

The Waste Land at 90

A Retrospective



Edited by Joe Moffett

THE WASTE LAND AT 90



DIALOGUE
12



Edited by
Michael J. Meyer†

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Introduction

At the time of publication of the present collection of essays, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) is a decade shy of its centennial. Yet the poem is still the source of critical debate. How are we to read this work and its attendant features? Should we view Eliot's poem as the product of a poet with mystical intent, attached to the idea of producing a spiritual autobiography, as Lyndall Gordon suggests in her biography of the poet? As the product of a misogynist, as Gordon also contends? As the work of an anti-semitic who nevertheless used his shortcomings to some productive ends, as Anthony Julius argues?

Critical appraisal has been divided on *The Waste Land* from the beginning. The early criticism of the poem, reflective of literary concerns at the time, often concentrated on the structure of the work. In an early review, for instance, Gorham B. Munson wrote, "I am compelled to reject the poem as a sustained harmoniously functioning structural unit" (205). Scholarly attention to the internal coherence of the poem continued some sixty years later when Calvin Bedient argued, "all the voices in the poem are the performances of a single protagonist—not Tiresias but a nameless stand-in for Eliot himself" (ix). Clearly, the search for an inner coherence for *The Waste Land* could be arrived at from several different angles, and Bedient's suggestion helps to make sense of a large number of the poem's challenges, its multiple voices preeminently.

In fact, many of the questions readers continue to ponder about Eliot's poem were present from the beginning of its critical reception. When Louis Untermeyer wrote in 1923 that *The Waste Land* "is a pompous parade of erudition," he spoke to the potential elitism of many key modernist texts, which seem to require specialized reading skills to be appreciated (151). Another reviewer that same year remarked, "*The Waste Land* is, it seems to me, the agonized outcry of a sensitive romanticist drowning in a sea of jazz" (J. M. 170). Of course, part of the interest in this comment is that it ties Eliot to romantic impulses, which the poet would not have

appreciated. But the reviewer's comments also evoke popular music—Jazz—and Eliot's connection with popular culture would not be fully considered until David Chinitz's early 2000s study which itself benefited from the hindsight provided by postmodernist texts by figures such as Thomas Pynchon or John Ashbery who showed how productive the integration of high and low cultures might be. In 1923, F. L. Lucas questioned Eliot's skills as a poet, an enduring question for some readers; he concluded, "in brief, in *The Waste Land* Mr. Eliot has shown that he can at moments write real blank verse; but that is all" (199). Anyone who has lead a classroom discussion with undergraduates untutored in the ways of modernism will likely have heard far worse an estimation of the value of Eliot's verse style than Lucas' terse summary.

The poem's evocation of then current theories in anthropology and metaphysics has always been a topic of discussion. To quote Munson once more, "the esotericism of *The Waste Land* is different: it is deliberate mystification" (205). True to the nature of the book series in which the present volume appears, a variety of critical perspectives are here presented from scholars of different ranks and geographical locations. Among the senior scholars represented, Leon Surette revisits his earlier work on the occult nature of Eliot's poem. Surette amends his earlier theory at the same time he points out common misreadings of what are often taken as foundational texts for *The Waste Land*: James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*—texts that are evoked by several of the scholars represented here.

Despite Eliot's dismal of the poem and its notes which bring considerable attention to Frazer's and Weston's books, his sources continue to the subject of debate. In this volume, Adrianna E. Frick considers the issue of Eliot's purported misogyny, calling for a more nuanced view of Eliot's treatment of women. Frick looks specifically at the ambiguous figure of Tiresias, whom she shows was also interestingly used in Guillaume Apollinaire's *Les mamelles de Tirésias*. Matthew J. Bolton examines the Dickens novel that gives the poem its early title so important to Bedient's argument. Bolton helps remind us of the profound influence reading James Joyce's *Ulysses* had on Eliot. Cameron MacKenzie brings us back to the role of another contemporary of Eliot's: Ezra Pound. Pound's editing of Eliot's poem has long been a matter of critical debate, allowing us to question fundamental assumptions we make about matters such as

how we assign authorship to any text. The complex nature of Pound's editing of Eliot's text is clearly illustrated in the *Facsimile and Transcript* version of the poem published in 1971, which MacKenzie draws on heavily. Moving further back into Eliot's past, Aaron Bibb reconsiders whether or not the figure Eliot wrote about in his dissertation, F. H. Bradley, should be read according to the paradigm advocated by one of Eliot's most prolific current critics, Jewel Spears Brooker. Bibb calls for an overturning of our previous assessments of Eliot's reading of Bradley.

Liliana Pop returns to the long contested issue of religion and spirituality in Eliot's long poem. Is *The Waste Land* an expression of despair or instead marked by transcendence at its end? Pop reads the poem in the latter terms, but Ben Bakhtarynia considers an often maligned concept in modern times—nihilism—and questions longstanding assumptions about the productivity of the negative. Petar Penda reinforces this perspective and questions Eliot's poem's success in living up to that criterion so important to New Critics: unity. Penda also addresses the question of Eliot's possible cultural elitism, which recent critics such as Chinitz have attempted to defuse. In his essay, Justin Evans argues for seeing Eliot's poem as a means of critique, thus returning to earlier views of Eliot as a commentator on society.

Yasmine Shamma and Carol L. Yang provide insights into the nature of Eliot's poem and its spatial orientations. They draw on contemporary understandings of the way space impacts our daily lives. Eliot's work is situated within present concerns by Joyce Wexler who reads *The Waste Land* in the context of 9/11 and the way Eliot's poem is brought to bear on the tragedy by Galway Kinnell's elegy on the terrorist attacks. Will Gray offers a new spin on the issue of how we read Eliot's poetics. He suggests we use the current manipulation of text known as hypertext, and the popular notion of mashup, as ways of understanding how the poem operates. Gray thus presents a fitting way of ending this volume insofar as he amply demonstrates how the poem, in protean fashion, continues to adapt to the different reading strategies ensuing generations have projected onto it in the ninety years since its initial publication. If the present essays are any indication, there is still plenty left to say and plenty left to debate on this poem, which has already been the subject of no small amount of study.

Textual Note: in-text citations marked “CP” throughout this volume refer to Eliot’s *The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1980.

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The Waste Land: A Personal Grouse

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Eliot's *Waste Land* must be the most discussed and analyzed poem of its length in the language, yet, for all that, it is perhaps still the most contested of all poems firmly ensconced in the canon. Initially received—at least by its boosters—as an articulation of the alienation, disillusion and scepticism of the young twentieth century, it has since been attacked from many angles—as reactionary, mystical, homosexual, anti-Semitic, elitist, phallogocentric and—perhaps most damagingly—as a con. The last criticism comes from the rather acid pen of Lawrence Rainey, who denounces the whole of Modernist art as little more than “a strategy whereby the work of art invites and solicits its commodification” (3).¹ *The Waste Land*, Rainey says, was “an effort to affirm the output of a specific marketing-publicity apparatus through the enactment of a triumphal and triumphant occasion” (100). There is no doubt that the publication of *The Waste Land* was orchestrated by Eliot, Pound, and Eliot's Harvard friend, Schofield Thayer, co-editor of *The Dial*, but if we are to condemn all artworks whose creators indulged in self promotion, the canon would shrink radically.

Of course, the poem has its defenders—indeed, they are legion; however, few any longer defend the poem's “mythical method,” a feature emphasized by early boosters and by Eliot himself. Ronald Bush, for example, dismisses the “Frazer and Weston imagery” as “superimposed . . . piecemeal onto sections that had been written earlier”—an assessment with which it is difficult to disagree. However, he goes on to surmise “that Eliot had some kind of short-lived religious illumination during the process of re-envisioning the fragments of his poem” (72), thereby prospectively defending it from Rainey's accusations of manipulative career building—which it certainly was. But even if the package was factitious, the components

could still be heartfelt.

An outriding view of *The Waste Land* is the “occult theory” of the poem that I first articulated in an article published in *Twentieth Century Literature* in 1988, “*The Waste Land* and Jessie Weston: A Reassessment,” and to which I returned at greater length in *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and The Occult* in 1989. So far as I am aware, the article has never been cited in published commentary on *The Waste Land*. Tellingly, Lyndall Gordon does not even mention Weston in either *Eliot’s Early Years* or the later *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life*. Although *The Birth of Modernism* has been cited, the “occult theory” articulated there has been addressed only by Timothy Materer, who largely accepts it (*Modernist Alchemy* 75-76). Others who have explored Eliot’s “occult” or “alternative religious” interests such as Donald Childs (1997, 2001) take no notice of my discussion of the occult provenance of Jessie Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance*. Laurie MacDiarmud’s occult friendly 2003 study, *Eliot’s Civilized Savage*, cites *The Birth of Modernism* as an epigraph to her Chapter 4 but makes no further reference to my study. Alan Clinton’s 2004 study *Mechanical Occult* dismisses my “occult theory” of the poem with an exclamation mark: “in *The Birth of Modernism* Leon Surette made the controversial claim that Eliot sought Pound’s help in editing *The Waste Land* due to Pound’s expertise in occult literature!” (2). Once again, no further mention is made of my argument.

The “Occult Theory”

I was not the first to offer an “occult” reading of *The Waste Land*. The first was by the Cambridge classicist F. L. Lucas, who reviewed *The Waste Land* in *The New Statesman* (Nov. 23, 1923). It was a negative review, observing that “Miss Weston is clearly a theosophist, and Mr Eliot’s poem might be a theosophical tract” (Grant 196). John Senior also highlighted the theosophical provenance of Weston’s study in his 1959 study, *The Way Down and Out: The Occult in Symbolist Literature* (176-177), although he backed off from drawing the inference that *The Waste Land* might be a “theosophical tract.” Lucas’s review was printed in full in Grant’s 1982 collection, *T. S. Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, but the sentence I have cited is elided from the version appearing in Spears Brooker’s 2004 collection, *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews!*

No doubt all of this sounds like sour grapes—and to some

extent it is. Nonetheless the silence, suppression, or casual dismissal of the “occult theory” requires some comment. Other troublesome interpretations—the homosexual, the anti-Semitic, the phallogocentric, and the disingenuous—have been vigorously contested rather than ignored or suppressed. Two questions come to mind: 1) what exactly is the occult theory and what does it tell us about the poem and about Eliot? and 2) why has the “occult theory” been ignored or suppressed? I have space to address only the first.

After outlining Blavatsky’s eccentric notion that there were seven independent human “evolutions,” in *The Birth of Modernism* I articulated my “occult theory”:

I do not suppose for a moment that Eliot shared such an eccentric belief. What I do suppose is that he wanted and expected readers of *The Waste Land* to discover the poem’s relation to Theosophical fantasies. Weston’s Theosophy was to be read as a symptom of the spiritual decay that Eliot’s poem—on any reading—evokes and bemoans. . . . The very implausibility of Weston’s thesis is, I think, much the point of the allusion. (*Birth* 461-462)

My Revised “Occult Theory”

I did not endorse Lucas’ suggestion that “Eliot’s poem might be a theosophical tract,” but assumed an ironic detachment from Weston’s theory of the grail legend on Eliot’s part. However, I no longer hold that view. I now believe that it was Weston’s claim for the persistence of religious experience throughout the whole course of human existence that Eliot meant his readers to take from her—without granting any particular importance to quests, waste lands, Hyacinth girls, perilous chapels, and the like. The message of Weston’s book is that these *exoteric* or external elements were inessential and particular to times and places. The Greeks had no questing knights, and the Middle Ages had no divine rapes. The *esoteric* content of the stories is what interested her. So when Eliot recommended *From Ritual to Romance* to his readers, he expected them to take the message that contact with the divine has been memorialized in a variety of ways over all of human history:

Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston’s book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance* (Cambridge). Indeed, so deeply am I

indebted, Miss Weston's book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do; and I recommend it (*apart from the great interest of the book itself*) to any who think such elucidation of the poem worth the trouble. (CP 50. My emphasis)

There is little sense of ironic detachment from Weston in these remarks.

What Weston Said

As we have seen, despite the early flurry of earnest elucidation based on Weston, scholars have come to the conclusion that no illumination is to be found there. Indeed, Anne Bolgan concluded that the notes were "intended by its author as a deliberate piece of obfuscation" (32). Her view is extreme, but not so far from the current consensus. And Eliot himself in "The Frontiers of Criticism" (1956) lamented sending "so many enquirers off on a wild goose chase after Tarot cards and the Holy Grail." In that same essay, Eliot explained that the notes were added to flesh out the volume. (There were no notes for the *Criterion* printing.) But a need to flesh out the volume does not explain why he gave such prominence to Weston, since he could have written more about Frazer, or filled out the Biblical references. Moreover he still felt, in 1956, that "it was just, no doubt, that I should pay my tribute to the work of Miss Jessie Weston" (*On Poetry and Poets* 121). That Eliot still felt some obligation to Weston despite disclaiming the relevance of the Tarot cards and the Holy Grail lends credence to my contention that it was her account of the persistence of a single religious illumination throughout the ages that is relevant to the poem.

Eliot went on in the headnote to invoke Frazer's *Golden Bough* as "another work of anthropology," as if Weston and Frazer were equivalent academic scholars. Indeed, even Lucas describes Weston as "a disciple of Frazer," which she manifestly was not. Frazer is thoroughly positivistic—in the Comtean sense. *The Golden Bough* locates the origin of Christian religious beliefs and practices in the barbaric rites of mankind's archaic past. No unbiased reader could mistake Frazer's posture toward archaic magical beliefs and practices on the one hand, and contemporary religious practices, on the other:

we may illustrate the course which thought has hitherto run by likening it to a web woven of three different threads—the black thread of magic, the red thread of religion, and the white thread of science. . . . while the black and

white chequer still runs through it, there rests on the middle portion of the web, *where religion has entered most deeply into its texture, a dark crimson stain, which shades off insensibly into a lighter tint as the white thread of science is woven more and more into the tissue.* . . . Will the great movement which for centuries has been slowly altering the complexion of thought be continued in the near future? or will a reaction set in which may arrest progress and even undo much that has been done? (*The Golden Bough* 33-34. My emphasis)

Frazer had good reason to fear a resurgence of religious superstition, as the preface to the abridgment reveals. Eliot was not the only reader who saw Frazer's work as, in Eliot's words, "throwing its light on the obscurities of the soul" (Eliot, "A Prediction in Regard to Three English Authors, Writers Who, though Masters of Thought, Are likewise Masters of Art"):

I am so far from regarding the reverence for trees as of supreme importance for the evolution of religion that I consider it to have been altogether subordinate to other factors, and in particular to the fear of the human dead, which, on the whole, I believe to have been probably the most powerful force in the making of primitive religion. *I hope after this explicit disclaimer I shall no longer be taxed with embracing a system of mythology which I look upon not merely as false but as preposterous and absurd.* (*The Golden Bough* vii)

Alas, Frazer's hope was not to be realized. Eliot scholars have by and large accepted Eliot's mis-characterization of Frazer's work as one celebrating the unity of religious belief from remote antiquity until the present. Jewel Spears Brooker, for example, declares that "Frazer constructed his mono-myth by tracing myths and mythic fragments back through time to a reconstructed hypothetical abstract parent myth" (*Mastery and Escape* 159). But Frazer did nothing of the sort. Brooker is confusing Frazer with Joseph Campbell, who, like Weston, does propose a monomyth underlying all human myths. Frazer, in contrast, exposed contemporary Christian beliefs as somewhat sanitized versions of ancient barbaric practices of human sacrifice and cannibalism. In fact, in his closing remarks, Frazer explicitly rejects theosophical speculations like Campbell's, as well as the nostalgia for a simpler time that characterizes Eliot's "East Coker":

It is in this final stage of decay that most of the old magical rites of our European forefathers linger on at the present day, and even from this their last retreat *they are fast being swept away by the rising tide of those*

multitudinous forces, moral, intellectual, and social, which are bearing mankind onward to a new and unknown goal. We may feel some natural regret at the disappearance of quaint customs and picturesque ceremonies, which have preserved to an age often deemed dull and prosaic something of the flavour and freshness of the olden time, some breath of the springtime of the world; yet our regret will be lessened when we remember that these pretty pageants, these now innocent diversions, *had their origin in ignorance and superstition; that if they are a record of human endeavour, they are also a monument of fruitless ingenuity, of wasted labour, and of blighted hopes; and for all their gay trappings—their flowers, their ribbons, and their music—they partake far more of tragedy than of farce.* (*The Golden Bough* 424-425. My emphasis)

Weston's view is diametrically opposed to Frazer's, and much closer to Campbell's:

The more closely one studies pre-Christian Theology, the more strongly one is impressed with the deeply, and daringly, spiritual character of its speculations, and the more doubtful it appears that such teaching can depend upon the unaided processes of human thought, or can have been evolved from such germs as we find among the supposedly "primitive" people, such as e.g., the Australian tribes. Are they really primitive? Or are we dealing, not with the primary elements of religion, but with the *disjecta membra* of a vanished civilization? Certain it is that so far as historical evidence goes our earliest records point to the recognition of a spiritual, not of a material, origin of the human race; the Sumerian and Babylonian Psalms were not composed by men who believed themselves the descendants of "witchetty grubs." (7)

In short, Weston rejects Darwin in favour of some fantasy of human descent from extra-terrestrial and immaterial beings.

Although Eliot himself is largely responsible for the persistence of the error that Weston's theosophical tract and Frazer's positivistic study are equivalent, it is astonishing that scholars continue to repeat the error—most recently in Craig Raine's biography of Eliot: "The argument of Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*—implicit in its title," Craig writes, "is that the Grail story is a transformation of, an outgrowth from, older vegetation rituals. Her strategy, then, follows Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, which is also acknowledged in Eliot's notes" (*T. S. Eliot* 81). Clearly Raine did not read any more than the title of Weston's book, divining the contents from that hint as only a poet can do.

Eliot and Anthropology

Eliot came to Weston already armed with a long-standing familiarity with *The Golden Bough*. He had read at least some volumes of it for “The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual,” a paper he delivered in Royce’s seminar in December 1913. He there considered the theories of Müller, Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl, and Frazer. He was not sympathetic to Frazer’s positivistic bent: “I have not the smallest competence to criticize Dr. Frazer’s erudition. . . . But I cannot subscribe for instance to the *interpretation* with which he ends his volume on the Dying God” (qtd. in Gray 130). The interpretation in question is a positivistic one:

He [the god] was killed, not originally to take away sin, but to save the divine life from the degeneracy of old age; but, since he had to be killed at any rate, people may have thought that they might as well seize the opportunity to lay upon him the burden of their sufferings and sins, in order that he might bear it away with him to the unknown world beyond the grave. (Frazer 755)

In short, Frazer asserts that the barbaric practice of killing and eating the king when he became ill or impotent foreshadows the practice of the Christian Mass which commemorates or re-enacts (as the Catholics insist) Christ’s death and involves the drinking of His blood and eating of His flesh—an interpretation to which Eliot “cannot subscribe.”

Some indication of what Eliot took from Weston is to be found in his September 1921 “London Letter” for *The Dial*, written during the early stages of his assembly of *The Waste Land*. [Eliot left the TSS of the poem with Pound sometime between December 19 and December 24, 1921 (*Letters* 497-499)]. In that letter, he remarks that he found Stravinsky’s *Sacre du Printemps*, to be an “interesting . . . but hardly more than interesting” juxtaposition of a primitive vegetation rite with modern music. He also remarked that *The Golden Bough* could be read either “as a collection of entertaining myths, or as a revelation of that vanished mind of which our mind is a continuation” (252. My emphasis). As we have seen, if one respects Frazer’s explicit intentions, it cannot be read in either of those ways. *The Golden Bough* is an exposé of the barbaric origins of Christian religious beliefs and practices. As for the “vanished mind,” Frazer’s point is that it has not yet vanished, but persists in Christian belief and

practice. A year later (after completing *The Waste Land*) Eliot commented on *The Golden Bough* more carefully, but in a similar vein:

It is a work of no less importance for our time than the complementary work of Freud—*throwing its light on the obscurities of the soul from a different angle*; and it is a work of perhaps greater permanence, because it is a statement of fact which is not involved in the maintenance or fall of any theory of the author's. ("A Prediction" 131. My emphasis)

Once again, Eliot ignores—indeed, denies—the clearly positivistic cast of Frazer's study, even though he does describe it here as a "stupendous compendium of human superstition and folly."

There is no mention of Weston in Eliot's published letters, so we do not know when he read her, but it may have been between the September 1921 "London Letter," and the undated "*Ulysses*, Order and Myth," which appeared in *The Dial* for November 1923 in which Eliot famously praised Joyce's *Ulysses* for "manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" (483). If Eliot *had* first encountered Weston's theosophical thesis between these two reviews, we could be confident that the debt he owed her was for a scheme that permitted an assemblage of fragments under the rubric of an encompassing expository frame. The fact that he disparaged the mythical method in his comments on Stravinsky supports such an hypothesis. But my claim—in contradiction of the various critical assessments—is that the frame he took from Weston was not a quest, nor a fertility rite, nor the Tarot cards, but the notion of an esoteric revelation recorded exoterically in a variety of stories throughout the ages. The anecdotes in *The Waste Land* cohere in the same manner as the legends and myths discussed by Weston—that is, they all have the same esoteric meaning. It remains to be determined just what esoteric meaning the anecdotes in *The Waste Land* possess.

What the Thunder Said

In a 1916 review, Eliot complained of Frazer's positivism, contrasting him to Lévy-Bruhl, who, Eliot said, gives due attention to "a side of the primitive mind which has been neglected by older anthropologists, such as Frazer, and produces a theory which has much in common with the analyses of mythology recently made by disciples of Freud"

(Review of Webb 116). The “side” in question is the “mystical mentality.” This juxtaposition of Frazer and Freud as compatible accounts of the human psyche did not last with Eliot. By 1925, he was backing away from it: “The influence of Frazer on our generation cannot yet be accurately estimated; but it is comparable to that of Renan, and perhaps more enduring than that of Sigmund Freud” (“A Commentary” 342). (Ernest Renan, author of *La Vie de Jésus*, was a prominent positivistic scholar of religion.)

Before he had read Weston, heard *Le Sacre du Printemps*, or read *Ulysses*, but *after* he had read Frazer, Eliot believed that “the poet should . . . be aware of all the metamorphoses of poetry that illustrate *the stratifications of history that cover savagery*. For the artist is, in an impersonal sense, the most conscious of men; he is therefore the most and the least civilised and civilisable; he is the most competent to understand both civilised and primitive” (“War Paint and Feathers,” 1919. qtd. in Bush and Barkin 35. My emphasis). Eliot, then, was primed for the Weston thesis that there was a continuity of revelation between the archaic past and the present, and that the artist was “the most competent” to reveal that continuity.

The Golden Bough cannot be read “as a revelation of that vanished mind of which our mind is a continuation,” but *From Ritual to Romance* certainly can. Moreover, Weston believes that privileged contemporary men and women have direct access to that “vanished mind.” She explains that the “esoteric ‘Mystery’ form” of the Grail legend reveals a “high spiritual teaching concerning the relation of Man to the Divine Source of his being, and the possibility of a sensible [that is, intimately felt] union between Man, and God” (Weston 203). She goes on to argue that Christianity “did not hesitate to utilize the already existing medium of instruction”—that is, the myth of a magical sympathy between the king’s potency and animal and vegetable fruitfulness (204). Her essential point is that the grail legend “is no mere literary invention . . . but a deeply rooted popular belief, of practically immemorial antiquity and inexhaustible vitality; we can trace it back thousands of years before the Christian era, we find it fraught with decisions of life and death today” (65).

The Grail legend itself, then, is of no particular interest for Weston except as a disguised account of a religious truth of great antiquity. She adumbrates that religious truth as follows:

the Otherworld is not a myth, but a reality, and in all ages there have been

souls who have been *willing to brave the great adventure, and to risk all for the chance of bringing back with them some assurance of the future life.* (186. My emphasis)

For Weston, then, stories of death and rebirth, of descent and return, of sleep and awakening, of sexual transport and post coital depression are all seen as exoteric accounts of an encounter with an ineffable truth. As Weston explains in the introduction: “part of the information at my disposal depended upon personal testimony, the testimony of those who knew of the continued existence of such a ritual, and had actually been initiated into its mysteries” (4-5). The grail legend, then, is merely one vehicle for the great truth that we are not mere mortals, but immortals who can look forward to a continued existence in the astral realm. “At its root,” she says, “lies the record, more or less distorted, of an ancient Ritual, having for its ultimate object the initiation into the secret of the sources of Life, physical and spiritual” (203). Fertility rites, quests, wastelands and fertile gardens are merely exoteric expressions of an esoteric truth—a truth that remains unspoken and unspeakable.

One might ask: why then is the poem full of images of death and disease? The answer is that normal access to the astral realm is by death. For such believers as Weston—and indeed for Christians as well—death is really a second birth, a birth to a spiritual realm traditionally called “Heaven.” (I have not found any occultists who believe in Hell, and only the more traditional Christian faiths retain belief in that place of punishment.) Ancient rites of illumination—most famously the rites of Eleusis—involved a mock death and rebirth. Christianity has retained that palingenetic practice in the rite of baptism, a ritual death by water and rebirth to a new life.

My claim, then, is that Eliot expected his readers to find in Weston an account of the persistence of stories recounting contact with the “Otherworld.” On that view Eliot’s reference to Frazer is misleading since if one were to consult Frazer one would find—in Eliot’s own words—a “stupendous compendium of human superstition and folly.” If we turn to *The Waste Land* itself, we find that it begins—appropriately on my supposition—with “The Burial of the Dead,” a pastiche of fragments from European literature evoking images of death as a transitional stage—just as Weston had drawn on Grail literature. If we remember that in Weston’s scheme death is the gateway to the Otherworld, Eliot’s focus on death and erotic failure in

the opening section is perfectly appropriate. Of course, we should not forget that death remains a terrifying gateway to a new life.

Part II, "Game of Chess," is more problematic until we remember that in the Christian tradition mortification of the flesh is the high road to the Otherworld, and that for Weston the sexual character of the legends is purely symbolic. Hence corporeal temptations will block access to the Otherworld. And it is worth noting that, while the colloquy of the distressed married couple might fit the pattern of a failure of fertility, Lil's excessive fertility does not. The allusion to Philomela's metamorphosis is also appropriate on my reading because tales of metamorphosis are read by occultists as allegories of enlightenment—a view Ezra Pound endorsed in *Guide to Kulchur*: "I assert that a great treasure of verity exists for mankind in Ovid and in the subject matter of Ovid's long poem, and that only in this form could it be registered" (299).

Part III, "The Fire Sermon," surveys varieties of genital activity—the homosexual advance of Mr. Eugenides, the typist home at tea time, the Virgin Queen's alleged affair, and the uncomplaining Thames maidens. It closes with an evocation of St. Augustine, who rose above concupiscence to become a Christian saint. On my reading, as on the standard one, these are to be taken as instances of concupiscence devoid of revelation.

Part IV, "Death by Water," hardly needs any comment. Baptism is death by water—death to this life and birth to a better. Alas, Phlebas' death seems not to have led to rebirth. So we come to the final section, "What the Thunder Said." In this section we move out of Weston's world of pagan notions of enlightenment and turn to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Eliot first invokes Christ's passion and death, but then returns to Weston's symbolism of drought and vegetable death. Once again, Eliot invokes the Gospels, alluding to the appearance of the as yet unrisen—and *unrecognized*—Christ to the apostles on the road to Emmaus. Next we get the Chapel Perilous from Weston. Its relevance, of course, is that the Chapel is the penultimate stage of the questing knight's journey toward enlightenment. However, the poem does not progress beyond this stage. There is no enlightenment, only ambiguous rumblings from on high. Although the thunder's voice is rendered in Sanskrit, the turn to a Sky God can be read as consistent with the return to the Judeo-Christian tradition that I see as the burden of Part V.

That the poem does not continue to some sort of enlightenment is perfectly in accord with my reading of it. Eliot was not a believer in any faith in 1921 when he completed *The Waste Land*—though he was very definitely in search of some faith. What *The Waste Land* represents is a faint hope that the “vanished mind of which our mind is a continuation,” might, after all, contain some wisdom. My reading of it, as a somewhat sceptical meditation on death as the gateway to enlightenment, explains Eliot’s original selection of epigraph: “Mistah Kurtz, he dead,” from Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Eliot resisted Pound’s advice to remove it: “Do you mean not use the Conrad quote or simply not put Conrad’s name to it? *It is much the most appropriate I can find, and somewhat elucidative*” (*Letters* 236. My emphasis). The elucidative nature is somewhat obscure unless we turn to *The Heart of Darkness* and Marlowe’s meditation on Kurtz’s dying cry: “The Horror! The Horror!” In that meditation Marlowe recounts his own near death from a fever: “I was within a hair’s breadth of the last opportunity for pronouncement, and I found with humiliation that probably I would have nothing to say.” Marlowe admires Kurtz for *his* pronouncement, conceding that perhaps he, Marlowe, would have had something to say if he had actually died: “And perhaps in this is the whole difference; perhaps all the wisdom, and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible. Perhaps!” (*Heart of Darkness* 119-120).

What the Conrad epigraph captures is the fact that the poem is a meditation on revelation or its lack—and not on those themes that nearly a century of commentary has supposed: impotence or infertility, still less on concupiscence or celibacy, and not at all on the state of Western civilization at the time of the catastrophe of the First World War. Eliot scholiasts have scrupulously ignored or discredited Eliot’s protestations against the standard reading—that the poem is a cry of despair at the decline of Western civilisation. Even Eliot debunkers—with the exception of F. L. Lucas and John Senior—have not understood it—as I do—as a *cri de coeur* expressing the author’s inability to believe, and equal inability to disbelieve.

Endnotes

¹ Kenneth Asher, 1995; Donald Childs, 1997; Anthony Julius, 1995; Lawrence Rainey, 2005; Gabrielle McIntyre, 2008.

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The Dugs of Tiresias: Female Sexuality and Modernist Nationalism in *The Waste Land* and *Les mamelles de Tirésias*

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In the wake of second wave feminist criticism, the misogyny of modernist writers such as T. S. Eliot often goes unquestioned. In the last decade, however, the tide began to turn and as scholars investigated further older assumptions about the way we look at canonical figures, these scholars often encountered resistance. In a 2007 review of a book on Eliot, Terry Eagleton asked, “Why do critics feel the need to defend [T. S. Eliot] against all charges of misogyny and antisemitism?” He further stated, “The poetry is shot through from end to end with a fear and loathing of women.” Yet this uncritical acceptance of critical dogma should itself raise eyebrows. While Eagleton’s primary purpose is to make a distinction between the personal habits of an author and the critique of his or her literary production, the blanket statement of Eliot’s misogyny, particularly in light of such a dynamic time period for gender construction, ought to be cause for re-examination. Indeed, recent scholarship on Eliot explores the contradictions and nuances in Eliot’s portrayal of modernist sexuality and representations of the feminine, revealing a far more complicated situation than previously acknowledged.

It is with this approach in mind that I suggest a careful re-examination of modernist female sexuality as represented in *The Waste Land*. When viewed within the political context of the modernist era, female sexuality is no longer only a social issue, but an economic and political issue as well, and a woman’s body becomes a possession of the state. Eliot’s use of Ovid’s Tiresias reveals a previously unexamined allusion¹ to Guillaume Apollinaire’s *Les mamelles de Tirésias* and adds layers of complexity to interpreting this figure’s narrative frame. Representations of modernist female

sexuality, such as Lil in the “Game of Chess” passage, and the typist of “The Fire Sermon,” as described by Ovid’s Tiresias and set in parallel to Apollinaire’s Tirésias / Thérèse figure, reveal a sympathetic depiction of women, demoralized and dehumanized by their economic and political roles in society.

Critical Foundations: Questioning Eliot’s Misogyny and the Politics of Female Sexuality in the Modernist Era

Eliot’s depiction of women is not, as it is often presented, uncomplicated nor is his misogyny without doubt. Eliot’s misogyny is not even worth questioning according to Eagleton: “Eliot’s well-earned reputation is established beyond all doubt.” Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s extensive work on the twentieth century woman writer found misogyny to be a fundamental characteristic of the modernist male author. Cassandra Laity refers to Eliot’s “role as a stock figure for misogyny in feminist overviews” (4). However, regardless of whether Eliot is or is not a misogynist, I believe that viewing Eliot’s treatment of women as uncomplicated results in ignoring key details in his work: “[C]ontemporary feminist readers of the male modernists must address misogyny directly, if only to move beyond it to more complicated readings of gender-inflicted aspects of their work” (McDonald 191).

In fact, recent scholarship suggests that what is often interpreted as violence or indifference to women in general can be viewed as class based and that Eliot is selectively sympathetic towards women. Gail McDonald attempts to account for Eliot’s extreme popularity and the lack of feminist criticism among educated women during his own time in her essay “Through the Schoolhouse Windows: Women, the Academy, and T. S. Eliot” and suggests, among other things, that Eliot’s portrayal of bourgeois “ladies” in his early poetry would have been equally contemptuous had it come from a female modernist: “Independent-minded women of the 1920s, however, also refer to ‘ladies’ derisively, deflating the pretensions of the guardians of gentility” (185-186). In addition to the class issues of the anti-bourgeois sentiment suggested in *The Waste Land*, discursive analysis suggests a close sympathy with the afflicted and the working class. Richard Badenhansen, in his essay “T. S. Eliot Speaks the Body: The Privileging of Female Discourse in *Murder and the Cathedral* and *The Cocktail Party*,” has suggested a more complex reading of Eliot’s

relation to the feminine by examining the power of female voice in these texts. Similarly, Jennifer Sorensen Emery-Peck examines the use of popular culture or “lower” class discursive elements to challenge the labels of both elitist and misogynist for Eliot, noting the significance of lower-class female narrative in the poem and studying the influence of both Eliot’s wife Vivien and the Eliots’ housemaid on *The Waste Land*.

Many others note that much of what appears to be anti-feminine was approved by women of the time, including Vivien Eliot and Virginia Woolf. In “Mimetic Desire and the Return to Origins in *The Waste Land*,” Jewel Spears Brooker notes that Eliot’s portrayal of the hysterical woman in *The Waste Land* is sympathetic, that Eliot’s nervous first wife obviously approved of the portrayal according to her notes in the facsimile edition, and that Eliot’s use of Ovid’s Philomel throughout “A Game of Chess” and “The Fire Sermon” sections of the poem suggest a sympathy with the feminine. Julie Elaine Goodspeed-Chadwick also notes the influence that Vivien had on the authorship of *The Waste Land* and suggests Eliot has a unique ability to sympathize and identify with women: “The change of Eliot’s citizenship and the subsequent acculturation allowed him a unique perspective [. . .] As a result, Eliot could relate to the marginalized position of women and may very well have identified with women in *The Waste Land* ” (118). The sum conclusion of all of this criticism, mostly from the last decade, is three-fold. Firstly, while second wave feminism and some modernist women found Eliot’s view of women misogynistic, often to the detriment of Vivien, Vivien herself did not disagree with the portrayal, and in fact encouraged it, as did other women in the time period. Secondly, Eliot’s view of women is complicated and far more nuanced than the label of elitist misogynist allows, and his use of different narrative and lyrical techniques is often sympathetic to the feminine, and particularly the working class. Lastly, this complexity is accounted for by seeing Eliot’s violence and even indifference as representations of the commodification of female sexuality. As Goodspeed-Chadwick states, “How can [*The Waste Land*] be anti-feminist when Eliot, like Marx, can be read as an advocate for change in the material conditions of women?” (125). Rather, one of his key portrayals of women is contained within a narrative frame aligned with the feminine, one that grants power to a feminine voice, and one that suggests a far deeper interpretation grounded in hysterization.

Michel Foucault's analysis of modern sexuality reveals a number of key underlying power structures, but two are especially relevant to analyzing Eliot and Apollinaire: the hysterization of women's bodies, causing female sexuality to become an analyzed, dissected object in medical and psychological discourse, and the socialization of procreative behaviors, by which the reproduction of a couple became a part of economic and political discourse (104-105). While these two factors began with the bourgeoisie towards the end of the nineteenth century, it is during the beginning of the twentieth that they cross class levels: "For their part, the working classes managed for a long time to escape the deployment of 'sexuality'" (121). These two factors are especially present in the modernist era due to the emerging issues of birth control and the contrasting nationalistic demand for repopulation. The Malthusian couple,² who scheduled and limited their reproduction through the advent of birth control, became a social stigma after World War I and later the Spanish Flu Pandemic depleted the populations of nations. Medical discourse also began to compare the nervousness experienced by shell-shock victims to the symptoms of hysteria, complicating the gendered identity of the soldier as well as that of the hysterical woman (Gish 111). The emergence of modernist feminism combined with the advent of wartime women entering both academia and the workforce created new political ramifications as to the ownership and purpose of a woman's body.

Eliot's Tiresias: A Narrative Frame of Comparison

Within this complicated social and political context, modernists like Eliot and Apollinaire examine the sexualized female body as an object of economic and political significance. Characteristics of Eliot's women, frequently taken as misogynistic, can also be perceived as examinations of this shifting role of women in the workforce, particularly when compared to Apollinaire's characterization of feminism. While Eliot's bourgeoisie women are portrayed as anxious and helpless in *The Waste Land*, working class women are especially mechanical and dehumanized. However, the narrative voice of Ovid's Tiresias serves to make the reader empathize with and relate to the feminine rather than perceive it as a political object. Tiresias's presence also creates a contrast between a classical portrayal of passion and sexual pleasure and the soullessness of one woman

reproducing at the risk of her life for God and country and another mechanically and apathetically going through the motions. The comparison with Apollinaire, also achieved by way of the narrative frame of Tiresias, further complicates the issue of the nationalistic female body by expressing the anxieties felt by men and referencing a surrealistic world where men can overcome the inconvenience of female sexuality. The complex signification of the female body and the allusion to Apollinaire are impossible without the use of Tiresias as a narrative frame, and indeed, without the invocation of Ovid's Tiresias specifically.

While Tiresias has a long classical history in literature and many symbolic representations associated with him, Eliot is very specific about the characteristics he is emphasizing. He makes a passing reference to Sophocles' blind prophet of the Oedipus Trilogy in one line and a half-line allusion to the wise man of the Underworld in Homer's *Odyssey*, but Eliot clearly states in his verbose footnote for line 218 that he is referring to Ovid's portrayal in the *Metamorphoses*. While this is not the first allusion to the *Metamorphoses*, the footnote is considerably longer than any other. The earlier reference to Philomel, for instance, merely warrants a line number. Eliot's reference to Tiresias, however, warrants a lengthy expository paragraph and the poetic passage quoted almost in entirety. While certainly, Eliot's footnotes are not always to be trusted or taken at face value, the sheer number of lines devoted to this one section indicates an attempt to draw attention to key factors only present in the Ovidian representation and as Eliot himself said, "No poet . . . has his complete meaning alone" ("Tradition" 38).

Eliot's invocation of Ovid is itself a commentary on seduction. Ovid's persona in his didactic poetry on sexual conquest was the *praeceptor amoris*, a teacher of seduction. His texts *Amores* (The Loves), *Ars Amatoria* (Art of Love) and *Remedia Amoris* (Cure for Love) were all concerned with winning over a sexual partner or keeping interest in the affair. Ovid also wrote *The Heroides*, a work that retells epics of antiquity from the female point of view, giving voice to Aeneas' Dido, Jason's Medea, and Odysseus's Penelope, suggesting that women previously considered plot points and accessories to their respective stories not only had their own perspectives but were frequently wronged by the supposed heroes. The *Metamorphoses*, Ovid's best-known work, is centered on the theme of transformation and is filled with stories of gods changing

forms to seduce or rape young maidens, begetting demigods along the way. In fact, the passage Eliot refers to follows one such story, that of Jove's ravishing of Semele, and the passionate, violent, and ultimately fatal jealousy of Juno. For Ovid, Tiresias and Semele are connected by the fiery passion and sexuality of Juno.

In contrast to the idea of classical fires, Eliot sets his own couple, the typist and the clerk and their tepid, mechanical affair. The "young man carbuncular," like Jove, plans his "assault" carefully (*CP* 44). However, where Jove may have watched the habits or actions of a maiden and altered his form to suit her, the young man waits until his prey is full from dinner after a long day at work and "she is bored and tired" (*CP* 44). Where Jove might engage in a courtship ritual, the clerk "Endeavours to engage her in caresses / Which still are unproved, if undesired" (*CP* 44). Eliot has put this scene in stark contrast to the strategic courtship rituals or even "ravishing" scenes of the classical era. While Gilbert and Gubar refer to the passage as a "figurative rape" (2:340), some, such as Goodspeed-Chadwick, have viewed the scene between the typist and the clerk as a more literal rape scene, particularly in light of Philomel's role within the poem (120-121). Philomel, as famously told by Ovid, was kidnapped and raped by her brother-in-law and had her tongue cut out to prevent her from telling anyone. Philomel and her sister Procne vengefully feed Tereus his own children, and after their deaths they transform into birds, usually a nightingale and / or sparrow, depending on the version of the tale. Spears Brooker notes a "moral pollution" in the "vignette" between the typist and the clerk: "The central event in this poem of crisis is rape, and as both violence and desire are contagious, the effects of Philomel's violation have spread from the center to the periphery in all directions. . . . In Ovid's version of Philomel, the emphasis is primarily on the link between violence and desire" (144-145). Perceived in this light, the clear apathy of the typist and the callousness of the clerk are a stark contrast to the violence and desire of the Ovidian predecessors. Gilbert and Gubar suggest this contributes to the "upside-down world" of gender change and that the scene is a "parody of the male dominance-female submission that should be associated with fertility and order" because of the young man's social position and the fact the woman is "not really submissive but simply indifferent" (339). However, the classical scene this is connected to by allusion is one of godly passion and sexual pleasure, rather than a dominant / submissive paradigm. This is all the more

explicit when viewed through the eyes of Tiresias.

The vignette of the typist and the clerk is relayed by Tiresias, an “old man with wrinkled female breasts” who is “throbbing between two lives” (*CP* 43). While Tiresias is exterior to the scene, he is capable of relating to both genders in the encounter and empathizing with both individuals. However, despite the two genders, Tiresias is grounded in the feminine from the beginning by immediately focusing on the typist’s perspective. As his narrative zooms in from the outside world, the frame is centered on the typist: her exhaustion, her undergarments, her lifestyle. Like her, he “too awaited the expected guest” and has “foresuffered all / enacted on this same divan or bed” (*CP* 44).

Despite his ability to empathize with the clerk as well, Tiresias is harshly critical of the pimply, vain young man. While Tiresias relates the internal, unspoken thoughts in the brain of the typist, he remains disconnected from the emotions and thoughts of the clerk, only describing and analyzing his actions from the external perspective. The clerk’s “vanity requires no response” and he “makes a welcome of indifference” and receives it in abundance (44). As his “unreproved, if undesired” caresses progress towards “assault,” he encounters “no defence” (44). The typist is not welcoming the “passionate” encounter, but she does not act to end it. Assurance is not a comfortable quality of the young man, rather it is like an expensive accessory on the nouveau riche, which implies his flimsy assurance and confidence in assault could be deterred; yet she does nothing to put him off. When finished, after he has “grope[d] his way” to the stairs, she isn’t traumatized or relieved, but she has hardly noticed his absence (44). Her role in the sexual conquest is one of unconsciousness and passivity: “Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass: / ‘Well now that’s done and I’m glad it’s over’” (44). Lastly, Eliot’s Tiresias repeatedly emphasizes his female characteristics: the “old man with wrinkled dugs,” with his “wrinkled female breasts” ties his masculine-gendered body to the feminine genitalia and sexual experience (44, 43).

Even when inside the mind of the typist, his description of her encounter is distant and filled with wearied cynicism. In this way Eliot indicates the veneer of intimacy and suggests that the distant cold mechanics of the act is related to vocation, class, and the industrial revolution. The young man is “one of the low on whom assurance sits / As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire” (44). Not only is Tiresias

associating each sexual participant in terms of their occupation, he associates the typist with a “taxi throbbing waiting” and the young man with an industrialist. She is a machine acting out what she has been programmed to do. Tiresias foregrounds the idea of a “human engine,” even before introducing himself, making the industrial, robotic sexual encounter all the more blatant (43). Eliot would later critique the “tendency of unlimited industrialism . . . to create bodies of men and women . . . detached from tradition, alienated from religion, and susceptible to mass suggestion: in other words a mob” (*Christianity and Culture* 17). Given this context, it is more likely that Eliot’s poem is criticizing the demoralizing effects of industrialism rather than expressing misogynistic undercurrents.

The passage is even more soulless and mechanized when viewed in light of the footnote. Eliot has the reader look to the story of how the seer was blinded and how he can relate to the male and female perspectives, a tale within a tale founded in sexual pleasure: “Cum Iunone iocos et ‘maior vestra profecto est / Quam, quae contingit maribus’, dixisse, ‘voluptas.’” “[Jove] jests with Juno and said ‘Actually, it is your sex that attains more pleasure than males’³ (Ovid 318-319). “Voluptas” as defined by the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* means pleasure, especially sensory delight but also the act of sexual intercourse itself, and it is the core of the argument that causes the divine couple to seek Tiresias’s guidance. It is because of *voluptas* that Tiresias’s tale of dual sexuality is told. It is because of female sexual pleasure that he judges in favor of Jove and that the goddess Juno blinds him and, more obscurely, it is because of *voluptas* he is granted prophecy as a consolation prize. One could even suggest he is punished for revealing the depths of female sexual pleasure to the masculine other. At the center of the Ovid is pleasure; at the center of the Eliot is indifference. Tiresias, particularly in light of the footnote, serves as signification and privileging of female sexual pleasure, and his presence as the frame of the scene shows just how decayed sex has become.

It is through Tiresias’s empathy with the typist that the lack of female *voluptas* is so clear. By means of Tiresias, Eliot portrays a by-gone golden age where sex is used for the purpose of pleasure and is particularly pleasurable for women. And yet his portrayal of the typist and clerk suggests that sex is no longer for recreation, or even for procreation, but the recurring action of machinery preprogrammed and degraded. The two individuals are described not by names, as Lil

and Albert are, but solely by occupation, suggesting a link between the industrialization of society and mechanization of the sexual act. What is especially absent from this picture is that while there are production line workers, there is no production: this is not presented as sex for the purpose of producing children. The clerk is the initiator and presumably experiences something akin to pleasure, but the typist is operating as a matter of form—a voluntary sexual objectification.

This supremacy of male sexual pleasure combined with sympathy for the feminine is also seen in Lil in “A Game of Chess” of *The Waste Land*. While her story is narrated by her “friend,” who is far from sympathetic to Lil’s fate, the details presented complicate the issue. The unnamed female exhibits a catty competitive quality, and remonstrates that Lil must “think of poor Albert, / He’s been in the army four years, he wants a good time, / And if you don’t give it him, there’s others will” (CP 41). Lil “ought to be ashamed” about her appearance, her friend says, because it is a wife’s place to please her husband and a husband’s place to be polygamous if necessary (42). Lil is toothless and looks “antique,” and her premature aging is dehumanizing and reminiscent of Eliot’s opening allusion to the Sibyl, whose control of her own sexuality against the will of Apollo resulted in her aging away to dust. Lil’s appearance, however, is a direct result of the sexual identity allowed to the nationalistic, industrialized woman—motherhood. “She’s had five already, and nearly died of young George,” her friend tells us matter-of-factly after Lil has explained her appearance is the fault of the drugs she took to abort her sixth child. Her friend, representing another societal norm for female sexuality, reminds Lil of her place: “Well, if Albert won’t leave you alone, there it is, I said, / What you get married for if you don’t want children?” (42). In terms of T. S. Eliot’s misogyny, it is worth noting that, according to the Facsimile edition edited by Valerie Eliot, Vivien Eliot is the one who added this line (21). The post-war political idea of repopulation, particularly after the extreme death tolls of WWI and the flu pandemic, became a foundational motivation for some sexual beliefs—women were to be baby factories and men were allowed to be polygamous due to woman’s inherent time limitations for completion. Like other capitalized ideas, sexuality became about mass production, and, if men just so happened to enjoy their work while serving their country’s population needs, so be it. This aspect of sexuality, that of polygamous male pleasure superseding female wellness and of female sexuality’s sole purpose being that of

repopulation, is presented in “A Game of Chess,” but is suggested by Tiresias’s presence in section III, “A Fire Sermon,” as well.

In addition to his role as a symbol of female sexual pleasure, and an allusion to classical grandeur to contrast the emptiness and alienation of industrialized gender roles, Tiresias stands as a representation of hermaphroditism. The significance of Tiresias possessing characteristics of both genders has been examined at length, even being suggested as a kind of anxious transvestism (Gilbert and Gubar 2:338-339). Often this simultaneous hermaphroditism is the foundation or central core of any gendered argument surrounding *The Waste Land*. However, Eliot’s footnote is as explicit as it is lengthy, and quotes the following from Ovid: “Deque viro factus, mirabile, femina septem / Egerat autumnos; . . . / . . . percussis anguibus isdem / Forma prior rediit genetivaeque venit imago.” ‘. . . extraordinary! He was made a woman from a man and spent seven autumns . . . After beating the same snakes again, the earlier form returned and his born image appeared’ (Ovid 321-329). Just as Eliot roots his Tiresias in a metaphor for female pleasure, he also points out the deviation he took in the construction of the original character. Eliot’s addition to Tiresias is significant in its allusion, just as it is significant in its representation of gender.

As previously noted, it is Tiresias’s wrinkled female breasts that enable him / her to unite the sexes and expose this degradation of the female sexual experience from its classical origin. And yet, as Eliot’s footnote referencing Ovid clearly states, Tiresias is not a man with wrinkled breasts— “forma prior rediit genetivaeque venit imago” ‘the earlier form returned and his born image appeared’ (329). Tiresias was not a simultaneous hermaphrodite, but a sequential one, first being born into one form in entirety, then changing to the other, in entirety, and then returning to his original form in entirety. Ignoring that there are other examples of simultaneous hermaphrodites in classical literature, most notably the condition’s namesake, there is no reason for Tiresias to retain characteristics of both genders, particularly when Eliot has gone to such great lengths to include the sequence in his notes, unless it is to draw focus toward the breasts of Tiresias, *Les mamelles de Tirésias* in French.

Eliot and Apollinaire: Contemporary Analysis of Female Sexuality in Contrast

Eliot was particularly concerned with French thought in the years preceding *The Waste Land*, often lecturing at Oxford on French intellectual movements and holidaying in France with friends (V. Eliot x, xvii, xix). In 1903, Remy de Gourmant wrote *Physique de l'amour*, later translated into English by Eliot's close friend Ezra Pound as *The Natural History of Love*. French scholar Scott Bates characterizes the work as having two arguments about the sexual relations of the couple. Firstly, the notion of "couple" is a societal device designed to protect the important reproductive functions of the female, for if there were entirely free love "the more feeble woman would be crushed by superior males and forced into slavery" (36). Secondly, human males are innately polygamous, and human females are innately monogamous, so women should allow a temporary polygamy for the good of the marriage and thus the good of society (37). In the years following World War I, theories such as Gourmant's regarding the role of sexuality and gender in relation to nationalism became popular, most notably in France. While Apollinaire claims in his Preface to the play that he had written *Les mamelles de Tirésias* many years prior to its 1917 performance, Maya Slater notes in her edition that "many critics agree that this is unlikely" due to its topical wartime theme (210). Bates believes that many aspects of Apollinaire's play, *Les mamelles de Tirésias*, are heavily influenced by Gourmant's theories. Eliot would have been aware of both Gourmant's text, via Pound, and Apollinaire's play; Apollinaire's "text achieved immediate notoriety and the first and only performance during Apollinaire's lifetime enjoyed a *succès de scandale*" (Slater xxxiv).

The significance of male polygamy and nationalistic reproduction are necessary components of Apollinaire's *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*. Apollinaire writes in his preface that the work addresses "le problème de la repopulation" 'the problem of repopulation' and suggests that France needs a "changer les mœurs. . . C'est aux gouvernants à agir, à faciliter les mariages, à encourager avant tout l'amour fécond" 'radical change in lifestyle. . . It's up to the people who govern us to take action, to make marriage an easier option, above all to encourage fertile love' (Apollinaire 94, 97; Slater 154, 156-157). One critic, Victor Basch, who had described the play as an anti-feminist satire (Slater 210), is directly addressed in the Preface,

but Apollinaire attacks Basch's description of the work as symbolic and does not refute being anti-feminist (Apollinaire 93). Apollinaire's goal in presenting a world in which men can produce babies more efficiently and effectively than women, and where everyone has three mistresses, is entirely prescriptive. Apollinaire's theories regarding the purpose and function of the dramatist are clearly outlined in his preface, and he believes the playwright is "a leader, helping mankind to a better world" (Slater xiii).

The play features Thérèse, a woman who rebels against being a mother and a homemaker and who desires a political or military career. The stage notes instruct that there be a hissing sound as she introduces herself as a woman who will not do what her husband wants and a *féministe* who does not "reconnais . . . l'autorité de l'homme" 'accept man's authority' (Apollinaire 1.1). She chastises her husband for only thinking about sex, but her monologue in which she outlines all of her masculine career goals ends with her 'keeping a chorus girl in style': "Et je veux s'il me plait entretenir à l'an / Cette vieille danseuse qui a tant de talent" (1.1). The feminist is not portrayed as a woman who desires more occupational opportunities but as a sex-hungry man in the wrong body. As she makes her speech about becoming a soldier, artist, doctor, barrister, mathematician, philosopher chemist, she sneezes over six times, per the stage directions. Over twenty years earlier in the co-authored *Studies on Hysteria* by Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, Breuer used sneezing as a metaphor for "the cerebral excitation" which contributes to female hysteria (206). From the very beginning, the roles of women are clearly specified as domestic, and a woman who would want otherwise is ridiculed by hissing and portrayed as wanting to exemplify the extremes of masculinity and in the throes of an hysterical episode. Apollinaire thus connects the will for feminism to a mental illness and medical issue.

Soon after this introduction, Thérèse experiences her transformation. She opens her shirt and allows her breasts, made of balloons on strings, to float upwards, referring to them as "oiseaux de ma faiblesse" 'birds of my frailty' and "les appas féminins" 'feminine charms' (1.1). She decides to destroy them by exploding them with a cigarette to complete her metamorphosis into a man, renaming herself Tirésias. Apollinaire's allusion to Ovid's Tiresias, as opposed to Tiresias from some other classical source, is expressed in a repeated

refrain, placed as a notecard on the stage for the end of Act 1 and sung as a chorus throughout Act 2:

Et cependant la Boulangère
Tous les sept ans changeait de peau
Tous les sept ans elle exagère
[Yet in seven years the Baker's wife
will shed her skin for one that's new
every seven years; what a life.]

This repeated reference to every seven years recalls the story of Tiresias's sex change, and the reference to shedding / changing skin further emphasizes the connection to his coming upon the transformative snakes, and also foreshadows Thérèse's eventual return to a female form.

Thérèse / Tirésias becomes a successful general with many mistresses, and his / her example leads the women of the town to protest child-bearing and go on strike. The men, led by Thérèse's husband, rise up and take on the challenge of producing offspring themselves, with great success. In Act 2, The Husband has produced "40 049 enfants en un seul jour" '40,049 infants in a single day' and feels his "bonheur est complet" 'happiness is complete' with "Le bonheur le famille / Pas de femme sur les bras" 'a happy family life / no wife to support' (2.1). He tells a journalist he accomplished this feat through *la volonté* (will-power) and he expects that as soon as the infants are off the bottle they will "me nourriront" 'cater to his needs' and that his paternal instinct is "tout à fait intéressé" 'self-interest' (2.2). The Husband introduces a few of the newborns on the basis of their economic accomplishments, as the male infants have already become novelists and captains of industry while the females collect alimony as divorcees of industrialists. This asexual production does not halt male sexual desire however, but merely disconnects the clinical aspects of the sex act associated with the state's political discourse of repopulation from the pleasurable aspects connected to male polygamy. The Husband decides his 40,050th child should be a tailor so he can be well-dressed when he goes out on the town: "Et n'étant pas trop mal de ma personne / Plaire à mainte jolie personne" 'And as I'm quite a decent looking chap / Plenty pretty girls will fancy me' (2.2).

For both *The Husband*, who exploits his children to further his sex-life, and for *Thérèse*, who refuses sex with her husband and the obligation of baby making but immediately takes three mistresses, sexual pleasure is distinct from procreation, and solely the dominion of males. Female sexuality, when present, is depicted as a sexual object of the male or for the purposes of childbearing. Apollinaire's ideal scenario is a world where the male's superior calculating abilities are put to the task of repopulation, and, by man's control and will alone, child-bearing has become a far more rapid and efficient process than when it was a female domain. The output is not only superior from a political and quantitative perspective, but the children prove economically viable immediately. Apollinaire connects sexuality with masculinity and mechanical, industrial reproduction while establishing male superiority and ridiculing feminism.

Ultimately, the wife-general tires of a career and returns disguised as a fortune-teller. In this form, *Tirésias*, recalling the classical seer aspect of the character, connects child-bearing to economy once again to counter the suggestion that raising many children is too expensive, and instead states that only those who are fertile will have a right to fame and fortune. After this pronouncement, she reverts to the form of *Thérèse*, gives her mistresses to the local policeman, and asks her husband to "*cueillir la fraise / Avec la fleur de bananier*" 'pick strawberries / and flowers from the banana tree' and "*régner / Sur le grand cœur de ta Thérèse*" 'reign o'er the heart of your *Thérèse*' (2.7). The sensuous proposition of the fruit and the submissive attitude are sexually suggestive, but her husband is concerned about her lack of breasts and tries to return assorted balloons and rubber balls to her. She refuses to regain her breasts, saying that she and her husband "managed OK without them," while her husband agrees not to "complicate" their lives. She concludes by throwing the symbolic representation of female sexuality, the rubber balls and balloons, out into the audience exhorting the "*oiseaux de ma faiblesse*" 'birds of my weakness' to feed the babies of the repopulation, which suggests that she does not intend to return to producing children sexually but rather through her husband's surrealist means (2.7).

Scott Bates, in his study of eroticism in Apollinaire suggested that there are two layers of meaning, an overt patriotic one and a subtle, less moralistic message (36-38). *Thérèse*, in her quest to gain the economic and political power of a man, ultimately becomes a

manufacturer of population and voluntarily abandons all symbols of sexual pleasure. On the surface, Bates writes, Apollinaire is advocating the patriotic notion of population: "The married couple is the basis of society, leading to female fecundity, perhaps to be transcended by male parthenogenesis" (36). And yet, while Thérèse abandons her feminism and everyone happily returns to the business of producing children without sex, the male figures maintain multiple mistresses for the purpose of gratification, not reproduction (Bates 37). As Bates says, "the breasts of Thérèse were to have two basic functions: first to attract and nourish libidinous and polygamous males; and second to nourish a numerous family" (39). By throwing them out into the audience, she has disconnected the nourishing act from her body, while she has also released her mistresses, symbols of masculine polygamy, to the policeman. Thérèse's final acts are to recant her feminism, to recant her statements regarding the begetting and rearing of babies, and to give away her sexual emblems to the general public to serve her city-state. The ultimate goal of female sexuality per Apollinaire is thus characterized by two factors, both of which require this kind of female selflessness: pleasure, benefiting only the male, and repopulation, benefiting the state.

The Waste Land similarly addresses these two representations of feminine sexuality. Eliot's pub-culture scene with Lil deals with the polygamous and reproductive aspects of female sexuality, and Eliot's typist appears to be playing the recreational doll to the carbuncular clerk, the pinnacle achievement of Gourmant's vision of the future couple. However, this image is framed and mediated by Tiresias as narrator and colored by the conflicting signification of *voluptas* inherent to the allusion. These layers and complications, when set beside the contemporaneous French representations of sexuality, reveal that Eliot represents the same dual-nature of female sexuality as owned by the nation and the male partner, but the lens of Tiresias exposes the dehumanization of the scene. Tiresias not only limits the extent of the reader's perspective of the scene to the typist, but also serves as a symbolic contrast to the events he describes.

While Apollinaire is creating a near-future utopia, Eliot's purpose in *The Waste Land* is to reflect his world in the way he perceived it, as a decaying pseudo-historical dystopia. Eliot's characters in the scene, the clerk and the typist, have very little commentary on their actions in light of the society around them. Apollinaire's characters do little else than comment on reproductive

duty to society, on working for society, and how a woman's desire for a career undermines society. While Eliot uses a classical figure to narrate a realist scene, Apollinaire must invent surrealism as a method of storytelling to paint the world he desires and have his feminist character repent of her political and working aspirations while being supplanted in her nationalistic reproductive function by her husband. Where Eliot is depicting a scene viewed every day, Apollinaire is attempting to create a surreal vision of how his world should be. As such, Apollinaire is advocating his representation, rather than simply stating what is currently happening, while Eliot critiques the demoralizing effects of industrialism. Eliot's commentary comes not from his female characters advocating an anti-feminist perspective, but from his Ovidian classical figure narrating the events in a tone sympathetic to his female character.

Conclusion

There is a danger in reading *The Waste Land* as an example of Eliot's misogyny or sexual anxiety. This interpretation, grounded in assumptions about an author's internal psychology based upon a reader's construal, creates a narrow space for reading that overlooks perhaps more pressing explanations. The women of *The Waste Land* are portrayed as demoralized or mechanical, not necessarily because of some deep seated anxiety present in Eliot from youth, but rather because women are becoming demoralized by their society. As industrialism and nationalism began to take responsibility for reproduction, and as women's sexuality became fodder for clinical and political discussion, the act of sexuality became more political and industrialized. Eliot's representation should be perceived as a warning.

Tiresias's presence does not serve as an endorsement of the mechanical and detached sexuality of the typist and her guest. Rather, per the footnote, the character's very essence is rooted in female sexual pleasure, and, more precisely, that women are capable of greater sexual pleasure than men. In an era when sexual pleasure was the sole dominion of the male and accompanied by a scene in which the woman feels no pleasure at all and the man not much more, Tiresias's empathy with the typist and representational contrasts serve as a critique of modernist notions regarding sexuality. Traditionally, Tiresias the seer is a harbinger from whom kings and heroes seek guidance, but unfortunately, they nearly always ignore his advice and

consequently face death, destruction, and / or misery. Eliot uses him as a harbinger here to challenge self-assurance in industrial progress. The classical prophet of bad tidings mediates and focuses the reader's interpretation of the typist's experience. The prophecy seems to be that if sexuality continues in this industrialized, nationalistic fashion, sexuality will become nothing more than soulless indifference. The invocation of Ovid, through Tiresias, is itself a sign of both sensuality and seduction and unheard female perspectives. Eliot creates a Tiresias with vestigial female genitalia who narrates more closely in sympathy with the typist, putting the reader's emphasis and empathy with the feminine. Lastly, Eliot deviates from his source by creating a Tiresias with wrinkled breasts, despite the fact they mythologically disappeared after seven years, suggesting an allusion to Apollinaire's utopia. These contrasts and nuances are less apparent if a reader perceives a simplistic, absolute misogyny on the part of Eliot.

While the passage of the typist is, on the surface, portraying a disturbing aspect of female sexuality by emphasizing her lack of involvement, of pleasure, and of self-defense, the presence of the contrasting narrator and his alliance with the feminine suggest a societal and moral critique rather than advocating her treatment. Eliot's working class women in *The Waste Land* serve to create a moralistic message against industrialism and nationalistic interests rather than illustrating Eliot's depictions of violence against women.

Endnotes

¹ This essay is based on a presentation given at the T. S. Eliot Society 28th Annual Meeting on September 28, 2007 in St. Louis, Missouri, entitled "Ovid's Tiresias in *The Waste Land*." At that time, the connection between *The Waste Land* and *Les mamelles de Tirésias* was, to my knowledge, unstudied and to date I am unaware of any scholarship connecting the two texts.

² While the unwritten *The Malthusian Couple* was intended to be a volume in Foucault's historical study of modern sexuality, it should be noted that Apollinaire, in his preface to *Les mamelles de Tirésias* rebukes a M. Deffoux who suggests the rubber balloons of Thérèse may be related to "certains vêtements recommandés par le néo-malthusianisme." 'certain items recommended by Neo-Malthusians' (Apollinaire 96; Slater 155-156).

³ All Latin translations are my own. All translations of Apollinaire are Maya Slater's unless otherwise noted.

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Manchild in *The Waste Land*: The Narrator of Eliot's 1921 Manuscript

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Eliot's Search for a Master Narrator

T. S. Eliot made several attempts to locate a master narrator or governing consciousness for *The Waste Land*. A few months before publishing the poem, he asked Ezra Pound if he ought to preface it with "Gerontion," so that its disparate voices would become "Tenants of the house / Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season" (*Letters* 504; *CP* 23). When he wrote his footnotes for the Faber & Gwyer edition of the poem, Eliot offered up yet another master narrator, proposing that Tiresias is "the most important personage" in *The Waste Land* because "what Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem" (*CP* 52. Eliot's emphasis). Most critics have recognized this note as an *ex post facto* imposition of form. Koestenbaum argues that Pound "convinced Eliot, by addressing him as Tiresias, that this androgynous seer was the poem's center" (128), while Hugh Kenner describes the footnote as "an afterthought . . . rather than as elucidative of the assumption under which the writing was originally done" (150). Yet in May of 1921, with *The Waste Land* still in its early draft stages, Eliot gave his poem a new title that identified a very different master narrator. In calling his work in progress "He Do the Police in Different Voices," Eliot elects Sloppy, the manchild who gives dramatic readings of the newspaper in Dickens' 1865 novel *Our Mutual Friend*, to the role he would later ascribe to Tiresias. Whereas the Tiresias footnote is an afterthought, the allusion to Sloppy is just the opposite: a forethought that elucidates one of Eliot's earliest efforts to comprehend his own narrative method in composing the poem. The "substance of the poem" might never have been "what Tiresias sees," but it may once have been what—or *how*—Sloppy

performs. Understanding the circumstances under which Eliot adopted his working title and the role he envisioned for this Dickensian narrator in his manuscript might provide a model for reading the poem in its published form.

Eliot's working title for his manuscript, "He Do the Police in Different Voices," has received a fair amount of critical attention in the decades since the 1971 publication of *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*. Both Gregory Jay and Allyson Booth, for example, have drawn thematic connections between *The Waste Land* and *Our Mutual Friend* as a whole, noting that novel and poem alike are stories of men supposedly drowned in the Thames who walk London in disguise. Like *Little Dorrit* and the other novels of Dickens's final decade, *Our Mutual Friend* is a dark, brooding, and savagely-satirical portrayal of Victorian London. In presenting a cross-section of the city's high and low society and in using the river as a symbol of the divisions and connections between these different London milieus, Dickens anticipates some of the themes and juxtapositions of *The Waste Land*. Yet while this mode of generalized comparison may be a profitable line of inquiry, Eliot's Dickensian title can only be fully understood in the context of the particular scene to which it alludes and of the particular period of time during which Eliot invented this title. For Eliot's allusion to Sloppy, Dickens's manchild performer, may be a response to the events that bookended an eventful month in the poet's life: the arrival of three unpublished chapters of James Joyce's *Ulysses* in early May of 1921, and the impending arrival of Eliot's mother in early June.

A Month Alone with Joyce's Manuscript

In the winter and spring of 1921, Eliot was struggling to find the time and energy to work on the "long poem" that would become *The Waste Land* (*Letters* 444). He complains in an April 22nd letter to John Middleton Murry, "It is true that I have started a poem. But Vivien has been very ill. Eight weeks in bed so far, and I shall be occupied this summer with my mother who will be here" (447). Writing to John Quinn, Eliot laments his "lack of *continuous* time, not getting more than a few hours together for myself, which breaks the concentration required for turning out a poem of any length" (451). In early May, Vivien, still suffering from what Eliot terms "*neuritis* in every nerve"

(441), a condition brought on, at least in part, by her father's recent illness, retires to a rented seaside cottage. During the month between his wife's departure and the arrival of his mother, brother, and sister on June 10, Eliot would have the flat at Clarence Gate Gardens to himself (Ackroyd 109; *Letters* 450).¹ He made good use of the time, typing a fair copy of the first two parts of what would become *The Waste Land*, adding to it an opening narrative of a night of debauchery, and giving the work its new title, "He Do the Police in Different Voices." One could argue that Eliot would not have made this progress—or at least, that what progress he made would not have moved in this particular direction—had it not been for the fortuitous arrival of a manuscript at the start of his month alone.

Sometime before May 9th, Eliot received, either from Ezra Pound or from James Joyce directly, the manuscript for three unpublished chapters of *Ulysses*: "Oxen of the Sun," "Circe," and "Eumaeus" (*Letters* 452). The fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth of the novel's eighteen chapters, these can be read as the climax of Joyce's story. In the first of these episodes, Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus, the novel's protagonists, finally meet. In "Circe," Bloom follows Stephen to Dublin's redlight district, where he intervenes to save the drunken young man from being arrested. Finally, with the night drawing to a close, Bloom helps Stephen to sober up at a cabman's shelter. Of course, it is not Joyce's plot, but his language that makes *Ulysses* such a groundbreaking work. The chapters that Eliot read in May are a tour-de-force, a series of bold experiments in which Joyce demolishes the very conventions of the novel. "Oxen of the Sun" is set in a maternity ward, and the narrative's language evolves over the course of the chapter to reflect the birth and evolution of the English language itself. "Circe," the longest chapter in *Ulysses*, is a phantasmagoric play in which elements from earlier in the book and from Bloom's and Stephen's subconscious minds redeploy themselves in surreal fashion. "Eumaeus," on the other hand, is narrated in a deliberately overstuffed, clichéd voice that is reminiscent of Bloom's own patterns of speech. Bloom and Stephen are tired, and "Eumaeus" reflects their exhaustion through its worn-out language. Taken as a whole, the manuscript that Eliot received in May represented one of the most important and influential literary works of the century.

Eliot was tremendously impressed by what he read. Writing to John Quinn on May 9, he describes these chapters as "truly

magnificent" (452). In a letter to Joyce dated May 21, Eliot singled out "Circe" for particular praise: "I think they [the chapters] are superb—especially the Descent into Hell, which is stupendous" (455). After suggesting a few minor changes in phrasing, he writes "I have nothing but admiration; in fact, I wish, for my own sake, that I had not read it" (*Letters* 455). Two years later, in his laudatory essay "*Ulysses*, Order and Myth," Eliot would assert that Joyce's novel was "a step toward making the modern world possible in art" (*Selected Prose* 177). While other artists would follow in Joyce's wake, "they will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations" (177). This may be a fair description of Eliot's relationship to Joyce by 1922 and 1923, but in May of 1921 Eliot was indeed a Joyce imitator. *Ulysses* seems to have impressed itself upon Eliot's sensibilities in much the same way that *The Waste Land* would eventually impress itself upon those of a future generation of poets.

The Waste Land in a Joycean Mode

Eliot is clearly under Joyce's sway when he writes the "Circe"-derived episode beginning "First we had a couple of feelers down at Tom's place / There was old Tom, boiled to the eyes, blind" (*The Waste Land Facsimile* 5). Although the action has been moved from Dublin to Boston and the patios is American rather than Irish, Eliot's narrative of drunken carousers who stay out all night, visit a brothel, and narrowly escape arrest derives its tone and plot from the chapter of *Ulysses* that he had so particularly liked. Eliot had for several years been writing about dramatic form in essays such as "The Possibility of a Poetic Drama," and he would try, throughout the 1920's, to write a play himself. He must therefore have been particularly fascinated by "Circe," which as a play-within-a-novel radically reinvents the conventions of the stage play. "Circe" spurred Eliot not only to resume work on his poem, but to rethink the way in which its various episodes would unfold. The poem would now begin with a 54-line homage to Joyce, a monologue that strikes a bawdy, colloquial tone rather than a literary one. It was Ezra Pound, during his revision of the poem in January 1922, who would later cut the entire scene. By scribbling a jagged line across Eliot's entire first page, Pound called for *The Waste Land* to begin not with "First we had a couple of feelers down at Tom's place," but rather with "April is the cruellest month"

(*The Waste Land Facsimile* 5-6). Elsewhere in the manuscript, Pound struck out the word “yes!” and wrote in the margins “Penelope / J.J.” (13). The exclamation was too reminiscent of Molly Bloom’s famous closing words in *Ulysses*: “yes I said yes I will Yes” (18.1608-1609). Pound knew how powerful Joyce’s example was, and, in revising *The Waste Land*, he kept Eliot from wearing his indebtedness on his sleeve.

The immediacy with which Eliot mimicked Joyce’s “Circe” speaks to the power it held for him. Lawrence Rainey makes a strong case, based on the typewriter and paper Eliot used as well as the alignment of text on the page, for dating the narrative passage to “late May” (*Revisiting the Waste Land* 20). Eliot’s new opening for his poem was very much the product of his time alone with Joyce’s manuscript. During this same period, Eliot added the title “He Do the Police in Different Voices” to the existing parts of the poem, rendering both the “Burial of the Dead” and “In the Cage” subtitles. The off-center, unaligned position of the new title indicates that it, too, is a late May addition to the manuscript, one Eliot seems to have added only after typing the new “Circe”-derived narrative. Why, in the wake of reading Joyce and emulating his style, would Eliot allude to Dickens? What connections did Eliot mean to draw among the line “He Do the Police in Different Voices,” Joyce’s novel-in-progress, and his own long poem-in-progress?

Joyce and Dickens

Eliot may have seen in Joyce an affinity with Dickens: both were chroniclers of the city, wicked satirists, and masters of characterization through voice. Other members of Eliot’s circle would make a similar comparison. Wyndham Lewis, for example, in his 1926 book *The Art of Being Ruled*, compares Leopold Bloom’s thoughts to the conversations of Mr. Jingle in *Pickwick Papers* (401). Lest Lewis’s association of the two novelists seem arbitrary, it is worth noting that Joyce himself bought at least four Dickens novels while living in Trieste in or after the year 1912, the period in which he would have been revising *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914) and beginning to sketch out ideas for *Ulysses* (Ellmann 106-107).² That same year, Joyce, in an attempt to qualify as an English teacher, took a series of English and Italian proficiency tests at the University of Padua. He wrote an English-language essay on Dickens,

citing “exaggeration” as the hallmark of his predecessor’s technique (Ellman 320; Berrone 3). Joyce, in short, passed through an intense Dickens phase during the same period in which he was beginning to write his great novel.

Joyce’s familiarity with Dickens is apparent in the many references to and parodies of Dickens that dot the text of *Ulysses*. The three chapters that Eliot received in 1922 contain several references to Dickens. When the evolving language of “Oxen of the Sun” reaches the nineteenth century, for example, it adopts the cadences of Dickens. A thirty-line passage in the latter half of the chapter parodies the novelist, casting a delivery room scene in the sentimental light that infuses Dickens’ famous death scenes: “She had fought the good fight and now she was very very happy. Those who have passed on, who have gone before, are happy too as they gaze down and smile upon the touching scene” (14.1313-1318). This elevated and sentimental language is reminiscent of the death of Little Nell or of Dora, the child-bride of David Copperfield. Joyce knew Dickens well enough to effectively mimic him, and Eliot knew him well enough to recognize the target of this mimicry.

“Eumaeus” finds Corley declaring he will take on any work “so long as I get a job, even as a crossing sweeper” (16.203). Either Corley or Joyce himself is referring obliquely to Jo, the crossing sweeper featured in *Bleak House*. Later in the chapter, Bloom makes a more explicit reference to a Dickens title. Questioning Corley’s wild stories, he whispers to Stephen: “Our mutual friend’s stories are like himself, Mr Bloom *apropos* of knives remarked to his *confidante sotto voce*. Do you think they are genuine?” (16.821-822). Eliot was already primed to think of *Our Mutual Friend*, for in his March “London Letter” to *The Dial* Eliot had referred to Podsnap, another character from the novel (*The Annotated Waste Land* 138). Bloom’s direct reference to the novel’s title might have been one more factor in Eliot’s selection of “He Do the Police in Different Voices” as a title. Nor are these Joyce’s only references to Dickens; Don Gifford, in his annotations to *Ulysses*, finds over a dozen other allusions to the author over the course of the novel.

Yet the inspiration for Eliot’s working title may have come not from any of Joyce’s direct allusions to Dickens, but rather from two characters who appear at the beginning and end of “Circe.” On the first page of the chapter, a figure reminiscent of Dickens’s manchild Sloppy appears: “A deafmute idiot with goggle eyes, his shapeless

mouth dribbling, jerks past, shaken in Saint Vitus's dance. A chain of children's hands imprison him" (15.14-15). At the chapter's conclusion, as Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom are leaving the brothel, the police appear. The brawler Private Carr has just knocked Stephen to the ground, when his friend Private Compton, "tugging his comrade," announces, "Bugger off, Harry. Here's the cops!" (15.4770). The night watchmen make their entrance: "Two raincaped watch, tall, stand in the group" (15.4771). This arrival of the police clearly made an impression on Eliot, for the monologue he wrote later that month centers on the speaker going to a brothel that is raided by "a fly cop" who insists that he "Come on to the station" (*The Waste Land Facsimile* 5). Moreover, the young protagonists of both "Circe" and Eliot's monologue are saved from arrest by the intervention of an influential older acquaintance. If the overall story arc of "Circe" inspired Eliot's new narrative, the "deafmute idiot" who appears at the start of the chapter and the "cops" who make an appearance at its conclusion may have inspired Eliot's new title for his poem.

Eliot's Dickensian Title

The line "He do the Police in different voices" is drawn from a seemingly inconsequential scene in Dickens' densely-layered, multi-plot novel. Eliot had a genius for allusion, and had he wished to he might have selected a line or phrase that went right to the heart of *Our Mutual Friend*. He did just that with his working epigraph for *The Waste Land*, citing the death scene of Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.³ "The horror! The horror!" can stand as a metonymy for Conrad's entire novel in a way that "he do the Police in different voices" cannot for *Our Mutual Friend*. It is therefore important to focus on the particular scene from which the line is drawn rather than on *Our Mutual Friend* as a whole.

Eliot's interest in a minor episode from *Our Mutual Friend* is all the more surprising given that the novel's main plotline seems to reverberate with the imagery of *The Waste Land* in a way its subplot does not. The novel opens with the body of a young man being fished out of the Thames. He is identified as John Harmon, heir to a wealthy man who made his fortune in "dust," the waste that London generates. Harmon's fortune passes to another dustman, Mr. Boffin, and his wife, who generously take in John Harmon's fiancée. The Boffins are soon

approached by a young clerk who offers to help manage their accounts. This stranger is John Harmon himself, who has staged his own death in order to test his fiancée (as this is an arranged marriage, she has never actually seen Harmon). The novel's romantic plotline centers on Harmon's attempt to win his fiancée's heart as a penniless factotum rather than as a wealthy man. Some of the same tropes and images therefore run through both Dickens's novel and Eliot's poem: the polluted and the pristine stretches of the Thames, dust and waste, a drowned youth, a stranger who may actually be a lost loved one. Likewise, Dickens's juxtaposition of poor and wealthy characters, of new money and old, and of low and high society resonates with "A Game of Chess" and the typist episode of *The Waste Land*. Novelist and poet alike view London through the prism the city's many different social classes and milieus. Yet Eliot's title gestures not to one of these more obvious affinities with *Our Mutual Friend*, but rather to an episode that held a more idiosyncratic appeal for the poet.

The episode that Eliot's title refers to involves the newly-wealthy Boffins' decision to adopt a grandson. The couple visits Mrs. Betty Higden, an energetic woman who cares for orphaned and abandoned children. The oldest of these foundlings is a young man named Sloppy, who works industriously at Mrs. Higden's laundry mangle and runs her errands. In the scene in which he is first introduced, Sloppy laughs rather than speaks, and when at one point he sees that Mrs. Higden is upset, he throws back his head and "bellows" like Faulkner's Benjy (250).⁴ Mrs. Higden confides to her visitors that when Sloppy was first brought to her, he was "thought to be no better than a Natural" (249). Sloppy's appearance, to the armchair Victorian phrenologist, would indeed suggest a lack of intelligence: he is "a very long boy, with a very little head, and an open mouth of disproportionate capacity that seemed to assist the eyes in staring at the visitors" (245). Indeed, Sloppy's eyes and mouth and silence are reminiscent of the character who appears at the start of "Circe": "A deafmute idiot with goggle eyes, his shapeless mouth dribbling" (15.14). Yet Sloppy's appearance belies a remarkable talent. "You might not think it to look," Mrs. Higden says, "but Sloppy is a beautiful reader of a newspaper. He do the Police in different voices" (246). Mrs. Higden seems to offer this ability as evidence that Sloppy is not, in fact, a "natural," but something else entirely. Sloppy is a savant, and his particular gift lies in being able to bring other voices to life.

The Manchild as Master Narrator

By giving *The Waste Land* a title which alludes to Sloppy's reading of the newspaper, Eliot directs the reader's attention to issues of narrative layering, mimicry, and performance. The original titles for the first two parts of the poem, "The Burial of the Dead" and "In the Cage," are thematic. The new title, which supersedes them, goes to form and method. Perhaps reading the late chapters of Joyce, in which the conventional role of the narrator was being radically refigured, helped Eliot to see that his own poem likewise was unfolding according to some new narrative model. David Hayman argues that *Ulysses* is animated not only by multiple narrators, but by an "arranger," which he describes as "something between a persona and a function, somewhere between the narrator and the implied author" (122). This arranger assumes more of a presence as the novel progresses and seems to have eclipsed the narrator entirely in the polylingual "Oxen of the Sun" and the phantasmagoric "Circe" episodes. It is the arranger who casts the former chapter into styles that mimic the development of the English language and who in "Circe" effects a dreamlike surrealism by redeploying elements drawn from earlier in the text. To read *Ulysses* from beginning to end is therefore to witness the utter disintegration of the nineteenth-century narrator.

Joyce's manuscript seems to have reached Eliot during a period of time when he was trying to understand the new narrative mode of his own work in progress, and his selection of a new title is an early attempt to articulate this narrative mode. Even in its initial phases of May 1921, Eliot's poem had moved far beyond the interior monologue form of "Prufrock" and "Gerontion." In these earlier poems, Eliot had adopted the Victorian convention of using a title and an epigraph to identify a poem's narrator. Whereas in Browning's "Fra Lippo Lippi" or Tennyson's "Ulysses" a narrator speaks of his own life and character, Eliot's monologues were marked by a movement inward. The words of "Prufrock" are not a soliloquy but rather a set of concerns and references specific to the title character. Hugh Kenner argues that Prufrock is not even a character in the traditional sense of the word, but is instead "a zone of consciousness" (49). In Eliot's new poem in progress, this zone had expanded beyond the limits of any single, unifying consciousness. There was no longer a Prufrock or a Gerontion to whom the disparate parts of Eliot's poem

might be ascribed. Instead, an abundance of “different voices” had stretched to the breaking point the old model of the spoken or interior monologue.

Eliot’s new title can therefore be read as a tentative articulation of the principle behind the arrangement of these voices: a mimicking performer has been turned loose in the poet’s personal library and store of memories. This performer moves from one episode to another in a transition-less and discombobulating way. The Nighttown episode, for example, simply gives way to the lyricism of “April is the cruellest month.” There is no single narrator charged with drawing connections between these disparate elements; instead, the reader must gamely follow as the poem moves from one narrative voice to another. Eliot had been thinking and writing about performers that spring. In commenting on a music hall performance in his “London Letter” of May 21, he wrote that the comedienne Ethel Levey “plays for herself rather than for the audience” (168). The same might be said of Sloppy in Dickens’ novel and, by extension, of the performer that Eliot’s new title implies is at work in his poem. “Doing voices” is fundamentally different from telling a story, and the relationship between performer and audience in Eliot’s poem is different from that of narrator and reader in the poems of an earlier generation.

Eliot Plays the Fool

Identifying himself with Dickens’s manchild may also be a self-deprecating pose on Eliot’s part: he reads what may be Joyce’s most brilliant work to date, and his response is to present himself as a mimic and a clown. In his May 22nd letter to Joyce, Eliot praises the three new chapters and then, apropos of nothing, includes one of his obscene Bolo verses. He could have sent Joyce a passage beginning “April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead ground / Mixing memory and desire.” Instead he sends him this: “Bolo’s big black bastard queen, / Was *so* obscene / She shocked the folk of Golder’s Green” (*Letters* 455). This is Eliot’s familiar tactic of self-laceration. One sees flashes of it in the poet’s letters and essays and perhaps sees it laid bare in a poem like “Prufrock” and in certain passages of *The Waste Land*. Identifying himself with the manchild Sloppy, whose gift is for mimicry rather than for creation, may be one more instance of Eliot’s acting the clown as a form of psychological

self-defense. On the other hand, sometimes a joke is just a joke. The three chapters of *Ulysses* which Eliot had just read are indeed “superb” and “stupendous,” but they are also tremendously funny. Joyce seems to have nudged Eliot back to the comic mode that marked *Ara vos Prec* (1919) and *Poems* (1920), and his new title reflects this return to the burlesque. Sending Joyce a Bolo poem may be as genuine a response to *Ulysses* as is the high seriousness of Eliot’s essay “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth.” To understand the full range of Eliot’s response to the novel, one has to triangulate between obscene private letter and sententious public tribute.

Moving the Poem from Confession to Performance

The allusion to Sloppy may function on another level as well, looking not only back to the poet’s reading of Joyce but ahead to his mother’s June 10th arrival and to the prospect of her eventually reading *The Waste Land*. Charlotte Eliot was a formidable presence in the poet’s life, a figure of rectitude and moral probity who was also herself a poet. Eliot routinely sent her his work; just the previous month he included in a letter home his essay on Andrew Marvell. He also sent her at different points long ratiocinations regarding his professional and personal decisions. At times, Eliot enlisted help in crafting these letters: he famously had Bertrand Russell send his mother a letter justifying Eliot’s decision to remain in England and to write poetry (118). When Charlotte Eliot, accompanied by Eliot’s brother and sister, arrived in June, it would be the first time Eliot had seen his mother in six years. He was eager to prove that the decisions he had made during those years apart—marrying Vivien, remaining in England, choosing not to defend his dissertation and hence not to receive his doctorate, taking a job at Lloyd’s bank—were the right ones.

Yet the first two parts of *The Waste Land* contain intensely personal confessions which might suggest that Eliot has made all the wrong choices. The withering exchanges between the husband and wife in “In the Cage” (later re-titled “A Game of Chess”) read as particularly autobiographical. In editing the manuscript the next winter, Pound scribbled next to the wife’s lines the one-word question “photography?” (*The Waste Land Facsimile* 11). Pound seems to have been implying that this scene was a snapshot of the Eliots’ marriage. But this is only the most obvious of a number of passages that might

be thought to hold a mirror up to the poet's life. Nor is it easy to say in what places a writer feels most exposed. Perhaps the ennui of commuters in a Dantean London is as damning an indictment of Eliot's life decisions as is the scene of marital discord. Virginia Woolf records in her diary Mary Hutchinson's response to poem: she "interprets it to be Tom's diary—a melancholy one" (2:178). Even the new "Circe"-inspired narrative, which features a character named Tom, might reflect back unfavorably on the poet, who frequented the Boston music halls while at Harvard. Eliot's mother worried about the influence that a year in Paris would have on her son; perhaps she should have been more concerned about his undergraduate years in Cambridge. In London, too, Eliot was a patron of music halls and boxing matches, a man who remained fascinated by the popular culture from which his parents had once shielded him. Given the dark materials of *The Waste Land*, it is perhaps no coincidence that Eliot's new title alludes to a mother's praise of her son's dramatic performance. It is Eliot's directive on how to read his long poem, an early signpost in the New Critical practice of not implicating the poet in the stuff of his poem.

Electing Sloppy as the poem's narrator or mouthpiece moves the work out of a confessional mode and into a performative one. By associating himself with the innocent Sloppy, Eliot tries to distance himself from his subject matter.⁵ After all, Sloppy is not making a confession, but giving a performance. Some critics have linked Eliot's title to an interest in crime and violence. Calvin Bedient argues that the title "He Do the Police in Different Voices" reflects back on the speaker as one "with a flair for tones of criminality, sensationalism, and outrage" and asks "[is] the very impulse to perform voices suspect? A complicity in the fascination of crime—say, murder? To create and to murder are near akin?" (73). These are fine questions, but unfortunately, none of the characters in *Our Mutual Friend* raises them. Sloppy is never charged with prurience, nor does his surrogate mother worry that his fascination with these newspaper accounts reveal some suppressed malevolence. In point of fact, Sloppy is in all likelihood reading not the crime blotter, but accounts of debtor families being evicted from their homes by the police. Ms. Higgins' great fear is that she will lose her own little home and be sent to the workhouse. By novel's end, she does indeed face such a crisis, and chooses to die wandering the country rather than to enter a debtor's prison. Sloppy's performances are therefore not a suspicious

dramatization of crime, but a kind of exorcism of his mother's fears. The Boffins likewise trust Sloppy, employing him as a messenger, while the novel's other child-like adult, the diminutive Jenny Wren, who is herself the book's moral compass, proposes marriage to him. By novel's end, Sloppy is wholly and happily integrated into the marriage plot and the new social order with which *Our Mutual Friend* concludes. If Sloppy's performances are deviant, this deviance goes unnoticed by everyone he encounters.

This may be part of the appeal that Dickens's manchild held for Eliot: the connection between Sloppy's inner life and his dramatic performance is wholly inscrutable. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," first published in 1919 and republished in *The Sacred Wood* in October 1920, Eliot had claimed that "poetry is an escape from personality" and that "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates" (*Selected Essays* 21; 18). Sloppy's reading of the newspaper is a burlesque, *reductio ad absurdum* vision of this separation of a man and his creative faculties. Laughing off questions about his intentions, Sloppy is able to perform crime and give voice to fearful scenes while still retaining his essential innocence. Under Pound's guidance, Eliot would ultimately reject "He Do the Police in Different Voices" as a title and drop the Joyce-inspired narrative that began his poem. *The Waste Land* is better for these changes and excisions. Yet the title and passages that Eliot conceived of in May 1921 may have been the means by which the poet was able to comprehend—and ultimately complete—his own work in progress. The Dickensian performer of Eliot's working title was effaced from the manuscript before it saw print, but the element of performance remains. From May 1921 through January 1922, Sloppy was both a placeholder for the master narrator that Eliot's poem no longer needed and a suggestion of the new mode of narration that would take his place.

Endnotes

¹ Eliot's mother Charlotte, along with his brother Henry and sister Marianne, arrived in London on June 10th and stayed through August 20th. Charlotte and Marianne stayed at the Eliots' 9 Clarence Gate Gardens flat, while Eliot himself moved into Lucy Thayer's empty flat. Eliot's brother Henry initially planned to stay in a rented room, but upon finding that Vivien was not in London moved in with his brother (Rainey 21).

² Joyce owned the following Dickens novels by 1920: *Barnaby Rudge*, *Bleak House*, *David Copperfield*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *Oliver Twist*. While his edition of *Bleak House* was published by Bradbury and Evans in 1853, the other four books were published in 1912. Joyce therefore bought them sometime between 1912 and 1920.

³ Eliot's epigraph read:

Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision,—he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath—

'The horror! the Horror!'

[sic: capitalization of second 'Horror' is Eliot's] (*Waste Land Facsimile* 3)

If Eliot points us toward an obscure passage in *Our Mutual Friend*, we ought to consider what that passage meant to Eliot and his poem, rather than jumping too readily into a discussion of the novel *in toto*.

⁴ Dickens uses the word "bellow" three times in the scene, while Faulkner will later use "bellow" or "beller" innumerable times to describe Benjy's cries. It is quite possible that Sloppy was one of the inspirations for Faulkner's Benjy. Faulkner read Dickens as a boy and later would read him aloud to his family. Blotner describes the scene this way: "In the evenings after dinner they would sit and read in the library. For several evenings Faulkner read one book very slowly. It was *Dombey and Son*. He said you had to make a distinction between books which you could read fast and those you must read very slowly. '*Great Expectations*,' he said, 'is one you must read very slowly'" (Blotner 686).

⁵ Eliot had earlier in his career found other characters who would license him to write of sex and violence. In "The Death of St. Narcissus" and "The Love Song of Saint Sebastian," religious martyrdom offers Eliot an occasion on which to write in a sadomasochistic vein.

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The Poem as Situation: Eliot's Meaning and Pound's Truth in *The Waste Land*

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Ezra Pound's role in the creation of the preeminent modernist poem has been an issue from even before its publication, and scholarship abounds on the Pound / Eliot relationship and its impact on the direction of the composition of *The Waste Land*. Significant work has been done to assign primary rights of the piece to Eliot or to Pound, but since the publication of the manuscripts in 1971, critical opinion has leaned slowly but significantly towards a deeper recognition of Pound's contribution, to the point that *The Norton Anthology* has suggested the poem should be considered as jointly authored (1266).¹

Richard Badenhausein makes the key point on this issue when he writes that those eager to dismiss one or the other poet in an explication of *The Waste Land* reveal a latent "anxiety" about how texts produce meaning in their embrace of a more unsophisticated conception of artistic creativity (74). The very notion of modernism as understood by both Pound and Eliot at the point of the poem's composition was that of a collaboration built to critique and thereby destabilize the "traditional" relationship between author and text. Such a notion, however, was agreed upon by these two writers for very different reasons; Badenhausein locates in Eliot a strong desire to cede authority, while Pound was more interested, I believe, in collaboration as the ongoing formation of a modernist "party bloc." Eliot's disposition has been read through more psychoanalytic models, but Pound's drive is better understood on a larger scale, insofar as we can imagine Pound's formulation of modernism as an act of an almost political nature centered on the tenets of Vorticism. In the years leading up to the composition of *The Waste Land*, Pound asked hypothetically whether it was possible to create a "long vorticist poem," and James Logenbach has recently suggested that the desire to

construct such a text guided Pound's editing of Eliot's major work (457). I would like to highlight here the ramifications of Pound's decision to edit Eliot's manuscript in this fashion, a decision that was motivated by Pound's attempt to unite a collective of artists in the common goal of nothing less than bringing truth into the world through poetry.²

Such a revolution would be accomplished, if we take Pound at his word, through a two-fold process: one, a reformulation of our relationship as a society to poetic language; and two, a resurrection of syntax which would significantly alter the function of the word through the formation of what he called a "Vortex." While the influence of Vorticism has been recognized in *The Waste Land*, the stakes and aim of Vorticism in relation to the piece have been forgotten. Focusing less on the the interplay of the poem's "narrative" and understanding the piece instead as a syntactical procedure suspended between subject and object, I believe that we can best grasp how the poem functioned to embody the truth of modern tragic finitude through Pound's utilization of Vorticism.

Denis Donoghue has written that the words of *The Waste Land*, divorced as they are from objective referent, attain an "aura" not unlike proverbs; but, while proverbs refer to life experience, *The Waste Land* refers to nothing more than its own uncanny presence as linguistic object. "I cannot explain this use of language," Donoghue writes, except to say that the procedure "issues from the quarrel between time and myth," between, that is, the temporal and the atemporal. "Eliot is using words," he concludes, "as if their first obligation were neither to things nor to time," and he is exactly right, save for the assignation of credit (230). Pound consistently turns Eliot's words away from an objective reality that can be determined physically or temporally, establishing them as the objects themselves of the syntactical poetic subject which speaks the truth.

It is this notion of "truth" that has been lost in formulations of Vorticism in regards to *The Waste Land*, effectively stripping Vorticism of its stakes and leaving it to wallow in its own obtuse reverberations.³ The fascistic endpoint of Pound's "philosophical" career has perhaps diminished the potency of his commitment to truth and erased the connections between Vorticism and its achievements, but the recent work of Alain Badiou—focused steadfastly as it is on understanding the presence and function of truth—provides a timely

echo of Pound, and aids us in understanding why the poet did what he did with Eliot's manuscript.

Beginning from the supposition that a current philosophical over-emphasis on the situationally dependent values—the identities—of elements commits the disservice of obscuring the nature of the structure of the situations in which these elements act, Badiou finds recourse in mathematical language as the most formal of human invention and conducts treatments of metaphysical problems in mathematical terms. The advantage of such strict formalization is its ability to escape, to a large degree, the subject-object correlation that haunts other, more “slippery,” alphabetic languages. Number, for instance, refers to no particular object, while mathematical principles offer a universal accessibility foreign to traditional conceptions of the subject (*Number and Numbers* 211). As a language bereft of either concrete referent or singular operator, Badiou understands mathematics to be a discourse on nothing less than Being itself.⁴

This mirrors in a striking fashion Pound's (and Fenollosa's) own “invention” of the Chinese language as a discourse of pure verbs, pure be-ing, in their essay “The Chinese Character as Medium for Poetry,” and both Pound and Badiou believe that such a discourse of Be-ing offers unique access to “truth.” For Badiou, this means that the sensible Thing can be thought outside of the subject-object correlation as an atemporal element quantified by an open logical system operating with ciphers of relation: numbers. Pound's conception imagines in turn the Chinese ideogram in place of Badiou's equations; their logic fashioned not by a singular subject but by an infinite collective, and their results indicative not of the concrete world, but behaving instead as an evocation of eternal relations (*Early Writings* 304-329). The ideogram, as Hugh Kenner understood clearly, is a precise model of the Vortex as Pound conceived it: a coalescing of time and space into a mythic, atemporal pattern. Such a pattern, divorced from situational particularities, has the power to effectively redistribute understandings of the objects involved in its composition and thereby inaugurate a truth which re-aligns the particularities of reality (Kenner 160-161).

What aids us in interpreting Pound's formulation is a clear ontology and a more precise understanding of truth as provided by Badiou: if, following Badiou, we can fix the presence of the object in an atemporal position by thinking it mathematically, we may then address the processes of the formulation of its situational identity.

These processes point to “truth” insofar as truth is understood as the radically anterior factor which anchors situations and the regimes of knowledge which exist within them.⁵ There is not a singular truth for Badiou or Pound (the pattern accessed by Homer is in no way better or worse as the pattern accessed by Li Chu) but this position of atemporality through which the constituting truth of situations is accessed stands as the aim of both Pound and Badiou’s thought, and key to accessing this atemporality is the progressive destitution of the situationally dependent values which adhere to the object.

What Pound offers, especially in his essay on Vorticism, is a concrete process explaining how this is to be enacted in poetry: if all extraneous decoration is stripped away from the most precise word, we are left with the talismanic power of the Image. This Image-as-word then has the power to ignite novel relations between itself and other words, other Images. The finely honed edges of the succession of Images compress themselves into a metaphorical Vortex which, through the narrowing nose of its cone, acts as a poetic wedge into “traditional” syntax, disrupting, by extension, meaning and the regime of knowledge in which meaning lies. When Pound proclaimed that *The Waste Land* was the justification of the modernist movement, I believe he understood it to be just such a Vortex, writ large across nineteen pages “without a break”; a sustained example, in other words, of how a poem could access truth (Ellman 51; *Selected Letters* 169).

Treating *The Waste Land* in this way, we must remain mindful that there are, however, two enveloping situations, and two corresponding truths: we imagine the situation of *The Waste Land* as anchored by the truth of the poem, and the situation of modernism as anchored by the truth as the poem. The founding truth of the poem, then, I understand to be the tenets of Vorticism as embodied in Pound’s editorial work, which in turn guides the various permutations of textual meaning of the poem proper. But the poem is also a truth itself, disrupting the regimes of knowledge antecedent to modernism and retroactively identifying the world that came before it in its wake. The syntax of the poem, then, ignites the truth of modernism: *The Waste Land* is an investigation into what Donoghue has called the “double allegiance” of the word to speaking subject and referential object, participating in both but adhering to neither, commanding the “otherwise senseless space between consciousness and experience” (230). I would, however, qualify Donoghue by suggesting that his

evaluation of the poem is a little too optimistic, as *The Waste Land* demonstrates this space without ever bridging it, in effect calling the role of the word into question and failing, in fact refusing, to provide an answer. In this refusal lies its power, as it dramatizes the tragedy of the modern finite subject's condition: the intrinsic inability to, as Forster urged, "only connect" (136).

The consonance of the text of the poem with a stable objective reality is suggested but consistently denied by the fractured subjectivity of *The Waste Land's* voice and the inability of the text to form a lasting connection to the worlds it attempts to address. This inability to connect to, and fruitfully participate in, worlds it repeatedly acknowledges results in the text's isolation from any procedure of meaning which would reside in such a world. Quentin Meillassoux has recently referred to this as a "glass cage" of isolation indicative of the modern subject, and just such a cage ignites the tragedy of finitude so eloquently performed in the poem itself (3-8).⁶ Disconnected voices murmur throughout; scenes are constructed and collapsed; meta-narrative arcs fall short. The voice of the text which survived Pound's carving of Eliot's manuscript remains bound in a pure subjectivity so abstract as to even preclude its own coherence. This tone, the anterior truth of the situation of the poem, is achieved through Pound's Vorticist-driven textual manipulation and most importantly counters Eliot's adherence to banal narrative: the Quest, lifted from, among others, Augustine, Mallory, Frazer, and Weston. Vorticism then ignites the tragic, finite truth of modernism as spoken by the poem into English literature with its publication; "truth" insofar as we understand it as Badiou does (as Pound does) as the only thing sharp enough to "bore a hole in knowledge" (*Being and Event* 525). While Pound fashions a wedge, Badiou wields a drill.

Truth imagined as such is not wholly alien to a situation; it is a novel "gathering" of its already-present elements, and so, in order to disrupt knowledge, the poem must first speak the language of knowledge (525). Eliot's words could be understood as the meat to Pound's syntactical skeleton. The effect of the total poem is the result of a twin conditioning of the drives of Eliot and Pound, one insisting on a veiled spiritual autobiographical Quest, the other insisting on the tightening solipsistic Vortex of text. And while this inter-relation can be witnessed at moments in the manuscript on which both labored, I would especially like to highlight the three poetic fragments "Song," "Exequy," and "Dirge," which Eliot considered as a conclusion to *The*

Waste Land and Pound firmly rejected. In an analysis of these fragments we realize the necessity of Pound's editorial rigor for the blossoming of modern tragic finitude which this poem presents, and we can consider this rigor, its explanation and its necessity, through Badiou's ontological positioning of "truth," "obfuscation," and "disaster." Lastly, Badiou provides us with a method with which to think through the victory of the poem on both a small and a large scale, and sketch an explanation of the disappointment and confusion that lies in its wake.

Speaking Finitude

Badiou often refers to the modern "dilemma" of tragic finitude as first embodied in the poetics of the age and characterized by the inability to bridge the chasm between subject and object. This dilemma was so unfamiliar to the world into which it was spoken that it garnered incomprehension and dismissal. An early review of *The Waste Land* calls it "a mad medley":

It has a plan, because the author says so; and presumably it has some meaning, because he speaks of its symbolism; but meaning, plan, and the intention alike are massed behind a smokescreen of anthropological and literary erudition, and only the pundit, pedant, or the clairvoyant will be in the least aware of them (Powell 15)

And yet certainly the overall drive of the poem was not unspeakable:

"The Waste Land" says something which is not new: that life has become barren and sterile, that man is withering, impotent and without assurance that the waters which made the land fruitful will ever rise again (Seldes 16)

Rather, *The Waste Land's* declaration of incoherence resonated particularly with a generation ready to hear it and more importantly to believe it, particularly after the atrocities in France.

The dialectical "lure of heresy" which Peter Gay describes as the engine for modernism powers the relationship he identifies as central to its rise; the "bourgeoisie" vs. "artist," a relationship understood by both actors as a confrontational one (11). Pound was not totally reactionary, at first, and neither was Eliot, but both found themselves in a time and place profoundly alien to their constitutions, one which radically devalued the new, and one which had

(conversely) seemed to have never known the lessons both of these young men had so recently acquired from old books. The sense of destiny so prevalent in the British Empire, despite the atrocities of the first world war, was what the poets reacted against; its gaudy optimism, its self-righteousness, its belief that it was, if not the first reich, then most certainly the last. These were the “well-defended bastions” which modernism in general, and Eliot’s verse in particular, was intended to attack (11).

The Waste Land denounces the bourgeois certitude, optimism, and faith in totality by undermining the two pillars critical to its foundation: place and master; king and country. Badiou identifies the poetic axiom for a modern process of the deconstruction of these pillars in his idiosyncratic reading of Mallarmé’s *Coup de dés*: the “captain” of the poem sacrifices himself, with his dice throw, for the establishment of a new world outside his control and beyond his power to name.⁷ This Master offers himself up in the interest of establishing a place from which we (the crew? the People? the reader?) may move forward without him. For Badiou, the death of Mallarmé’s Master-captain brings to an end both the tyranny of a single subjectivity and the clarity of purpose necessarily aligned with it. Badiou would have Mallarmé present us, after the death of the Masterful captain, with a new Place (“nothing will have taken place other than...”) from which we may begin again, but his poet provides no answer as to how we will prevent ourselves from taking the mantle of the captain for ourselves, exercising our own totalizing subjectivity, all-powerful and imminently dangerous, on a prone and defenseless world (Mallarmé 179). Eliot and Pound, working in the wake of not only Mallarmé but Somme, endeavor to offer us even less.

The method employed to dramatize such a coherent incoherence is initiated by Eliot but brought to the fore by Pound: through the destitution of the word brought about by the elimination of objective referent, the text of the poem is forced back upon itself, increasingly bereft of meaning. To this process falls prey authorial mastery, subjective identity, textual stability, and even Eliot’s famed irony. There is no safe place in *The Waste Land*, and when Eliot tries in the manuscript to build one (with dramatic set pieces and Grail references), Pound is there to thwart the construction of a meta-text at every turn, preventing an objectification of the poem proper by disallowing the acknowledgement of another, meta-subjective position.⁸ In so doing, Pound enforces the sustained finitude of the

text, rendering it unable to do little but regurgitate unconnected scraps of knowledge, pieces of broken civilizations (“Jerusalem Athens Alexandria Vienna London”) that once championed achievement, success, totality (*CP* 48). And it is the rigorous inability of the poem to summon any such conclusion from the shards at its disposal that allows the full truth of the tragedy of finitude to bloom.

Creating the Aura

The Waste Land has not one place but several: the desert, brown London fogs, the dense banality of a fortune-teller’s chamber, a drawing room, a noisy bar, the invocation (I hesitate to say “place”) of a sloshing sea, then the desert again, a dry plain. The scene continually shifts until the poem stumbles upon its own words, the words becoming the only place, themselves cracking and breaking any idea of place [“London bridge is falling down” (*CP* 50)] into nonsense.

The voices are so many as to almost defy listing, and they are quite different from the characters; while Spenser and Shakespeare and Dante make appearances in the form of raw text itself, these are not characters, not Masters; and then the very characters themselves—the hyacinth girl, the young man carbuncular, Madam Sosostriis—are introduced and manipulated by another narrative hand altogether. There seems to be the operations of a consciousness, but where it comes from, where it stands, and even what it wants to say, is incoherent.

I contend that this incoherence, this splintering, is not Pound’s invention but is representative of his editorial rigor. Eliot himself establishes the tone of the piece; Pound helps him to maintain it. The first page in Eliot’s manuscript is a long narrative scene of drunken youths stumbling around a nighttime Boston, which Eliot cuts completely in subsequent drafts. The next page begins with the familiar “April is the cruelest month . . .” and continues in at least three separate voices. The sense of disembodiment which pervades the poem is achieved by Eliot in the first pages by cutting the narrative scene and beginning instead with the jumble of the mountains and the hyacinth girl and the “red rock.” This is the essence of the poem which Pound struggles to maintain throughout the manuscript against Eliot’s propensity to lapse into ironic bourgeois set pieces reminiscent of the cut first page.⁹

Eliot leads the way with the second page of the manuscript, providing the compressed voice necessary to dislocate the text from an objective reality. Pound takes this compression to the brink of coherence and then beyond it in the interest of creating a poem which refers to nothing other than itself; a poem which is a world itself, not a poem about the world. For example, the direct attack on the city of London which Eliot writes on page thirty-one of the manuscript, the repeated: "London, the swarming life you kill and breed . . . London, your people is bound upon the wheel"; this Pound strikes through completely, almost four stanzas total, because this passage is a direct address to London; an emotional address certainly, but worse, one which focuses too intently on a single location. Pound cuts these passages not once but twice, as Eliot holds on to it in further revisions. "Vocative" Pound angrily scribbles twice on the manuscript (*Facsimile and Transcript* 43). Further on in the section Pound continues to work: "Unreal City [this Pound allows] I have seen and see / [Pound circles this because of "I" as well as] Under the brown fog of your winter noon ['your' he cuts]" (43). Pound's paramount concern, as becomes increasingly evident in the manuscript, is not with the nomination of a setting-as-such, so much as it is with the preoccupation with a particular setting to the point at which it overwhelms the speaker. In Pound's vision, the poem may access The City, all cities, at will; in Eliot's vision, the poet is consumed by London, railing against it.

Pound is notably aggressive with Eliot's coherent scenes and strives to eliminate any temporal continuity, leaving only the most interesting sequences of words. He attacks the first long setting of "A Game of Chess," finally allowing it as only the nouns and verbs of pure description. He disallows "inviolable" as a descriptor of "voice"; he disallows "spread out in little fiery points of will" (cutting "little" and "of will") and finally suggests the entire section is "dogmatic deduction but wobbly as well" (11). A single example to illustrate this larger aim: "from which one tender Cupidon peeped out": "one" is changed to "a."

What is the difference between "one" and "a"? The difference lies in specificity: if the Cupidon is "one" then it is separate from others; it is unique, notable, memorable, special, specific, central; it becomes an object strong enough to capture the speaker and a strong object denotes a stable world, an objective world. The danger of such a world is that Eliot, a master of both irony and the dislocation

necessary to affect it, could then easily extract himself, as poet, from it. But Pound allows nothing to take full shape, thereby disallowing the safe retreat into irony Eliot attempts to re-instate with his more dramatic scenes.

Pound takes the section “Death by Water” originally a four page, ten stanza piece, and cuts it by at least two-thirds. While critical of the overall section, Pound does not advocate the near-complete cut that Eliot finally executes, though the impact of Pound’s overall displeasure with it is, I believe, evident in Eliot’s cut. On his copy of “Death by Water” Pound writes: “Bad—but can’t attack until I get typescript” (55).¹⁰ The first two stanzas of “Death by Water” in the manuscript run as follows:

The sailor, attentive to the chart and to the sheets.
A concentrated will against the tempest and the tide,
Retains, even ashore, in public bars and streets
Something inhuman, clean and dignified.

Even the drunken ruffian who descends
Illicit backstreet stairs, to reappear,
For the derision of his sober friends,
Staggering, or limping with a comic gonorrhea,
(*Facsimile and Transcript* 63)

Pound first cuts “attentive to the chart and to the sheets,” the cut indicative of his distaste for a strong character or character building; names, he allows, as flat icons, but solid figures and characterization, he does not.

The next line he cuts altogether: “concentrated will,” as it provides no image, and “the tempest and the tide” because it conveys nothing substantial other than cliché sacrificed at the altar of rhythm. Yet Pound is sensitive to rhythm, asking in the next line for “retains” to be moved to the end of the line and “even” to be cut. I am tempted to add that Pound allows the phrase “public bars and streets” which, while flirting with the same level of inconsequentiality and indecisiveness (is it a bar or a street?) as “tempest and the tide,” still uses words more firmly descriptive. For the final line he cuts “clean and,” taking an interesting line and elevating it to the mythic by eliminating any corporeality that “clean” would denote.

In the next stanza, the ruffian need not be “drunk”; again it’s a choice of one-or-the-other, and “drunken” suffices. “Stairs” need not be both “illicit” and “backstreet.” “Illicit stairs” is far more poetic than

“backstreet stairs” which is merely descriptive and here is a perfect example of the poetic in Pound, who would seem to advocate plain speech; poetic speech is nothing of the sort. The poetic is, for Pound, the perfect juxtaposition between commonplace words, and juxtaposition suits his Vorticist aims succinctly: by eliminating the signifying traits of a stable objective referent and providing instead the bare word, Pound allows for different, varied connections to be formed. “Backstreet stairs” is therefore obvious because it does no work; “illicit stairs” infers “backstreet” in a way in which “backstreet” does not necessarily infer “illicit.” A degree of the sinister seems to be at stake in this moment, and “illicit stairs” maintains an air of secrecy. These are stairs leading from a dark place to a dark place: stairs from a basement, stairs to a guarded room, stairs leading somewhere where they should not lead.

This is how Pound’s editorial hand, one that first recognizes the necessity of choice in the phrase and one that secondly makes the more poetic choice, is able to achieve a modern voice; a voice which, through juxtaposition, here in the very space between two words, is able to conjure the poetic effect. (Need one wonder why then Pound finds it unnecessary for “gonorrhea” to be identified as “comic”?)

The rest of the “Death by Water” manuscript evinces Eliot’s worst and most typical stylistic flourishes: the confessional tone lapsing into vague nonsense [“I was / Frightened beyond fear” (67)]. The piece receives stern treatment from Pound, but the entire section reads as though it exists merely as a set-up for the chill-inducing beauty of the last ten lines, which Eliot chooses to let stand on their own, though not without first seeking Pound’s approval (*Selected Letters* 171).

To cut the preceding four pages of setting, description, and characterization is the essence of modern poetry as Pound imagined it: to remain abstract in the relation yet specific in the fact, to allow the juxtaposition of the text to do the work, and to clear the sentiment to the bone. Badiou refers to this process as the elimination of the “trait of the concept,” the “operational fiction,” and the “constitutive category,” in pursuit of a language of pure relation (*Number and Numbers* 211). What supports this procedure’s efficacy in a poetic sphere is an appreciation of what Badiou calls the essential “mystery” of the poetic declaration. Words treated in this Vorticist manner affect what Donoghue calls an “aura,” due to their independence from the referents of time and place. The absence of any otherwise obvious

sustaining force, any objective referent, suggests the words contain an unearthly (a divine?) power, demanding the witness re-organize his world and its corresponding meaning around their presence. The “mystery” then is the power of the word to demand and attract meaning and, when strategically positioned by the poet, testify to a reality as yet unknown.¹¹

By this late point in *The Waste Land*’s composition Eliot seems to understand the tenor of Pound’s editorial drive and he successfully executes “What the Thunder Said” with almost no interference from his editor. Pound makes no serious edit from this point forward in the poem, other than his strong advisement against Eliot’s inclusion of three additional fragments to close out the entirety (*Selected Letters* 169). A consideration of these fragments, however, yields the underlying reasons behind both the failure and the success of the poem in total.

Three Pieces

After the “shantih, shantih, shantih,” that closes the poem proper, Eliot planned to insert three separate fragments to function as the conclusion. One fragment, “Song for Ophion,” had already been published the previous year, and its dates of composition predate those of the body of the poem as we know it. The other two fragments date from the months of 1921 in which Eliot was primarily concerned with completion of *The Waste Land*, and yet these pieces were assigned titles on their own: “Exequy” and “Dirge.” There remains some debate as to when, precisely, Eliot chose to incorporate these particular poems into the larger text, since he had cannibalized other old poems and fragments for insertion throughout *The Waste Land*, but his intention to use these pieces at the close is undoubted, due to Pound’s strong advice against such a move in a letter from the first months of 1922.

Lyndall Gordon has written that these three fragments constitute an attempt by Eliot to dramatize a scene of redemption; that Eliot’s initial vision of the poem was one of a spiritual progress, a “spiritual autobiography” (570). She writes: “*The Waste Land* began as the purely personal record of a man who saw himself as a potential candidate for a religious life but was constrained by his own nature and distracted by domestic claims.” Due to the presumably negative reaction the readership of the day would exhibit to such a pilgrim’s

progress, the final poem, in Gordon's view, sublimates Eliot's initial drive in an attempt to reach its readers "by indirection." Eliot's strategy of covert autobiography was successful, then, in abstracting its unique elements enough for its readers to identify with the disillusionment of the speaker, yet unsuccessful in that the larger intentions of the poem were obscured. Gordon places the blame for such obfuscation, predictably, at the feet of Pound. Gordon makes a convincing case, in fact, that Eliot's intentions for *The Waste Land* were thwarted by Pound's refusal to allow a more straightforward autobiography of the spiritual quest. The outlines of this quest, however, can be easily discerned in a consideration of the intricacies of the Notes. The guiding force for Eliot in the composition of the poem itself is the Quest, a meta-text upon which he hangs the particulars of his own biography (564).

This guiding force was neutered by Pound's insistence to eliminate the final three sections which would have provided a more rounded finale. Such a lost, "complete" poem could then be better understood as a progress towards sainthood in the model of Augustine; a progress which was realized more fully, Gordon believes, in Eliot's later works "Ash-Wednesday" and the *Four Quartets* (570). This may very well be the case, but if we are to grant Gordon's suggestion that *The Waste Land* would appear more complete with the final three sections included, we would also have to admit, as Gordon stops just short of suggesting herself, that the poem would be weaker.

What we see here is a debate between the legitimacy of the two drives of composition in relation to *The Waste Land* proper, but the danger in raising Eliot's narrative to the surface of the poem lies in the ability of that narrative to destroy the very thing that makes *The Waste Land* the truthful enunciation of tragic finitude: the destitution of the object. If the poem provided a clear narrative that concluded in a firm "solution," the drama of the disconnection between subject and objective reality which the poem enunciates would be drained of impact. "One test," Pound writes in the letter discouraging the inclusion of the three pieces, "is whether anything would be lacking if the last three were omitted" (*Selected Letters* 169).

"Song," contains typically dazzling Eliotic imagery ("the surface of the blackened river / is a face that sweats with tears") though it be imagery already included elsewhere in *The Waste Land* ("the river sweats") (*Facsimile and Transcript* 99). Present as well in

“Song” is the recurrent theme from the larger poem of “throbbing between two lives,” rendered here as “bleeding between two lives.” The scene, however, is striking insofar as it begins from the riverbank on which the speaker of *The Waste Land* is last seen fishing. Across the river from this vantage he now sees “the campfires shake the spears.”

What this provides (other than a Bard reference), is another place, as well as another people. The speaker offers here something beyond his power to subsume, thereby opening the poem in a manner consistently disallowed by Pound throughout. Other than this vision, “Song” closes without further advancement.

“Exequy” opens in the voice of a man torn, predictably, between two visions: one the local life of a suburban husband, the other a brooding Italian narcissus. While the theme matches that of some scenes from *The Waste Land*, the overall tone indulges in the worst of Eliot’s style. We are presented with a “grove” which contains marble statuary; “garlands” abound in “a bloodless shade among the shades . . . while the melodious fountain falls” (101).

Certainly the elements comprising this scene, indeed the very language itself, could be considered satirical; and yet it is this very kind of “bloodless” satire, the deflation of such an easy target as British symbolism (a target which had been effectively skewered and stylistically surpassed by Eliot himself as early as “Prufrock” ten years previous), that has no place in *The Waste Land*, which repeatedly implodes the empty satisfactions of ironic detachment.

The relatively simplistic fragment “Exequy,” which turns in the final stanza to confront its pathetic narrator with an Indic suicide and the sounds of laughter from an infernal Dante, takes the larger poem no place it has not already been. The notion that the indecision of a superficial bourgeois is critically undermined by the forgotten primal forces of ages past is not a new sentiment to *The Waste Land* by page 21. As a continuance of the section preceding it, “Exequy” presents nothing vital.

The final section—“Dirge”—would ostensibly conclude the entire poem and it begins with the echo of the song from *The Tempest* which Eliot reworked obsessively into the text of the long poem proper: “those are the pearls that were his eyes.” The change that is implied by Shakespeare’s line as utilized by Eliot (namely, the possibility of change offering the shadow of redemption) is worked out more fully here in “Dirge.”

It begins at “full fathom five” where Bleinstein lies, and it returns to a theme we see elsewhere in Eliot’s poetry, where “the rats are underneath the piles. / The jew is underneath the lot” (*CP* 24). But Bleinstein is down here at the bottom of the ocean to “suffer a sea change . . . rich and strange” (*Facsimile and Transcript* 119). At the sea floor Bleinstein is purged of his discriminating traits: his nose rots away (a Jewish nose?); his bones begin to protrude, not from his skin but more importantly from his “clothes.” The figure of the Jew Bleinstein is progressively reduced to his spiritual bone or perhaps his incorruptible essence. This figure is not caught between, but is “caressed” between two tides that roll the him “gently” as his lips “unfold” to reveal not “black yellow” teeth (this Eliot crosses out) but teeth of “gold.”

Could this be yet another swipe at supposed Jewish avarice? If so, it is a weak and inconsequential swipe. I believe what is of greater importance here, since Eliot eliminates the negativity of “black yellow” to leave the more enchanting “gold,” is the delicacy of the image: a body at the bottom of the ocean, stripped of flesh and clothes, of identity. The final image is a skeleton riddled with gold, held softly by the sea. It is an image of peace, one which Eliot sentimentalizes further in an early draft, adding “sea nymphs nightly tend his watch.” These nymphs become lobsters in a later draft and it is these creatures that finally close the poem, eerily grating out a triple call, “scratch scratch scratch,” mindless, insistent and insectile; a “shantih, shantih, shantih” purged of all sense (121).

Such a vision would finish *The Waste Land* on firmer feet, certainly less hysterical feet, than the closing of the poem proper. Gordon has written that this scene is a stab at the mystic, at a transcendence offered by the most concrete image of emptiness material reality allows: the sea floor (the very setting, perhaps not coincidentally, of Mallarmé’s *Coup de dés*). The fragment from which Eliot finally lifted “those are the pearls,” in which crabs and eels attend to the corpse of Bleinstein instead of lobsters, ends with a line furthering Gordon’s supposition: “still and quiet brother, are you still and quiet.”

Eliot would then leave his corpse drowned in the water so thirsted after on the barren plane, surrounded and tended to by creatures of the sea. Such an octopus’s garden will strike even the most casual readers of Eliot as familiar. It’s the ending to “Prufrock.”

Disaster Averted, and Otherwise

What Pound emphasizes with his disruption of Eliot's meta-narrative Quest is the unsuitability of that quest for London, 1922. Pound's editing reveals nothing if not the very modern truth that "meaning" can no longer be a viable mode of treating the poetic text. If the object (Tiresias, for example) can be stripped of its situationally-dependent meaning, it is then exposed as an operational functor. The "meaning" of Tiresias is inconsequential, but the "forcing of [his] consistency," as Badiou suggests, reveals "inconsistency to thought" (*Logics of Worlds* 35). For Badiou, this simply means that the destitution of the object reveals not the object itself so much as the forces which constitute it. Through the destitution of its objects, *The Waste Land* forces us to confront the ossified understanding of their meaning and thereby the inconsistency of our belief in the rectitude of such meaning. While this process is not, necessarily, radical to us in the present day, the preceding century of literature, criticism, and thought has been in no small way shaped by the publication of the poem itself. That the lesson *The Waste Land* teaches is one we already know is testament to its ability as truth to put to rest the regime of cultural objectivity into which it erupted.

This was, for Pound, a roaring success, the crowning achievement of modernism. For Eliot it was, at best, a mistake.¹² And so we see the differing aims of the Quest and the Vortex revealed clearly, one faithful to the truth of *The Waste Land*, a truth which would alter English poetry, and one a disastrous turn from it.

For Badiou, "disaster" represents the "obfuscation" of the truth. Obfuscation of the truth and fidelity to it share many traits: both believe in the transformative power of the truth; both are willing to commit to the repercussions of the founding of a new world; both are enemies of the status quo. But while fidelity to the truth gathers up elements of the old world in an affirmation the existence of the new, the obfuscation of the truth attacks any and all elements and is thereby willing to negate the existence of anything at all, obfuscating, in effect, the ability of the true to exist in the present. This is due to the commitment of obfuscation to a world which is no longer existent. Perversely "faithful" to the organization of a lost world, obfuscation finds in the present world no corresponding elements, in effect mistaking the particulars of the past (the old identities of objects) for the truth of all situations. There had once, perhaps, been truth in the

world the obfuscater evokes, but the element used to access it has ceased to function in the same manner. Such fidelity to an exhausted truth ignites the disasters of (to use two of Badiou's favorite examples) fascism and religion. Both these disasters judge the elements of the present world as insufficient to affecting change and therefore attempt to resurrect an unreachable past through adherence to a transcendental body: a City, a Race, a God.¹³ They are also, not coincidentally, the last refuges of *The Waste Land* authors.

But the difference between Pound's Vorticism and Eliot's Quest is significant: while the Vortex aims to replicate an atemporal structure, it makes no claims as to the truth it may or may not engender. Not so for the Quest, the ending of which is already written. The Vortex is a process, not an answer, while the meta-text of the Quest is possible thanks only to the past enactments of such a plan (Augustine, Bunyan, Malory). Eliot's desire to include the last three sections indicates an expectation to find and provide not only the meaning, the solution, of *The Waste Land* in the work of others, but in his own previous work as well. This is why such an ending as the three sections provide would amount to a poetic disaster: they are not earned.

If Gordon is correct in her belief that the Quest is a structure upon which Eliot hoped to hang his own understanding of himself, then the redemption denied Eliot here after his wandering in the waste land of a failing marriage, a hated job, and a nervous breakdown is realized poetically in "Ash-Wednesday." If we imagine Eliot's poetry in this way, not as independent pieces but as chapters of a larger work, each poem becomes an exploration and a test of a biographical moment, and a forcing of his emotional reality. The chapter of *The Waste Land* was not supposed to end ruined and chanting by the dry banks of a gray river, but exquisite and delicate, lulled into the comforting sleep of eternity at the floor of the ocean. The manifest action of the poem and this Quest must be understood as two very different things, kept separate thanks only to Pound's insistent disruption. He continually prevents the fusing of Eliot's own emotional experience to an exhausted story.

A repetition of that story absent its truth would amount to something a good deal worse than plagiarism; it would turn the poem away from the present and instead stuff it full with easy solutions from the past, a past which cannot ever again be realized due to the different identities of the given objects in the temporally separate

situations. If *The Waste Land* concluded with “Dirge,” we would have a poem in which the desire for transformation is forced on to the page, because Eliot already possesses an idea of what a way out of the waste land is supposed to look like: in his notebooks he is writing “I am the resurrection,” but is as yet unable to dramatize it poetically (*Facsimile and Transcript* 111). In search of a conclusion, Eliot turns, then, not deeper into the unknown, risking the poem itself (one wonders if it would only be the poem at risk) in a literal quest for a conclusion. He simply grafts on an event already experienced to stand in for the event that should be there.

Bereft of an abstract process with which to engage, Eliot follows the models of the confessions and the myths. This process, unlike the Vortex, already contains its own answer, in effect objectifying the text of the poem itself to the subject of the meta-textual Quest. The poem becomes, then, not a purified presentation but a very rigid and codified representation: the obstacles encountered are already enumerated, the processes of struggle and success are nominated, the ending already written.

The Waste Land as Eliot intended it could be understood as a single step along Eliot’s autobiographical arc of truth; as a forcing of Eliot’s own biography, a test as to whether the dismemberment of Bleinstein points the way out of his desperation. But Pound takes the poem away from Eliot’s biography and ends it instead at its most profound moment: that is, before the solution. Eliot wants to force the truth, but the truth he attempts to force is not the truth of *The Waste Land* as it exists up to the point of the three sections’ insertion. It could be charitably said (as Gordon has done) that Eliot has yet to write his redemptive poetry, but we could say instead that Eliot has yet to write the poetry that will constitute the next step backwards. *The Waste Land* stands at a crossroads, and the choice it provides is whether to continue forward with the suicidal despair in the face of meaninglessness evident in its final lines, or to renounce the very validity of this despair.

Pound willfully cuts the head off of Eliot’s presupposed narrative arc, eliminating the final three sections, denying the poem its “conclusion,” its retreat into meaning and its objective status in the face of the meta-narrative Quest. He saves the poem through his denial of an answer and it is this denial which makes *The Waste Land* the preeminent modern poetic statement, because it leaves bare on all levels the tragic chasm between the subjective voice and the objective

life, and that tragedy continues to provide its strength. The poem is then a truthful enunciation, insofar as we imagine the situation of modernism to be demarcated by the poetic act of *The Waste Land*. And as it speaks modernism, the poem itself is half-made, throbbing between two lives, or better between two authors; between the Place, the Quest, the object of Eliot and the Master, the Vortex, the subject of Pound, forever tragically unable to “only connect.”

This was not, necessarily, what Pound expected from the Vortex. Its aim was to “cause form to come into being” by creating a “self-interfering pattern” (Kenner 145; *Early Writings* 289). This “form” understood as such a pattern, would find its atemporality, its persistent truth, in its repetition of ancient sequences: as Li Chu then for Pound; as Homer then for Joyce; as Dante then for Eliot. The only way to fashion this atemporal form was to strip away the situational values the world has placed on the objects at hand. Those who sought to respond to *The Waste Land*, endeavoring to “enter the new world naked, uncertain of all save they enter,” could formulate no object to balance their “stark” subjective “dignity,” no stable world to prevent them from once more taking up the totalitarian mantle of Mallarmé’s lost Master, no code that could stop a repetition of *Somme* at Nagasaki (Williams 39).

Badiou’s work has recently undergone a remarkable about-face from a subject-oriented to an object-oriented ontology. If his first major work *Being and Event* is designed to strip situational objects of their identity in a search for relational value, his second major work *Logics of Worlds* begins from this point of relational value and descends once more into the messy particulars of situations, attempting to locate precise temporal moments when the pattern of truth rises to the surface to change the world, a minority rebelling (as it were), against the status quo. As for Spartacus, so then for Toussaint-Louverture: a series of objects in relational concordance, replicating an atemporal shape, funneling their particulars into the infinite domain of truth, causing its form to come into being. But “truth,” in this later work, lacks the completely transformative power Badiou accords it in his earlier books (*Logics of Worlds* 64). It erupts and fades as the subjective bodies which bear it inevitably encounter their own, temporal “finition” (81).

It should then come as no surprise that what rises up after such monumental disappointment is the reactive negativity of obfuscation; a turning away from the world, and not only the

particulars of such a world but its very capacity for change. In the wake of *The Waste Land*, its truth perhaps too difficult to pursue, we find this voice of obfuscation, frustrated and shrill, railing against “usura,” and it is this voice once more that announces, with the certitude of exhaustion, “I know I shall not know / the one veritable transitory power,” even as it dares to name Him.¹⁴

Endnotes

¹ For an excellent summary of the positions taken in the authorial debate on *The Waste Land* see Jack Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987, chapter 6. Other strong treatments of the collaboration not directly mentioned here include Donald Gallup, *T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound: Collaborators in Letters*. New Haven: Henry W. Wenning / C.A. Stonehill, 1970; Grover Smith, *The Waste Land*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983; A.D. Moody, *Thomas Stearns Eliot: Poet*. London: Cambridge UP, 1980.

² Koestembaum’s reading of Eliot’s work is particularly strong in this regard.

³ I am referring specifically to McLuhan’s treatment. For an example of the vague rhetoric Pound employs in his more polemic moments, see his essay on Vorticism in *Early Writings* where he suggests “Vorticism is art before it has spread itself into flaccidity.”

⁴ Being, for Badiou, is the infinite multiple from which all presentations and representations are culled. See *Being and Event*, 506.

⁵ Badiou’s definition of knowledge, “the articulation of the language of the situation over multiple-being,” means simply that “knowledge” is the ability to effectively engage with being through the parameters of the situation. Truth, however, “bores a hole in knowledge,” because it is “the being of the situation,” marking the situation as such and all meaning within it as belonging solely to that particular situation. See *Being and Event*, 513, 524.

⁶ Mellaissoux’s recent critique of Kant, in which the sensible is understood only as the product of the subject / object correlation, describes the modern subject as cognizant of, and constituted by, the world of objects in which he can never participate due to his relative use of language.

⁷ My reading of Mallarmé here is merely a condensation of Badiou’s oft-repeated and iconoclastic explication of *Coup de dés*, which can be found in *Being and Event* (191-198), but also throughout his *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. Badiou utilizes this poem to illustrate chiefly how the totalitarian “Master” gives way to the infinite setting of “Place,” couching the text in terms of the modern struggle between the terror of absolute authority and the unlimited possibility of the new, rendered impotent by the absence of such authority.

⁸ Pound’s annoyance at the presence of Tiresias in the manuscript is informative: “make up yr. mind,” he writes in the margin, “if you know know damn well or else you don’t.” See *Facsimile and Transcript*, 47.

⁹ Badenhausem bemoans the loss of this “dramatic” material as it may have provided more accessible points of entry for the reader, while at the same time admitting it

would have “loosened the overall focus” of the poem. See *T. S. Eliot and the Art of Collaboration*, 109.

¹⁰ It is the “attack,” which denotes the attitude of so much of Pound’s work on this poem; an active, if not outright aggressive approach to the prone text, one which connotes violence and one which helps establish his own sense of ownership, or at least his level of comfort, with the text as a whole.

¹¹ The poem, for Badiou, is “unthinkable thought” insofar as it cannot be logically (mathematically) registered. At the same time “the role of the poem is to engineer the sensory presentation of a regime of thought” and it encompasses both roles due to its ability to directly access truth. See *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 19-20.

¹² Eliot writes: “some of the more approving critics said that I had expressed the ‘disillusionment of a generation,’ which is nonsense. I may have expressed for them their own illusion of being disillusioned, but that did not form part of my intention.” See *Thoughts after Lambeth*, 10.

¹³ Here I use Badiou’s category of “obfuscation” from *Logics of Worlds*, combined with his notions of “disaster” from *Ethics*, and the purge of a situation in the grip of “evil” as described in his *Century*. He is intensely critical of religion in *Logics of Worlds*, while fascism, particularly in the guise of nationalist socialism, is more directly treated in *Ethics and Century*.

¹⁴ As does Pound in the 45th Canto, 229; as does Eliot in “Ash-Wednesday.”

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Death by Water: A Reevaluation of Bradleian Philosophy in *The Waste Land*

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In recent decades, few scholars have influenced our understanding of the philosophical foundations of *The Waste Land* as much as Jewel Spears Brooker, who has long advocated a reading of the work through the lens of Eliot's doctoral study of the philosophy of F. H. Bradley. We should read the poem, Brooker argues, as Eliot's diagnosis of humanity's fundamental epistemological dysfunction, a system of knowledge that remains mired in the illusion of separable subject and object, knower and known.¹ Brooker's reading relies upon her extrapolation of a three-stage model of knowledge from Bradley's writings and Eliot's dissertation, a model in which

knowing is a process occurring in stages that may be called immediate experience, relational experience, and transcendent experience. The first is the stage before experience falls into dualistic categories, the second is the dualistic stage, and the third is a stage in which intellectual categories are transcended in a return to the unity of the first stage. The first stage comes before analytical thinking and the last comes after such thinking has been overcome. The first two stages are common to everyone, but the third is one that must be achieved through mastery and discipline. (*Mastery and Escape* 17)

The Waste Land, Brooker argues, advocates a transcendence of a stage of illusory dualism (relational experience) into a stage that contains the full unity of experience (transcendent experience) as a solution to the ills of the world. In short, Brooker claims that Eliot posits, in his dissertation and in *The Waste Land*, a developmental model of experience, in which one, as she writes, "through mastery and discipline," can achieve the goal of transcendence of duality and paradox. The goal of this process, then, is an experiential

understanding of the fundamental unity of existence: union with the Absolute.

Brooker's careful study of Bradley's writing and its influence on Eliot, particularly her analysis of the Bradleian aspects of *The Waste Land*, has been crucial to our reevaluation of Bradley's importance to Eliot's poetry.² Her approach, however, relies on what I believe to be a misreading of a key passage from Eliot's dissertation, one that reverses Eliot's stated views in his dissertation on the nature of experience beyond everyday relations. Eliot's dissertation argues, according to Brooker, for the existence of three distinct stages of experience, each of which is, at least in theory, accessible to us in day-to-day life. However, in his dissertation, Eliot actually treats nonrelational experience (immediate experience and Brooker's transcendent experience) as *hypothetical* boundaries to relational experience, rather than wholly separate modes of experience from our daily lives, as I will show below. In what follows, basing her argument upon what are, in my reading, flawed assumptions about Eliot's philosophical beliefs, Brooker develops a reading of *The Waste Land* as offering transcendent experience as a hopeful escape from worldly dualism. I contend, however, that the poem offers no *promise* of release or salvation, but is rather despairing about the hope for an end to suffering within life. While the poem may at times hint at the hope for transcendence expressed in Eliot's later Christian work, such hope is found to be fleeting and transitory; death is, the poem suggests, the only sure hope for release.

Brooker lays out her view of Eliot's understanding of Bradley in "F. H. Bradley's Doctrine of Experience" from *Mastery and Escape*, in which, supporting the claim that "Eliot shared [with Bradley] this general view of relational experience as enclosed in an envelope of indiscriminated and felt nonrelational totality," she writes that this idea

is explicit in his dissertation. In the first chapter, he explains Bradley's immediate and absolute experience and then unambiguously states his concurrence. "If anyone object that mere experience at the beginning and complete experience at the end are hypothetical limits, I can say not a word in refutation for this would be just the reverse side of what opinions I hold" (*Knowledge and Experience*, 31). To Eliot, then, as to Bradley, immediate experience at the beginning [. . .] and transcendent experience at the end [. . .] are not mere hypothetical limits to the comprehended dualistic sphere I am calling relational experience. Together, they constitute the reality that

makes possible all abstraction or, in other words, that makes possible our construction of the relational world, the everyday world of straw. (200-201)

What Eliot's (admittedly tangled) subjunctives and multiple negatives actually state, however, is that to refute the objection that "mere experience . . . and complete experience . . . are hypothetical limits" would be "just the reverse side" of Eliot's opinions—that they are, in fact, hypothetical. This is further supported by Eliot's following sentence—omitted by Brooker—in which he adds, "And if anyone assert that immediate experience, at either the beginning or end of our journey, is annihilation and utter night, I cordially agree" (*Knolwedge and Experience* 31). Here, Eliot clearly equates nonrelational experience with nonexistence—whatever it might be to Eliot, it is clearly not a state of experience that is accessible within one's life.

Moreover, Eliot flatly states at several other points in the dissertation that immediate experience (as a separable stage from Brooker's "relational" experience) does not exist in actuality. Earlier, for example, he writes, "Whether there is a stage at which experience is merely immediate, Bradley says, we have agreed to leave doubtful. But here, I feel sure, he has understated his case, and we may assert positively that there is indeed no such stage" (16). This is not to say, however, that Eliot rejects the *idea* of immediate experience; he in fact affirms its conceptual necessity for Bradley's philosophy, the central tenets of which he defends strongly. He argues that "we are forced, in building up our theory of knowledge, to postulate something given upon which knowledge is founded" (17); for Bradley (and Eliot, in his dissertation), that foundation is immediate experience. But in its pure, theoretical form, immediate experience, according to Eliot, "is a timeless unity which is not as such present either *anywhere* or to *anyone*" (31; italics in original). The ideal of pure experience is actualized, Eliot argues, merely in approximations or degrees of immediacy, in which thought is always, necessarily, present to some extent.

This misreading of Eliot's assessment of Bradley's philosophy of experience consistently leads Brooker to hypostatize these states of mind, which Eliot views as strictly hypothetical bounds of human experience, as stages that exist in reality. She often cites Eliot's example of a person viewing a painting as an instance of immediate experience, as in this passage:

In his dissertation, Eliot gives as an example of immediate experience the viewing of a painting in which the viewer is so absorbed that he has no consciousness of self or subject, on the one side, and painting or object, on the other (*Knowledge and Experience* 20). This directly experienced nonrelational many-in-one is not the viewer's experience, for he as subject and the painting as object do not yet exist. When he becomes aware of "his" experience and of the painting as other than himself, then immediate experience will have dissolved into the realm of relations, of self and not-self. (*Mastery and Escape* 197-198)

Brooker's language here is of a transition from one distinct stage of knowledge into another; as she describes it, the man is first in the state of pure immediate experience, and then in the state of relational experience.

A more nuanced view of Eliot's dissertation must account, though, for the purely hypothetical nature of immediate (and transcendent) experience, as necessary fictions to understand individual human knowledge of an ideal unity. A closer examination of the passage she cites will illustrate this; Eliot actually uses this scene as an example not of purely immediate experience, but of the fundamental immediacy that underlies our normal, everyday experience:

The reasons for denying that feeling is consistently real are briefly as follows. *Mere* feeling [or purely immediate experience] is something which could find no place in a world of objects. It is, in a sense, an abstraction from any actual situation. We have, or seem to have at the start a 'confusion' of feeling, out of which subject and object emerge. We stand before a beautiful painting, and if we are sufficiently carried away, our feeling is a whole which is not, in a sense, *our* feeling, since the painting, which is an object independent of us, is quite as truly a constituent as our consciousness or our soul. [. . .] If this whole of feeling were complete and satisfactory it would not expand into object, and subject with feelings about the object [Brooker's "relational" experience]; there would, in fact, be no consciousness. But in order that it should be feeling at all, it must be conscious, but so far as it is conscious it ceases to be merely feeling. Feeling therefore is an aspect, and an inconsistent aspect, in knowing; **it is not a separate and isolable phase.** (*Knowledge and Experience* 21; italics in original, emphasis mine)

Eliot's focus in this passage is not on explicating a developmental model of human experience, but rather of understanding the limits of the only stage of experience that is open to humanity—the stage that Brooker terms "relational" experience. He even stresses the

inseparability of these two “stages” of experience in the passage; they are, he writes, far from stages along a prescriptive path toward transcendence, being inextricably intertwined.

We may, Eliot argues, occasionally encounter brief *approximations* of immediate experience, since he admits that it is necessary to understand “that at some moments our consciousness is nearer to ‘pure’ experience than at others” (*Knowledge and Experience* 18), but we can never fully leave the realm of relations. Terms such as immediate experience and pure experience, he writes,

turn out to be unreal abstractions; but we can defend them, and give them a kind of reality and validity (the only validity which they can possess or can need) by showing that they express the theory of knowledge which is implicit in all our practical activity. (18)

All experience, according to Eliot’s dissertational argument, is tinged with the relational; it cannot be completely transcended, at least not in the human lifetime.³

In *Reading The Waste Land: Modernism and the Limits of Interpretation*, Brooker and Bentley develop an impressively comprehensive, carefully argued analysis of the poem upon this understanding of Eliot’s philosophy. Their primary argument is that the poem sketches the possibility of a movement from relational experience into transcendent experience. The poem’s characters, Brooker and Bentley argue, are moving toward “a transcendent unity,” one that “contains rather than resolves paradoxes.” While these characters “have no way of imagining [this unity’s] possibility,” the poem’s reader, however, with a perspective outside of the poem, is the true audience for this “demand for transcendence of paradox” (111). In this way, as in Brooker’s reading of Eliot’s dissertation, *The Waste Land* is envisioned as a prescriptive model for the ideal development of human experience. Brooker and Bentley do briefly acknowledge in this book that Eliot’s dissertation “maintains that earlier and lower stages are not purely immediate, that indeed immediate experience and transcendent experience exist only as necessary abstractions” (43).⁴ However, like Brooker’s other discussions of Eliot and Bradley, *Reading The Waste Land* generally treats Eliot’s dissertation as offering a three-stage Bradleian developmental model for human existence, reifying Eliot’s “necessary abstractions” into distinct stages of experience.⁵

In support of this reading, Brooker and Bentley interpret the poem's opening lines as "introduc[ing] a world where humans are out of phase with the seasons and other cycles," describing "life out of rhythm with nature" (60-61). They then provide a Bradleian diagnosis:

In Bradley's terms, Marie is trapped in relational knowledge. The ideal unity of immediate experience, in which space, time, and self do not exist, has broken down into a jungle of contending dualisms in which the self exists only to perceive its instability. Transcendent experience would be possible for her if she could accept the simultaneity of her condition in the curvilinear time of nature and the rectilinear time of her isolated uniqueness. But that paradox defeats her precisely because she cannot avoid seeing it as a paradox, a failure of relations to melt into unity. (62)

To make their case, they contrast Marie's past relationship with the winter, a time "when she was in tune with the seasons" and "overcame her winter fears" (61) through sledding with her cousin, with her present, during which she "go[es] south in the winter" (*CP* 37) in an effort to avoid "winter fears" (Brooker and Bentley 61).

This is an intriguing interpretation and certainly correct in its contrast between Marie's desiccated present experience and her more vibrant memory, but its dichotomy between an Edenic past relationship with nature and an unnatural present relies on what I believe to be a false division between past and present experience in the poem's opening. In their attempt to idealize Marie's past experience in contrast with her present, Brooker and Bentley are forced to oppose "a general present where April is cruel" to "a recent past in which winter was perceived as providing warmth and summer as a surprising occurrence" (61). But to frame the time in which "Winter kept us warm" as the speaker's idyllic past, when "she was in tune with the seasons," undercuts what I read as the speaker's stated justification for April's being the cruellest month; it is cruel precisely because it, as part of seasonal cycles, disturbs the warm torpor of winter, perpetuating an empty existence. The past tense is used to describe winter not to distinguish between two states of mind but because, in April, the previous winter is already in the (recent) past; that, in fact, is what the speaker resents—the spring's forced end to winter's sleep. April, in "mixing / Memory and desire," removes the "forgetful snow" (*CP* 37) that had provided winter's warmth, a sort of hibernatory sleep somewhere between life and death. Perceiving the winter as a time of warmth is not, I argue, part of the speaker's past; it

is part of the speaker's present lament against the *cruelty* of spring as it begins life's empty cycles once again.

For this reason, I find Eloise Knapp Hay's claim that *The Waste Land's* focus "is not toward the Fisher King's desire for renewed life but toward hope for cessation of this cycle of rebirths" (54) to be quite compelling. As readers, Hay argues, we have been misled by Eliot's citation of Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* into searching for a Grail quest within the poem, when the poem seems more to "question, and even to propose a life without hope for, a quest, or Chapel, or Grail in the modern waste land" (48). Or, as Michael Coyle notes, "the effect of Eliot's note about Weston and [James] Frazer [author of *The Golden Bough*] has more often led to expectations of narrative structure than of informing tensions" (161). Following Hay's theory, I believe this is not a poem concerned with rejuvenating the cycles of nature by helping humanity find its place within them; its very opening lines show us that those cycles are functioning as they should, with spring rains "breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land," creating new life through seasonal cycles. And, as Coyle observes, the poem resists interpretive attempts to reduce it to a structured Grail quest narrative (161). The poem expresses, rather, a deep weariness toward such natural cycles, and is, as I will argue below, pessimistic at best toward any hope of cyclical renewal.

Thus, I contend that *The Waste Land* is not, as Brooker and Bentley argue, a model for how we should live in the world, with hope for a transcendent experience of reality; it is, rather, an expression of a desire to escape a world tiresomely defined by sex and desire. Eliot's early speakers tend to depict sexuality and desire as overwhelming threats to agency and selfhood, forces capable of destroying the individual.⁶ Read in this way, the opening lines of *The Waste Land* come from a speaker who, perhaps believing that she or he was done with struggles over desire and control, resents being pulled back into such concerns by these seasonal cycles.

This tension between desire and control is brought to the forefront in the subsequent hyacinth girl episode, in which the poem's speaker, like so many of Eliot's earlier poetic speakers, experiences an intense crisis of agency in an encounter with a woman. On a superficial level, this encounter depicts a lover incapable of social performance, one who "could not / Speak," whose "eyes failed," who "knew nothing." Of course, this failure is also an ontological crisis for the speaker, who tells us he "was neither / Living nor dead" (CP 38).

As in the earlier poetry, the speaker's social crisis is also clearly a crisis of identity and agency. Here, however, this crisis is deftly linked to the cyclical movement of the seasons of the poem's first stanza through the hyacinth. As Nancy Gish notes, hyacinths blossom in early spring, which places us "in the time and location of memory and desire" (51) of the poem's first lines. And, as both Gish (51) and Donald J. Childs (109) note, the occasion seems to be a *second* gift of hyacinths from the speaker, as his companion says that he "gave me hyacinths first a year ago" (*CP* 38). Thus, the gift of hyacinths suggests an annual springtime ritual of desire enacted by the speaker and his companion—desire that has prompted this intense crisis of agency.

This loss of power leads to a vision of "the heart of light, the silence" (38). Brooker and Bentley read this as "a moment of immediate experience in the Bradleian sense," "an opening onto [the] timeless and selfless ground upon which time and selfhood are built," and "a reversion to a primal state, the place where he started, here known for the first time" (76), a state they align with Marie's supposed childhood harmony with the seasons. Childs, similarly contrasting mundane experience with a higher reality, finds the moment to be an opening into transcendent mysticism, "hint[ing] at an awareness of a more general contradiction between things physical and things spiritual," "an intimation of the divine" that is opposed to "the hyacinth girl's invitation to a potentially physical intimacy" (110-111). However, given the revised understanding of Eliot's understanding of experience discussed above, I find that these interpretations misread the scene's depiction of self-dissolution. The speaker finds himself unmanned by the hyacinth girl,⁷ incapable of thought or action; the vision that follows this experience, I argue, is a vision of what our narrator perceives as the ultimate endpoint of physical desire.

Such desire, this scene suggests, leads to self-destruction, a sublimation of one's individual identity into the natural cycles of lust, desire, and reproduction that are lamented during the poem's opening stanza. This loss of identity is perhaps due to the personal and social expectations of desire; the speaker's gifts of hyacinths, aside from binding the couple in these natural cycles, suggest a host of obligations, expectations, and romantic entanglements.⁸ More deeply, though, the poem suggests that romantic experience subsumes the identity of the lover into itself; as the speaker's companion tells him,

after his previous gift of hyacinths, “‘They called me the hyacinth girl’” (CP 38). She is literally renamed after that encounter, redefined in a way that threatens to dissolve both of their identities.⁹

The lines from *Tristan und Isolde* that frame this brief scene provide further support for this interpretation. While both Childs and Brooker and Bentley discuss Wagner’s opera in relation to this encounter, they do not examine its crucial tension between light and day (associated in the opera with life and temporality) and darkness and night (associated with death and timelessness). Throughout Wagner’s opera, daytime and light are depicted not as mediums of knowledge, but as barriers against true sight and union.¹⁰ This contrast is particularly prominent in the second scene of the second act, in which Tristan asks, “Is there any distress, / is there any anguish / which [the day] does not revive / with its beams?” (98), while Isolde laments having been caught in “Day’s / false glitter” (104). “Spiteful Day,” Tristan says, with “[i]ts vain glory, / its flaunting display, / [is] mocked by those to whom Night / has granted sight” (110). The scene concludes with a celebration of night and unity, as the lovers sing together:

Tristan: Tristan you,
I Isolde,
no longer Tristan.
Isolde: You Isolde,
Tristan I,
no longer Isolde! (130)

However, since the speaker of the hyacinth girl scene sees a vision of light as the end of erotic desire, rather than a vision of darkness, the framing device of *Tristan und Isolde* suggests no such paradisaical endpoint for physical love within the context of *The Waste Land*. Thus, the vision is immediately followed with another quotation from *Tristan und Isolde*, “Oed’ und leer das Meer,” or “Desolate and void the sea” (148). Erotic love, this scene suggests, leads to disintegration of identity as it is subsumed into desire for the other, an empty waste, rather than transcendence of identity in any meaningful rapturous union with the beloved.

The poem’s second section, “A Game of Chess,” further develops this relationship between identity and desire as it depicts another encounter between a presumably male speaker and a woman. Here, the woman’s identity suffuses the room, through her powerful

presence and her luxurious possessions. She dominates the scene through almost every sense; visually, her “Chair . . . / Glowed on the marble” while “[t]he glitter of her jewels” refracts the light from “sevenbranched candelabra” (CP 39). The nose is assaulted by “her strange synthetic perfumes,” which “drowned the sense in odours,” while one might smell, see, and even taste “the prolonged candle-flames” as they “flung their smoke.” But the woman herself is the synesthetic climax of this richly described scene, as “her hair / Spread out in fiery points / Glowed into words, then would be savagely still” (40). Every element of the woman fills the room, leaving no space for any other, particularly her companion, presumably the scene’s narrator. Like the narrator of the hyacinth girl scene, and like narrators and speakers in many of Eliot’s earlier poems, this narrator’s identity disappears in the face of a woman’s powerful, overwhelming presence.

This disintegration of identity is heightened in their subsequent “conversation,” in which she begs him to stay with her, then attempts to probe his silence and explore his inner thoughts, finally asking him, “Do / You know nothing? Do you see nothing / Do you remember / Nothing?” and “Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?” (41). But the narrator’s unspoken responses are merely fragments of common culture—a piece of Ariel’s song from *The Tempest*, and a snatch of a contemporary rag—suggesting that, in fact, he *is* nothing more than a collection of these fragments, incapable of offering any response to her queries.¹¹ Again, a male speaker’s sense of identity and agency has been destroyed through contact with an overpowering female figure, a figure of both mundane horror and an almost supernaturally powerful terror. His only possible assertion of agency is to refuse to participate in the conversation; all that he can do is to do nothing.¹²

The poem’s further depictions of and allusions to desire and sexual experience are all almost certainly negative ones from our narrator(s)’ perspective(s), if not always from the perspectives of most contemporary readers of the poem: the women in the bar discussing abortion and adultery, Sweeney’s patronization of Mrs. Porter’s brothel,¹³ Mr. Eugenides’s presumably homosexual proposition to the narrator, the liaison of the typist and the clerk, and the Thames-daughters’s song (as well as the numerous sexual allusions scattered throughout, such as the story of the rape of Philomel, and Augustine’s pre-conversion promiscuity). We can safely assume, I believe, that

none of these scenes is meant to be read as a positive depiction of sexuality. But if we read the poem as yearning for a successful Grail quest (as Hay argues we should *not*), a quest to redeem the Waste Land, we should be able to find a hope for a productive sexuality, one that is attuned to seasonal regeneration (as Brooker and Bentley argue the poem offers).

However, I find Hay convincing on this point when she stresses the poem's use of Augustine and Buddha in its third section, "The Fire Sermon," in their role as ascetics, men "who both fled from the detritus of their ancient civilizations" (62). Eliot's own note strengthens this interpretation, as he writes, "The collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism, as the columniation of this part of the poem, is not an accident" (CP 53). According to Hay, Eliot's use of Augustine "is as interesting for what [he] does not use as for what he does" (62), focusing on Augustine and Buddha not as spiritual leaders, providing guidance to a higher form of existence, but as ascetics, those who renounce society entirely. The Buddha's Fire Sermon focuses on the inherent suffering of physical existence, and the need to obtain release from that suffering. Similarly, Eliot's allusion to Augustine, "O Lord Thou pluckest me out / O Lord Thou pluckest" (CP 46), expresses a wish for release, for removal from the world of desire. The poem does not offer a hope for a redemption of sexuality and physical existence; escape from the world, it suggests—*not* spiritual rejuvenation—is the only productive response to a debased sexuality.

Given the pervasive obsession with sexual desire in Eliot's earlier poetry, I find Freud's analysis of the child's game of "*fort*" ["gone"] in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to be illuminating here. Freud tells of a toddler whose mother was away for long periods of time. The child would throw a toy across the room and say "gone," which Freud relates "to the child's great cultural achievement—the instinctual renunciation (that is, the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction) which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting" (9). The child's game, Freud suggests, represents an attempt to turn a "*passive* situation" into one in which the child may take "*an active* part" (10; emphasis in original). The image of renunciation, I argue, plays a similar role in *The Waste Land*; if desire represents a threat to agency, then renunciation of that desire can serve as a reassertion, however limited, of that agency.

This desire for renunciation in the poem is then tied to images of self-dissolution and surrender (though not surrender to desire). In contrast with the earlier encounter with the hyacinth girl, however, in which loss of identity was tied to the oppressive seasonal cycles of existence and desire, the loss of identity into death is now presented in an ambiguous or even positive light. The ascetic concerns of the end of “The Fire Sermon” that focus on the desire to escape a world that is “[b]urning burning burning burning” (*CP* 46) thus lead directly into the poem’s fourth section, the brief “Death by Water,” in which a merchant, Phlebas, is freed from unpleasant existence through the unlikely avenue of his drowning. The section opens with strong, rhythmic use of the ‘f’ sound, almost comforting in its soft alliteration as it introduces us to “Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead” (46). We have been warned (in “The Burial of the Dead”) to “[f]ear death by water” (39), but the warning comes from the comic figure of Madame Sosostriis, whose perspective is highly dubious at best. Her judgment on “death by water” needs not be taken seriously, and might even be read as an endorsement of the concept. While on its own, this section might appear ambiguous towards Phlebas’s condition, his fate seems vastly preferable when contrasted with the agony and sordidness of the characters in the previous section. In his death, Phlebas “[f]orgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell / And the profit and loss” (46), all markers of his former identity as a maritime merchant. Note, too, that two of these markers are cyclical—the natural, rhythmic cycle of the “deep sea swell,” and the economic cycle of “the profit and loss”—and thus reminiscent of the cycles lamented in the poem’s opening lines. In a way, then, Phlebas has found a sort of peace through his renunciation of identity, letting it dissolve into nothingness as he is transformed via the “sea-change.”¹⁴ He is then offered as an object of reflection to the reader: “Gentile or Jew / O you who turn the wheel and look to windward, / Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you” (46-47). By hailing the reader as one “who turn[s] the wheel,” the narrator connects the reader to Phlebas’s former life as a sailor, but also subtly connects the reader’s life, through the symbol of the wheel, to the cyclical processes the poem has been critiquing and which Phlebas has now escaped. The only response to the unending cycle of desire and suffering, “Death by Water” suggests, is renunciation—not just of society, but of the self and the agency and identity that accompany it. Death is not only an embodiment of the only possible release from the

suffering of life and its cycles, through renunciation of existence itself; furthermore, it is a symbol for the only possible relief within life, the renunciation of sex and desire.

In contrast with the relatively peaceful scene of “Death by Water,” the poem’s fifth section, “What the Thunder Said,” presents an extended, stark vision of the world Phlebas has escaped, a world of “agony,” “shouting,” and “crying,” in which there “is no water but only rock,” leading to a remarkable poetic depiction of delirium as the dehydrated narrator fantasizes about his need for water (47).¹⁵ This section peaks with the speech of the thunder in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, the single syllable “DA” that was interpreted in three different ways by gods, men, and demons: *Datta*, which Eliot glosses in his endnote as “give”; *Dayadhvam*, or “sympathise”; and *Damyata*, “control” (49; endnote on 54).¹⁶ While these three interpretations led to three dramatically different moral lessons in the original story, here, each leads to a reflection on the possibility, or lack of possibility, for individual human connection.

In the *Datta* section, the narrator answers the query “[W]hat have we given?” with an address to a “friend,” discussing “[t]he awful daring of a moment’s surrender / Which an age of prudence can never retract.”

By this, and this only, we have existed
Which is not to be found in our obituaries
Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor
In our empty rooms (49)

The shared experience of mutual surrender briefly described here is somewhat reminiscent of the prior encounter with the hyacinth girl, but is depicted in very different terms. Whereas the hyacinth girl threatened the narrator’s very being, the surrender described here defines the narrator’s being: “By this, and this only, we have existed.” And while the scene with the hyacinth girl was tied closely to the rhythms and cycles of natural life, this experience is depicted as one that offers at least a brief escape from those concerns, as it is an experience “not to be found in our obituaries / Or in memories . . . Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor” (49). It is, in other words, an experience that cannot be fully contained through society’s

understanding of a life and death—obituaries, memories, wills, and the like.

But lest this sound too hopeful, the word *Dayadhvam* leads to a memory in which the narrator “heard the key / Turn in the door once and turn once only,” as he is locked within a prison. In the context of the previous passage’s image of brief connection in “a moment’s surrender,” the key’s turning seems to represent locking the narrator within the prison of selfhood and identity, as narrowly defined by the desire for action and agency. The subsequent lines may then be read as an extension of this metaphor: “We think of the key, each in his prison / Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison.” If one feels powerless as an individual, imprisoned in one’s self, one might imagine greater connection with others as the key to release from that situation. But in imagining such a key, the prison of selfhood, isolated by desire from such connection with other such “prisoners,” is “confirmed”; its existence is verified, perhaps even strengthened, by the desire for an escape from it. Paradoxically, then, this passage suggests that the prison can only be escaped by a renunciation of the desire to escape from it.

This section is crucial to Brooker and Bentley’s argument that *The Waste Land* suggests a prescriptive model for the development of human experience out of relational experience and into transcendent experience. They focus on Eliot’s endnote to this passage, which quotes both the story of Ugolino locked within a prison from Dante’s *Inferno* and a passage from *Appearance and Reality* in which Bradley discusses the “peculiar and private” world of each individual soul. In this passage, Bradley writes,

‘My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts or my feelings. In either case my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside; and, with all its elements alike, every sphere is opaque to the others which surround it. . . . In brief, regarded as an existence which appears in a soul, the whole world for each is peculiar and private to that soul.’ (qtd. in *CP* 54; ellipsis in Eliot’s quotation)

Brooker and Bentley take issue with critics who understand Eliot’s use of this quotation as “parallel” to the Dante quotation, as relating to the “solipsism” of the *Dayadhvam* passage’s other allusions and images. Rather, they argue that Eliot is suggesting that this quotation “is presented not as an equivalent to the situation of being locked in a tower but as a key that can be used to get out of the tower” (193).

However, this too is dependent upon Brooker and Bentley's overly reified model of Eliot's understanding of Bradley at the heart of *Reading The Waste Land*. To support this claim, Brooker and Bentley point to Brooker's prior examination of Bradley's idealism (*Mastery and Escape* 191-206), in which she carefully distinguishes Bradley's quotation from solipsism by differentiating Bradleian idealism from that of George Berkeley and G. W. F. Hegel. She helpfully notes that Bradley is not, in this quotation, arguing for the impenetrable nature of individual minds, since, as she demonstrates, Bradley did not hold that minds can have individual existence; moreover, in this passage, she reminds us that he is discussing "finite centres," his term for "the whole complex uniting the viewer, [the viewed], and all other elements of that situation" (198). She then examines Eliot's discussion of this passage in his dissertation as he considers Bradley's view that there is no self separable from the "finite centre" of its experience of the universe. The purpose of this is to show that Eliot meant to contrast Bradleian idealism with the fatalistic solipsism of the image of the prison, with its reference to the *Inferno*'s imprisoned Ugolino, as Eliot "juxtaposes two notions of self that seem contradictory, when he appends to poetic lines that present the self as the only knowable reality a doctrinal statement that cancels the reality of the self" (202).

As I understand Eliot's use of this passage, however, what is important is not whether it is individual "selves" that are isolated from one another, or whether it is "finite centres" that are isolated. His usage of the Bradley quotation, particularly within the context of the rest of the *Dayadhvam* passage, places stress not on any critique of the idea of the self that is within it, but on the profound chasm between individual "souls." The divide between souls would be equally stark whether they are understood as selves or finite centres. Moreover, despite Brooker's (careful and highly useful) analysis of Bradley's departures from the idealism of Berkeley and Hegel, Eliot himself writes of this exact passage, "Perhaps [this passage from *Appearance and Reality*] is only a statement of a usual idealistic position, but never has it been put in a form so extreme" (*Knowledge and Experience* 203). Clearly, whether correctly or not, Eliot saw this passage not as refuting a key doctrine of prior idealists, but as fitting squarely within the idealist tradition. Thus, even immediate experience (or transcendent experience, its successor in Brooker's model) seems to offer no true escape from the prison of individuality.

Brief, isolated moments of connection (such as “[t]he awful daring of a moment’s surrender”) seem to be the best one can hope for, but even the desire for such moments will only strengthen one’s isolation.

The poem’s conclusion, I argue, concerns precisely this difficulty of connection. If *The Waste Land* offers transcendent experience as one’s hope for escape from illusory dualism, then why is its final stanza focused so intensely upon fragmentation and despair? It presents, rather, the inability of human beings to achieve a fully transcendent experience of reality. Instead of perceiving fundamental unity, the narrator is witnessing further dissolution, as “London Bridge is falling down” and the Prince of Aquitaine is in a ruined tower, while the stanza itself is a discordant mixture of four different languages (as well as the archaic early modern English). Instead of fitting disparate pieces together into a whole, the narrator has merely “shored [fragments] against my ruins” (CP 50). And while one could understand the narrator’s act of “Fishing, with the arid plain behind me” (50) as a hopeful action, with symbolic Christian significance, it is, to me, more plausible to read it, as Coyle does, as a futile act of waiting, as the speaker subsequently asks, “Shall I at least set my lands in order?” amidst a crumbling society (50). The phrase “at least” suggests that this is, perhaps, all that can be done, an act of “preparing a last will and testament, making ready for death—waiting” (Coyle 163). Moreover, although there was “a damp gust / Bringing rain” earlier in this section, perhaps fulfilling the parched narrator’s desire for water, we are told in the very next line that “the limp leaves / Waited for rain” (49); the “damp gust” will not be sufficient, it seems, to provide true restorative sustenance. This rain will only continue the cycles lamented in the poem’s opening, “breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain” (37). Rather than bringing the release of death by water, this rain, fulfilling desire, will only perpetuate desire’s prison. We can thus read the poem itself as enacting the cycles of its opening lines, as its conclusion brings us back to its beginning, restarting the very cycles that its narrator wishes to escape.

Eliot’s post-conversion poetry, in contrast, is often explicit in its expression of belief in the possibility of transcendence of duality. Even then, however, full transcendence remains possible only in death. In *Four Quartets*, Eliot writes that “to apprehend / The point of intersection of the timeless / With time, is an occupation for the saint,”

not for the living.¹⁷ Such states of being are simply not comprehensible within life outside of brief moments of grace through “Incarnation,” “[t]he hint half guessed, the gift half understood” (136). But while Eliot’s later work might hold out hope for some form of transcendent experience, within the world of *The Waste Land*, we find only violence, fear, and despair. Despite the poem’s closing benediction of “Shantih shantih shantih” (50), it leaves its reader amidst ruins and fragments, trapped in a self-perpetuating natural cycle from which oblivion, not transcendence, seems to be the only hope of escape.¹⁸

Endnotes

¹ This summary is based on Brooker’s readings of Eliot’s dissertation and Bradley’s work in various chapters of *Mastery and Escape: T. S. Eliot and the Dialectic of Modernism*, including the book’s introductory essay, “Mastery and Escape: T. S. Eliot and the Dialectic of Modernism” (1-20); “T. S. Eliot and the Revolt Against Dualism” (172-190); and “F. H. Bradley’s Doctrine of Experience in T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*” (191-206).

² For this reason, my own engagement with Brooker’s work on Eliot should be understood in the sense in which she and Joseph Bentley discuss Cleanth Brooks’s work on *The Waste Land*: that which might be “perceived as a repudiation of [Brooks’s ideas], in fact, can best be understood as part of a dialogue that would have been impossible without them” (Brooker and Bentley 3-4). Brooker’s work has helped numerous scholars, myself included, better understand and appreciate the crucial role Bradley’s philosophy plays throughout Eliot’s career.

³ Brooker offers a partial disclaimer near the end of her discussion of *The Waste Land* in “F. H. Bradley’s Doctrine of Experience,” writing, “Bradley’s transcendent experience is highly problematic. Even in Bradley, it is only a possibility. In Eliot, tinged with despair, it is barely a possibility. One objection that appears in Eliot’s technical discussions of Bradleyan idealism, one note of dismay in Eliot’s literary and social criticism, is that Bradley greatly underestimated the difficulty of achieving transcendent experience. Perhaps immediate experience, like April, is cruel, promising what it cannot deliver; perhaps transcendent experience is, after all, no more than an ethereal rumor” (*Mastery and Escape* 205). This is the only point in this essay at which Brooker expresses such a disclaimer. But aside from the relative lack of emphasis on this crucial point, even to say that transcendent experience for Eliot “is *barely* a possibility” is to misstate a position that is articulated in his dissertation, which leaves no doubt that transcendent experience is a necessary abstraction with no actual existence. Transcendence is posited as a model, a hypothetical limit that can be approached, but never actualized (in the same way that immediate experience, according to Eliot, does not exist in full). She similarly acknowledges this point in “Yes and No: Eliot and Western Philosophy,” noting that Eliot “admits that [immediate and transcendent experience] can only be known

hypothetically" (61), although she only tangentially discusses *The Waste Land* in this article.

⁴ This acknowledgement is, however, absent from most of Brooker's other discussions of Eliot's dissertation, as discussed above.

⁵ E.g. their use of the fifth section of "The Dry Salvages" three pages after this acknowledgement, when they write that, according to Eliot, "a few extraordinary beings will achieve (or receive as a gift) a perspective from the intersection of time and timelessness, a perspective similar to that associated with Bradley's transcendent experience" (46). While this may (or may not) be a valid claim about *Four Quartets*, I believe that such an approach is less useful with regard to *The Waste Land*.

⁶ E.g., see many poems both published—"Portrait of a Lady," "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," and "La Figlia che Piange"—and long unpublished—"Circe's Palace" from *Poems Written in Early Youth*, and "Convictions (Curtain Raiser)" and "Entretien dans un parc" from *Inventions of the March Hare*. Anthony Cuda has very recently examined Eliot's persistent concern with agency in "Passion and Surrender," an excellent chapter in *The Passions of Modernism*, tracing Eliot's developing use of the trope of the etherized or unconscious patient through his career.

⁷ My choice here of a gendered verb is intentional; in a sense, my reading of this scene is parallel in many respects to Cyrena Pondrom's in "The Performativity of Gender in *The Waste Land*," though the focus of my reading of this scene is different. Pondrom argues that this scene depicts "the erosion of confidence in an essential self" (430), drawing on Judith Butler's observation in *Gender Trouble* that "the fear of losing one's place in gender . . . constitutes a certain crisis in ontology experienced at the level of both sexuality and language" (xi, quoted in Pondrom 430; ellipsis in quotation). Like Pondrom, I find the essential significance of the hyacinth girl encounter to lie in its deconstruction of masculine identity.

⁸ In *Empire of Conspiracy*, Timothy Melley argues that many post-World War II texts "understand social communications as a feminizing force" (14) that threatens a masculine sense of identity through a process he calls "agency panic," in which individuals express "extraordinary desires to keep free of social controls by seeing the self as only its *truest* self when standing in stark opposition to a hostile social order" (25). I find this to be a highly useful concept in examining Eliot's early poetry, and it seems quite applicable here as well.

⁹ It is worth noting how this scene, in many respects, is reminiscent of moments of illumination and / or transcendence in *Four Quartets*, moments in which the narrator contemplates or describes the relinquishing of desire in order to obtain grace. But while this scene might point forward to such purely mystical moments, I find it to be much more ambiguous in presentation than those later, explicitly religious moments, for reasons I examine below.

¹⁰ In his discussion of *The Waste Land* in *The Cambridge Introduction to T. S. Eliot*, John Xiros Cooper, too, treats the image of "light" here in its more familiar sense: "In Western metaphysics 'light' is traditionally the metaphor for the enlightened mind, the subject in full possession of knowledge" (72). While we cannot, of course, ignore this primary symbolic valence of "light," its critical symbolic function in *Tristan und Isolde*, one contradictory to its more typical use, should not be ignored in our reading of this crucial scene.

¹¹ The quotation from Ariel's song in *The Tempest* (used, of course, in several key places in the poem) points, I believe, to the narrator's only hope for escape from his

entanglements—the oblivion of death, which I will discuss below in an examination of “Death by Water.”

¹² Cyrena Pondrom has suggested to me that we can read this encounter as two people capable of destroying one another, but in different ways—the woman through her aggressive questioning and sexual manipulation, and the man through his passive-aggressiveness. From an exterior perspective, I would agree; each party in the conversation seems to be extremely cruel to the other. But the narrative structure of this section leads us to focus on the woman as an overwhelming figure of terror, as this exchange is immediately preceded by a description of how she regally fills the room with her presence. Moreover, our perspective in the conversation is from within the consciousness of the man; we are privy to his thoughts and interior life, but not the woman’s, aligning our perspective with the man’s. While the male narrator may seem equally cruel to us, this section seems designed to focus our perspective, if not our sympathies, with his, rather than with the perspective of his companion.

¹³ This is also tied to the seasonal cycles, as “[t]he sound of horns and motors . . . shall bring / Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring” (CP 43). Note, too, that Sweeney is depicted passively, as object rather than subject of the sentence. He will be *brought* to Mrs. Porter, as opposed to actively deciding to go; like other males in this poem, his agency seems to be threatened as well.

¹⁴ This positive reading of Phlebas’s transformation in death is further supported by Eliot’s use of a fragment of Ariel’s song from *The Tempest*, “Those are pearls that were his eyes,” twice during *The Waste Land*. Its first appearance is directly connected to Phlebas during Madame Sosostris’s reading in “The Burial of the Dead,” as it is quoted in response to “your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor” (CP 38), just before Sosostris’s warning to “[f]ear death by water.” Since Sosostris is such a figure of ridicule, and since she is so distrustful of death by water, I find it likely that it represents the narrator’s response to the figure of the drowned sailor—a sense of wonder at the change in such death, whether figurative or literal, and perhaps even desire for such change. This line of interpretation is further strengthened by the next appearance of the fragment, in “A Game of Chess,” when the section’s narrator offers it as an unspoken response to his companion’s query, ““Do / You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember / Nothing?”” (41), as discussed above.

¹⁵ This suggests, perhaps, either that the hope offered by “death by water” has vanished, or (more likely, in my mind) that desire for the release of death by water will prevent any such release. The second interpretation meshes well with my reading of the “*Dayadhvam*” passage below, in which the desire for escape from the prison of selfhood makes that escape impossible.

¹⁶ Brooker and Bentley’s discussion of the implications of the interpretation within the poem of the thunder’s “speech,” while beyond the scope of my argument here, is fascinatingly argued, and while I disagree with the Bradleian aspects of their interpretation of this scene, I have found their explication of this section’s Upanishadic sources invaluable.

¹⁷ In the Catholic tradition, of course, saints can only be canonized well after their deaths. Eliot further differentiates the dead from the living early in “Little Gidding,” when he claims that “the communication / Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living” (139).

¹⁸ I am very grateful to Professor Cyrena Pondrom for her ideas and advice during the writing of this essay and during my graduate studies to this point. Her thinking about

Eliot has become an essential part of my own, even—or especially—when we differ in our interpretations, and her guidance has been invaluable.

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The Use of Poetry and the Use of Religion

For Iancu

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That *The Waste Land* has remained one of the most abstruse and mysterious modernist texts is partly due to its complicated use of religion. However, the situation is not simplified by Eliot's evolution as a poet and his public allegiances after *The Waste Land*. Eliot was a trendsetting critic who made clear pronouncements on controversial literary, religious, and social issues that are as trenchant as his poetry is elusive. One such pronouncement refers to the fact that a poet's authority on poetic matters is best expressed in reference to the kind of poetry he himself writes. In this context, the relationship between literature and religion is one of the most amply discussed topics of Eliot's essays. Eliot argues that "[w]hen religion is in a flourishing state, when the whole mind of society is moderately healthy and in order, there is an easy and natural association between religion and art."¹ Obviously, according to Eliot's ideal, in none of the artistic stages of his creation was the whole mind of society healthy. That is why his poetry, at all times, whether in the sharp cries of *The Waste Land* or in the stubbornly muted tones of the *Four Quartets*, advocates religious stances with so much discordance.

Around the time of the publication of *The Waste Land*, Eliot wrote a laudatory essay dedicated to the issuance of Joyce's *Ulysses*: "*Ulysses, Order and Myth*." The essay asserts for the first time the new tendency of modern literature, its new structuring principle: literature can no longer be written on a narrative model; instead it should incorporate a mythical element, the only one capable of conferring coherence and meaning to the world in the twentieth century. Eliot identifies and describes the way in which Joyce's novel functions, uniting the mythical past with the historical present:

manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity . . . is a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. . . . Psychology . . . ethnology, and *The Golden Bough* have concurred to make possible what was impossible even a few years ago. Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art.²

Eliot's definition of the mythical method has become a central position regarding modernism. It is based on what became the generalized belief of high modernism that a rationalist explanation of the universe and life is inadequate and unsatisfactory, that the kind of knowledge to be obtained through such explanations has to be replaced by a different kind of knowledge, a paralogical one, that should account for human *données* that cannot be quantified. While most modernist writers resort to myth in order to find meaning in the contemporary world and to achieve a sense of connectedness, *The Waste Land* moves one step ahead as a result of Eliot's poetic and personal involvement in Christian religion.

The indisputable connection between literature and religion is established on several grounds, of which I shall refer to two. On the one hand, the common origin of religion and literature is assumed by certain poetics to be axiomatic. On the other hand, there is the use of literature, more specifically poetry, in religious practice. The wide range of meaning of the term "religion" itself determines the variety of ways in which the connection between religion and literature can be interpreted. When poetry is thematically and / or psychologically motivated by the vast field covered by religion, it can be defined as "religious poetry," a syntagm that is subject to controversy. It would be helpful to start by pointing out Eliot's own position on this matter, as he explained it in "Religion and Literature" (1935).³

In this essay, Eliot finds three senses to the term religious literature.⁴ First, we find literature that is called religious because of the field of its interest, just as we can speak of historical literature or biological literature. This kind of religious literature would include The Authorized Translation of the Bible, just as scientific literature would include Bradley's *Logic*, Buffon's *Natural History*, Gibbon, etc. All these works are still enjoyed because, incidental to their purpose, whether religious, historic, philosophical, or scientific, their authors also demonstrate a gift for language, so that their works are "delightful to all who can enjoy language well written" (344). It is

significant for Eliot's position that he accepts the discussion of the Bible only in such terms, and categorically refuses its interpretation on the grounds of its literary merit.⁵

The second type includes literature whose restricted field is the praise of God, "devotional" literature, such a restriction accounting for its being often considered a variety of minor poetry. The religious poets do not treat the whole range of human interest in a religious spirit, but only as a part of this subject matter—they are the hymn-writers, leaving out what individuals generally consider their major passions, implicitly confessing their ignorance of them. Such is the case with the poetry of Southwell, Crashaw, Herbert, or Hopkins according to Eliot. A distinction could be added here that while being aware of the whole range of human passions, certain poets deliberately restrict their interest to the religious, while others never possess such a wide range. This would also account for the possible confusion between the major poetry of the former and the minor poetry of the latter.

Finally, there is, according to Eliot, the literature written for the purpose of advancing a certain doctrine, belonging to the field of propaganda. But, in addition, there are other poets of great religious poetry, poetry of "great awareness" (346), such as Dante, Racine, Corneille, who write great religious poetry even when they do not speak about specifically religious matters. About this last group of illustrious poets, who obviously capture Eliot's imagination, he makes another significant remark in another essay:⁶ it is not important for the reader to adhere to their doctrine in order to appreciate such poetry as literature, and neither is it essential for the poet himself to share the philosophical / religious doctrine from whose vantage point he writes,⁷ although there are obvious advantages if he does.

A less formalized classification of the relationship between poet and religion is offered by Vincent Buckley in *Poetry and the Sacred*. Buckley defines such poetry as being written by an author who has a sense of human life as being bonded with forces in the universe which have a correlation in his own psychic life, but which cannot be accounted for in terms of his own psychic life. These forces govern him in terms of power of presence; they require adoration, worship, and celebration. They might or might not be accompanied by further concepts of communal fall, personal sin, salvation, eternal life; they might or might not be accompanied by feelings of devotion, by attitudes of submission and responsibility. Their sustaining conception

is theology. They are defined as religious forces if they are seen as having a present relevance to questions of personal identity, meaningful action, and inner structure of feeling. Buckley distinguishes between two lines of religious poetry depending on the concern of the poets. There are poets like Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Whitman, Yeats, Lawrence, and Dylan Thomas whose motive is to redefine God's action in the world in such a way as to create a new sense of God and man's relation with him, humanity seeking to create a tradition and record the action of God. Such poets experience feelings of amazement, inadequacy, a need to speak and even to expound on their beliefs or religious perceptions. On the other hand, there are poets like Smart, Hopkins, or Eliot whose motivational power is to recreate God's action in the world in such a way as to reinforce a sense of its presence and urgency. Such poets seek to redefine a tradition and present an awareness of God. Their feelings involve worshipfulness, sinfulness, and a need to address and to be heard.

A comparison between the two points of view places Eliot in a much more restricted field of literature than the one he had imagined for himself. I should add though that Buckley's classification obviously takes into account the whole of Eliot's literary output, including such pointedly religious poetry as "Journey of the Magi," "A Song for Simeon," "Ash-Wednesday," or the pageant *The Rock*. The implication that both classifications share is that Eliot's poetry, unique as it is, whichever way we look at it, belongs to a very rich tradition in English literature.

Eliot's poetry underwent a very clear evolution from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" to the *Four Quartets*, but in the succession of his creative work his interest in religion is evident and develops on an ascending scale. The exceptional place of *The Waste Land* in the Eliot canon and in the poetic canon of modernism is at least partially contingent on the fact that it is a poem written during a period of crisis. It is a crisis of a personal, psychological, poetic, cultural, historic, and spiritual nature, a crisis to which the poet responds by gathering a correspondingly multifarious collection of memorized props capable of offering the desired re-establishment of coherence and meaning. In the words of the poem's concluding / conclusive metatext: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" (*CP* 50).

Religion,⁸ as it has been well documented by Eliot's biographers,⁹ his critics, and by his own prose writings, is the adequate solution that the poet discovers after being trained in philosophy and after becoming the leading poetic voice of his time. The 'waste land' that he discovered around himself and in himself had to be replaced by a condition leading to something different from mere biological extinction. Religion needed to be reached by a process of intellectual choice, overcoming scepticism and doubt, and not through mystical experience.¹⁰ In his essay of 1931 on "The *Pensées* of Pascal," Eliot offers the best synopsis of his own spiritual evolution:

The Christian thinker . . . proceeds by rejections and elimination. He finds the world to be so and so; he finds its character inexplicable by any non-religious theory: among religions he finds Christianity, and Catholic Christianity, to account most satisfactorily for the world and especially for the moral world within; and thus by . . . "powerful and concurrent" reasons, he finds himself inexorably committed to the dogma of the Incarnation.¹¹

Eliot's public triple allegiance in the famous "Preface" to *For Lancelot Andrews* of 1928 ("I am a Classicist in literature, a Royalist in politics, and an Anglo-Catholic in religion") only enhanced, retrospectively, the public perception of *The Waste Land* as a text of transition preparing the way for the assumption of the previously mentioned allegiance in which literature, politics, and religion are intertwined.

In 1922, though, religion does not appear to Eliot as the final answer, but as one option among many. By the same token, notice should be made of the fact that any type of text, including a religious one when included within a literary text, undergoes a metamorphosis—suffers a sea-change—and becomes a constitutive part of the whole which is the artistic work.

The five-section text of *The Waste Land* unfolds a pervasive and multifaceted use of Christian and Indic¹² religions: Biblical language and imagery, section titles from Christian ritual, literary references to Christian religion, both in translation and in the original Italian language, Christian urban toponymy and onomastics, fragments of sermons and holy texts, use of Sanskrit, as well as the additional explanations on religion and religious references provided by the "Notes on *The Waste Land*." The multiple layers of sources and

meaning¹³ of the text have been profusely documented¹⁴ at all levels, including the religious.

Eliot explained his rejection of the Unitarianism that he was brought up in as mistrust of what he called “the Boston doubt.” Unitarianism is based on earthly accomplishments, on a sense of duty to the community, and on skepticism.¹⁴ Eliot’s mistrust is based in his conviction that liberal Protestant theology could provide neither a scheme for organizing life, nor a framework for writing poetry. It is this double conviction that led Eliot away from the institutional church between 1917 and 1922, and produced a return towards aestheticism. All in all, Eliot’s “Christian assent” is made up of a pattern of rejection and acceptance, with an aggressive exchange taking place between his faith and his art. The great dilemma of coping with the two systems is that they are based on different assumptions. Religion rejects the reliability of the senses, stating their deceptiveness and advocating “contemptus mundi.” Poetry thrives on the exploration of the senses, in an infinite “amor mundi.” What the two systems have in common, though, is a respect for creation and a founding on language.

In what follows I shall try to highlight aspects of the use of religion in *The Waste Land* as the poem of a period of crisis, aspects that have received less attention than they deserve. For this purpose, I shall proceed to an analysis of this blending of the two systems, poetic and religious, in what I consider to be the most outstanding instances in *The Waste Land*—the instances in which this blending results in paradoxical or ironic new meanings. In the process, I shall be using the ideas of the religious experience by the philosopher of religion William P. Alston and several conceptions about the use of symbols in literature, as delineated by Murray Krieger, Tzvetan Todorov, and Luc Benoist.

The mutual assumption and rejection of the senses is apparent in the emblematic opening of the poem. “April is the cruellest month” is not only shockingly paradoxical, but it holds the attention of the reader by the apodictic quality of the statement. It gives spring, through the month of April, a totally different quality from that of the other seasons invoked. Winter is also paradoxical, but it is particularized by the use of the past tense and the pronoun “us” (“Winter kept us warm”), while summer, by its limited past tense, spatial location, and abundance of details is even more limited [“Summer surprised us coming over the Starnbergersee / With a shower of rain; we stopped in

the colonnade, / And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten, / And drank coffee, and talked for an hour" (*CP* 37)]. The effect is that of highlighting the symbolism of spring—season of regeneration—but colouring it with a dysphoric quality, while minimizing the other seasons and memory itself into trivialization by the coordinated addition of details.

Similarly, as the poem proceeds to the passage of Old-Testament suggestion and atmosphere, it is the symbolism of light that is inverted. In "the light beats" the image is that of the plain light of day, with a dysphoric quality.¹⁵ Light appears again in the next passage of the first section, in the eroticised dialogue of the Hyacinth garden, as "the heart of light," as an essential symbol with mystical suggestions. Both instances, the Old-Testament desert and the contemporary garden, are connected to negative knowledge respectively: "Son of man, / You cannot say, or guess, for you know only / A heap of broken images, where the sun beats" and "I could not / Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither / Living nor dead, and I knew nothing / Looking into the heart of light" (38). With a masterful stroke, the fortune-telling passage that follows brings together the image of light and the idea of negative knowledge, telescoped in the ironic use of the word "clairvoyante."

According to William L. Alston, there are three ways of experiencing religion: the mystical, the sacramental, and the prophetic. In the mystical way, the divine appears in the experience of the union. In the sacramental experience, the divine appears in objects. The prophetic experience of the divine takes place through human society, through the events of history and the utterance of great inspired figures. As I shall show in what follows, while continuing to address the issue of the use of symbols, all of these modes of religious experience are represented in *The Waste Land* in different degrees.

The only mystical union in the poem takes place in the first section, "The Burial of the Dead." It is the moment of the Hyacinth garden, the lyrical moment of the poem. The "waste land" quality of the experience is exemplified by the failure of the moment and the fact that the encounter is placed in the past ("You gave me Hyacinths first a year ago").

The presence of the divine in the sacramental experience, through objects, is most emphatic in "A Game of Chess," in its first part. Here, objects proliferate in an enclosed space, the boudoir, with the effect of appearing more animated than the woman occupying the

center stage. The objects with the greatest sacramental potential are the “seven-branched candelabra,” a mock-sacramental presence (39). Arguably, “her strange synthetic perfumes” that invade the same boudoir—and the first part of section II—are a mock-image of incense, completing the sacramental experience (40). Instead of a spiritualised atmosphere, they “troubled, confused / And drowned the sense in odours,” “ascended / In fattening the prolonged candle-flames.” Again, through the felicitous choice of a word (“drowned”), the detail has the power to send suggestions backward and forward in the poem.¹⁶ Thus the oxymoronic image of simultaneous drowning and burning (“the flames . . . drowned the sense”) is a reminder of Madame Sosostri’s soothsaying in the first section and an anticipation of all the drowning suggestions in the following sections of the poem: Ophelia’s, in the concluding line of this section (“Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night”), the drowning of “the King my brother” and “the King my Father” of *The Tempest* from “The Fire Sermon,” and the whole of “Death by Water.” The oxymoronic image of water and burning is repeated in the image of the “sea-wood fed with copper / [which] Burned green and orange . . . / In which sad light a carved dolphin swam” (40). The potentially sacramental objects, therefore, are more suggestive of hell’s fire and deathly water.

The last way of experiencing religion in W.L. Alston’s taxonomy, the prophetic, is the most dominant in the Scriptural text, as well as in Eliot’s. It is significant that the prophetic stance in poetry is also associated with the literary tradition that Eliot most disparaged—Romanticism.

Clearly, all the suggested Biblical prophets of *The Waste Land*, Ezekiel, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, appearing in “The Burial of the Dead,” are dwarfed in comparison with Madame Sosostri. This character not only dominates through her idiosyncratic use of English (“Tell her I bring the horoscope myself”¹⁷) and probable false timbre due to her “bad cold,” but she is also the manipulator of the “wicked [Tarot] pack of cards,” which practically spreads its anticipating / prophetic powers all over *The Waste Land* (38). Her perception of “crowds of people, walking round in a ring” initiates the other great movements of masses in *The Waste Land*: “a crowd flow[ing] over London Bridge,” both everyday London commuters and Dantean lost souls, that appears in the last part of “The Burial of the Dead,” and “those hooded hordes swarming / Over endless plains,” of Hessian

inspiration, suggesting the Slavic threat to Western Europe, of “What the Thunder Said” (39, 48). Yet there is a hint that truth is granted to this charlatan from an external source, or else how would she be quoting Shakespeare on death transformed into beauty [“Those are pearls that were his eyes” (38)]? And again Madame Sosostri’s otherwise damaged credibility bounces back with her admission of ignorance: the card “which is blank,” which she is “forbidden to see,” as well as her admission, “I do not find / The Hanged Man” (38-39). Given the centrality of the card figure, according to Eliot’s important note to line 46, namely its association both with Frazer’s Hanged God and with the Christic hooded figure of The New Testament, the contemporary prophetess is reduced to a highly credible human dimension. In this manner, Alston’s taxonomy of the experience of religion occupies a proportionate place in Eliot’s *Waste Land*. Its ironic or paradoxical uses, as analyzed above, reinforce the reading of *The Waste Land* as a poetic crisis.

“The Waste Land,” as the title indicates, is primarily a space, and in this space there are repeated references to churches, nominally urban spaces of Christian devotion. The lines referring to the ecclesiastical London toponymy (“Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours / With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine”), besides all the suggestions noted by criticism (the symbolic number of Dante’s *Commedia* and the coincidence with the hour of Christ’s death), present the church through a function different from its intended purpose—that of marking chronological time (39).

There is another subtle level at which confusion is produced. The beginning and the end of “The Burial of the Dead” contain a strange inversion in the use of verbs in the biological regnum, between the animal and the vegetal: April *breeds* lilacs, while corpses *sprout* and bloom.¹⁸ Both images refer to vegetation myths and resurrection, but the effect of the inversion produces an uneasy feeling for most readers.

In the French-language ending of section I, which equates the poet narrator¹⁹ with the reader²⁰ (“hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!”), Eliot’s footnote sends the reader to Baudelaire’s Preface to *Fleurs du Mal*, thus facilitating a reference to what Baudelaire considered to be the greatest sin of all, and what Eliot²¹ considered to be the characteristic of *The Waste Land*: *l’Ennui* / boredom (39). It is, in fact, relevant that what Eliot affirms to be “the substance of the poem,” i.e. “what Tiresias *sees*”—the typist and the

young man carbuncular—describes the typist's state of mind by a cognate: "she is *bored*²² and tired" (44. My emphasis). At this moment, after the ending of the lovemaking scene, the typist's "brain allows one half-formed thought to pass"; consequently, boredom is completed by mental laziness. This suggestion of mental laziness is an artistic anticipation of Eliot's critical thought on the same topic in his essay on "The *Pensées* of Pascal" (1931). In fact, the whole passage quoted below reads like a description of the inhabitants of *The Waste Land*, with great relevance for the interpretation of the spirituality of the poem:

The majority of mankind is lazy-minded, incurious, absorbed in vanities, and tepid in emotion, and is therefore incapable of either much doubt or much faith; and when the ordinary man calls himself a sceptic or an unbeliever, that is ordinarily a simple pose, cloaking a disinclination to think anything out to a conclusion.²³

The first section of "A Game of Chess," formerly "In the Cage," besides employing the strongly olfactory and visual images that help construct the pseudo-sacramental experience presented above, also contain kinetic and auditory images of great subtlety: "the flames . . . stirred . . . Stirring the pattern on the coffered²⁴ ceiling," "footsteps shuffled," "hair / Spread out in fiery points / Glowed into words, then would be savagely still" (*CP* 40). The wet hair of the moment of unique mystical experience in "The Burial of the Dead" (the Hyacinth garden scene) turns into a hallucinating image of fire and words. This provides a perfect connection to the woman's staccato prompts and questions—"speak," "think," "know," "see," "remember," all of them injunctions referring to the intellect, all of them answered inadequately, dissonantly by the male partner: "I think we are in rats' alley / Where the dead men lost their bones" and "I remember / Those are pearls that were his eyes." In the dissonance between the intellectual reference of the questions and the poeticized, even Shakespearean answers, I suggest there is a trace of inadequacy at the level of the mythical structure of the poem, as it is directed by Eliot's introductory note on *The Waste Land*. According to the Grail legend, the pure knight's supreme test consists of asking the right question. The fact that the dialogue mentioned above does not offer adequate questions enacts this inadequacy. The chaotic, senseless dialogue of the couple is completed by the masterful Cockney dramatic monologue, which creates the best portrait in the poem, that of Lil, a

given name that suggests the purity of the lily, the flower of Easter, the flower of the cruellest month,²⁵ and the one character who is significantly absent from the scene.

So far my analysis has focused on the use of Christian elements as they appear especially in the first sections of the poem. "The Fire Sermon" explicitly uses a Buddhist theme, while "What the Thunder Said" introduces a Hindu theme. Eliot's final footnote to section III presents at large the parallelism that he is drawing between Christian and Buddhist religions, comparing the importance of Buddha's Fire Sermon to Christ's Sermon on the Mount. Buddhism, with its belief that life is permeated with suffering caused by desire, is present, though, from the very beginning of the poem, specifically in the very first lines on the painful birth of the April vegetation. According to the Awakened Buddha, everything is suffering: birth is Suffering, Aging is Suffering, everything that is Ephemeral is Suffering (the First Noble Truth) and the origin of Suffering is Desire (the Second Truth). The third Truth is that the annihilation of Desire annihilates Suffering.²⁶ The realization of this aspect of the poem's spirituality, which is of paramount importance, depends upon the information provided by Eliot's endnotes. The final note to "The Fire Sermon" steers the reading towards a comparative understanding of Christian and Buddhist faiths which serve as "representatives of eastern and western asceticism," with the added exhibition of authorial intention: "the collocation . . . is not an accident." This realization is both illuminating and frustrating for the reader. It provides the illumination that the reader aspires to in order to begin to comprehend the intricacies of the poem and at the same time it enacts the experience of "the wasteland" in the very act of reading.

The same ambiguity is present in the general note to *The Waste Land* regarding the centrality of Tiresias who is claimed to *see* "the substance of the poem." Even more confounding is the fact that by the time the reader starts looking for mythical and religious connections, Eliot confuses him or her even more by providing an explanation of a private nature to the lines. Such is the important passage of the unrecognized presence of the Christ among the disciples on the road to Emmaus after the Resurrection, for which Eliot gives the note on Shackleton's expedition.

"What the Thunder Said" carries a general note in which Eliot offers an explanation on the three interconnected themes employed in

the first part: “the journey to Emmaus, the approach to the Chapel Perilous (see Weston’s book) and the present decay of eastern Europe.” While this information is extremely helpful for the understanding of the poem, Eliot actually produces an inversion in the ordering of the note, so that the succession “journey” / “approach” / “decay” should become apparent. Weston’s book, *From Ritual to Romance*, is mentioned one last time at the very end, as the note to line 425 [“Fishing, with the arid plain behind me” (*CP* 50)]. In this way Eliot spreads the notes on this book in a balanced manner across the poem. Besides the indubitable importance of his notes on Jessie Weston, there is the added suggestion in her title that the reading has a direction: from *Ritual to Romance*, that is to say, from myth to literature. In fact, it is clear that Eliot’s interest is ultimately literary, and his thoughts and feelings about religion are to be subordinated to the unity and achievement of the artistic work.

The “story” of the Notes is well known; they were only added for the book-form issue of the poem in order to plump up the volume, and so we encounter the author’s later complaint that the notes had become more famous than the poem. As an integral part of any contemporary reading of *The Waste Land*, though, Eliot’s Notes provide a balanced view of the spirituality in the poem.

Eliot’s literary intertextuality in *The Waste Land* also has an outstandingly religious orientation. The chief source of literary intertextuality is, of course, Dante, the most important literary influence throughout Eliot’s life. Dante is present in the original Italian (or Provençal) language, in English translation, paraphrased, or hinted at. The references all belong to “The Inferno” and to “The Purgatorio,” without any reference to “The Paradiso”; in other words, they all refer to people who died without salvation. Eliot’s lifelong attachment to Dante’s literary merit can be witnessed, though, by mentioning Dante’s political allegiance. *The Divine Comedy* has a clear political side, that of the struggle between two parties, the Guelphs and the Ghibellines. Dante was himself of the aristocratic Ghibelline party who opted for the supremacy of the German Empire over the Peninsula. Eliot’s option for “Royalist” politics may be remembered here as a parallel.

Baudelaire’s presence in *The Waste Land* is, in its first instance, in Part I, an act of authorial organization. The syntagm “Unreal City” could in no way suggest the “fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves. /

Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant” [Swarming city, city full of dreams, / Where the spectre in full daylight accosts the passer-by], the source that Eliot offers in his note to line 60. The fact that Eliot offers Baudelaire as an intertext enriches the urban space of modernity, the city, which acquires the spiritual dimension that Eliot so much praised in Baudelaire. The “unreal city” appears twice in the poem, and the mild exclamation “O, city, city,” once. The quintessentially urban space, the very concrete business district of London, is also the place that is contrasted with the Augustinian *City of God*. It is important to note that Augustine wrote *The City of God*, a reference to God’s empire through the Church, at a time when the Roman Empire was starting to crumble, thus portraying both a religious and a political utopia. But the same “unreal city” might also be an anticipating allusion to the *Upanishad* that Eliot will present at the finale of the poem:

Lead Us From the Unreal To the Realization
 Lead Us from Darkness To Light,
 Lead Us From Death to Immortality,
 OM
 Let There Be Peace Peace Peace (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 1.3.28)

The initial epigraph that Eliot had in mind for *The Waste Land*, from Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, ending in “The horror!, the horror!,”²⁷ would have been a reference to the most devastating realization of the horror of death after a misspent life in modern literature. Even if, in the end, at Pound’s suggestion, Eliot did not use that epigraph, he included a reference to the opening of Conrad’s novella in the rhythmical reference to Elizabeth and Leicester on the River Thames (“The Fire Sermon”). In *Heart of Darkness* Kurtz leaves for the outposts of the Empire, reaching the heart of Africa, the heart of spiritual darkness. In 1933, Eliot praised both Conrad and Dostoevsky for being “novelists comparable in their ‘essential moral preoccupation with ‘Evil.’” Dostoevsky is present, indirectly, in the quotation Eliot provides in a note to the lines, “Who are those hooded hordes swarming / Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth,” from Hermann Hesse’s essay *Blink ins Chaos*, published in *The Dial* and in which he expressed his admiration for Dostoyevsky. The excerpt from Hesse’s essay refers to the demented, drunken dance of Dmitri Karamazov, epitomizing the Slavic spirit, stirring opposing

responses in the inhabitant of the city and in the saint and prophet: while “lacht der Bürger beleidigt, der Heilige und Seher hört sie mit Tränen” [the bourgeois laughs in shock, the saint and seer hear them with tears]. The German fragment quoted by Eliot captures the split that torments Eliot, between the lack of vision of the contemporary world and the awareness of the saint and prophet.

It becomes obvious that all of these literary intertexts are concerned with the issue of spirituality, with the additional qualification that spirituality is also seen through the angle of its political functioning. The authors who provide the intertexts offer a view of the world that is similar to Eliot's. And yet Eliot embraces the idea of religion that will be formulated by the historians of religions, including Mircea Eliade who held that religion has a systemic character; it is autonomous from society.

As Eliade's disciple and collaborator, Ioan P. Couliano, says, “The world view of the *Upanishads* deals with an acosmic doctrine, that seeks man's identity in unfathomable depths, far from the contaminated sphere of nature, which is a sign that the psycho-mental activity, being external, has lost any trace of sacred prestige.”²⁸ If there is any relative relief in the poem, it comes in line 392, possibly 393-394 (out of the total 434): “Co co rico co co rico / In a flash of lightening. Then a damp gust / Bringing rain” (*CP* 49). The poem of drought changes in this introduction to the Hindu section, with a promise of rain (“Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves / Waited for rain, while the black clouds / Gathered far distant, over Himavant. / The jungle crouched, humped in silence.”) In spite of the exoticism of the place, this is the same anthropomorphic vegetation of the first section of “The Burial of the Dead” [“What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow” (38)] and of the opening of “The Fire Sermon” [“the last fingers of leaf / Clutch and sink into the wet bank” (42)]. This section is based on the oldest *Upanishad*, the “great forest teaching,” a song that is made up of philosophical statements. As Eliot informs the reader in the note to line 402 as to the meaning of “Datta, dayadhvam, damyata” (Give, sympathize, control) . . . from The *Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad*,” he expedites the reader on the last abstruse “wild goose chase” for sources. “DA,” the thrice repeated word of the Thunder, the Hindu god, is the most authoritative word in the text, if we consider that the only other address by the Old-Testament god appears in the opening of the poem (“Son of man”). DA is the retort of the god Prajapati when his three offspring ask him

for sacred knowledge. The god's injunctions, the three interpretations of one and the same syllable, are in Sanskrit. While it is known that Eliot spent two years studying Sanskrit as a student at Harvard, whatever his mastery of the language and of the arcana of the *Upanishads*, the "word" as the reader sees (or hears) it might as well be the syllable for nonsense: "da." The more complex meaning of the poetry is given by the three interpretations, offered by Eliot and expanded into three beautiful passages.

Throughout the poem, Eliot uses different words and phrases to refer to "the waste land": "desert," "cracked earth," "brown land . . . deserted." In the last paragraph of the poem, with a note sending the reader again to Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, the reader finds: "I sat upon the shore / Fishing, with the arid plain behind me"; the protagonist is in the position of the Fisher King, having left the wasteland behind. To the storming of the next lines, totally disconnected from one another, the synthetically presented line, "These fragments I have shored against my ruins," offers a statement of authorial purpose that does not include a sense of having secured the necessary shoring. Instead, the actual concluding lines reiterate the Sanskrit words "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata." with the thrice repeated, incantatory final "word": "Shantih shantih shantih" (50). Eliot's last note refers to this last line: "Shantih. Repeated as here, a formal ending to an Upanishad. 'The Peace which passeth understanding' is our equivalent to this word." Again the reader (who does not know Sanskrit) has to trust Eliot's note for the meaning. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) Eliot had declared that in a complex world literature must be difficult. And he kept true to his word. On the other hand, much later, about the time he seemed to be apologetic about the "wild goose chase" for sources imposed upon the reader, Eliot candidly declared that for him the poem had been a response to "a grouse against life," "a bit of rhythmical grumbling." Acceptance of the accuracy of this last statement would imply acceptance of the "personal" note and the suggestion about the musicality of poetry. Viewed in this way, the daunting Sanskrit words take their power from their internal music, and the repeated syllables "shantih" do indeed suggest the soothing effect of words beyond meaning. In the unfinished poem *Sweeney Agonistes*, the protagonist complains: "I've gotta use words when I talk to you," suggesting a dissatisfaction with the capacity of language to represent the exact curve of the thought (CP 83). If the translation of "shantih" means that

the peace passes understanding, it might as well pass it in this musical way.

Eliot's idea of a literature that must be difficult does not imply that an extremely capable reader, or, let us say, "the ideal reader," might be able to pick up the poet's every intention and suggestion. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot himself plays the part of a Fisher King, in search of spiritual recovery in a period of crisis. If the poem is read with an endorsement of Eliade's idea that religion is built according to rules, and that consequently it has a systemic character which ensures its autonomy in relation to society, Eliot's appropriation of the Indic religions is an exercise in multiplying and complicating the facets of his spiritual quest. He thus belongs, in the paraphrase I used in the beginning of this essay about Vincent Buckley's view-point on religious literature, with the poets who attempt to recreate God's action in the world in such a way as to create a sense of its presence and urgency.

Endnotes

¹ T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 390.

² *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode, 177-178.

³ *Selected Essays*, 343-354.

⁴ *Selected Essays*: "when I am considering Religion and Literature, I speak of these things only to make clear that I am not concerned primarily with Religious Literature. I am concerned with what should be the relation between Religion and Literature," 346.

⁵ *Selected Essays*: "the Bible has had an influence upon English literature not because it has been considered as literature, but because it has been considered as the report of the Word of God. And the fact that men of letters now discuss it as 'literature' probably indicates the end of its 'literary' influence," 345.

⁶ "Dante," in *Selected Essays*, 218.

⁷ *Selected Essays*: "there is a difference between philosophical *belief* and poetic *assent*. . . . In reading . . . you suspend both belief and disbelief," says Eliot in the same essay, using the terms imposed by Coleridge in the discussion of the relationship between the reader and the text. 218.

⁸ The etymology of the word "religion," from the Latin *religio*, re-tying, is relevant.

⁹ See Peter Ackroyd, *T. S. Eliot* and Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot's Early Years* and *Eliot's New Life*.

¹⁰ See for instance Cleo McNelly Kearns, "Religion, Literature and Society," in *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, 88: "there is no doubt that Eliot's Christianity was long meditated and perhaps even longer deferred, and came in part as the result of having arrived at a very zero sum, in morals, in epistemology and in personal affairs as well."

¹¹ *Selected Essays*, 360.

¹² Eliot's interest in Indic religions will persist in his *oeuvre* after 1928, year of his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, materializing in *The Dry Salvages*, III.

¹³ See Grover Smith, 72-98, B.C. Southam, 93-145 and Lawrence Rainey, *The Annotated Waste Land*.

¹⁴ As Eliot commented on one of his famous ancestors, Henry Adams, "Adams could believe in nothing."

¹⁵ The dysphoric quality of such symbols as "spring" and "light," as they appear in the opening of *The Waste Land*, normally invested with euphoric qualities, has a powerful shock effect, comparable to Blake's "sick rose."

¹⁶ Compare with the occurrence of the word "clairvoyante" in the first section, mentioned above.

¹⁷ Charles Tomlinson draws attention to her bad English in a radio recording of a reading of, and commentary on, *The Waste Land*.

¹⁸ My underlining.

¹⁹ I am using Harold Bloom's syntagm (22).

²⁰ The same structure of an ending appears in "Death by Water": "O you who turn the wheel and look to windward / Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you," which transforms the ten-line lyrical section into a *Memento mori*.

²¹ The whole essay on Baudelaire is relevant here (*Selected Essays*, 371-381).

²² My underlining.

²³ *Selected Essays*, 363-364.

²⁴ There is the phonetic suggestion of "coffin" in this word. See Rainey's *Annotated Waste Land*, 89.

²⁵ Jewel Spears Brooker and Joseph Bentley's suggestion in *Reading The Waste Land: Modernism and the Limits of Interpretation*, 112.

²⁶ Ioan P. Coulianou, *Dictionnaire des religions*.

²⁷ See *The Waste Land. A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, 2.

²⁸ My translation from Ioan P. Coulianou, *Dictionnaire des religions*.

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Thinking the Nothing: Nihilism in *The Waste Land*

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"In these days negation is the most useful thing of all—and so we deny."

"Everything?"

"Everything."

"What? Not only art, poetry . . . but also . . . I am afraid to say it . . ."

"Everything," Bazarov repeated with inexpressible calm.

—Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons*

According to John Marmysz in *Laughing at Nothing*, nihilism is not uniquely modern. As a sensibility, he argues, it is at least as old as the world's major religions, and, because it can be seen as constitutive of human life as such, it is a recurring and perennially dangerous force in human history.¹ It figures prominently as far back as the Old Testament, particularly in *Ecclesiastes* where it emerges as an idea that threatens life with the loss of meaning, raising the possibility that behind all human endeavor lies emptiness, that all is "vanity and chasing after wind" (1.1-1.14). In its modern form, it has undergone various shifts in definition and accrued numerous contradictory valences since its influential literary incarnation in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, published in 1862. In that novel, the political radical and self-titled "nihilist," Bazarov, who rejects all forms of traditional authority, rouses his friend Arcady's deepest fears. As the episode unfolds, the implications of nihilism as the denial of everything—of art, poetry, even of the unspeakable, which Arcady most fears to utter, religion—is too terrifying to fully think through. One would rather avoid the very thought, for it causes a shudder and threatens to overtake every sphere of positive human value. The ellipsis that concludes the phrase—"I am afraid to say it . . ."—reveals the weight of anxiety, and echoes what Heidegger contends we all do in the face of the nothing: "Anxiety is indeed anxiety in the face . . . , but not in the face of this or that thing" (100).

But what is nihilism, this phenomenon increasingly demanding attention and fundamentally linked to the fate of modernity?² As its etymology might suggest, nihilism derives from the Latin word *nihil* which signifies ‘nothing,’ indicating that nihilism is the collection of views that involve a belief in, or, rather, threaten to reduce all belief to, nothing. Yet nihilism simultaneously admits the “being” of nothing, as Heidegger notes, which means we have to concede that the nothing is, not simply as negation, but as an aspect of being. The ostensible nothing of nihilism, as its early polemical uses would suggest, is a term pregnant with negative associations. As Marmysz writes, “by far the most common and widely accepted understanding of nihilism today places it in the category of things to be avoided and shunned” (1). The energy expended on attacking nihilism in contemporary political or religious discourse and, conversely, on defending so-called nihilists from attack, powerfully testifies to what Marmysz calls “the disturbing power of the word” (2). Though its currency of late has been in decline, superseded by the more popular, “relativism,” one of the easiest ways to discredit an opponent in a debate remains to accuse him / her of being a nihilist. What could a nihilist, who allegedly rejects everything, possibly have to contribute to a discussion in a positive sense? This way of stigmatizing the word, of course, begs the question and is far from a satisfying intellectual response. Like Arcady in *Fathers and Sons*, in the “nothing” that attends nihilism our deepest anxieties about everything come to be.

While nihilism is a major theme in many world religions, and assumes a revolutionary valence in Turgenev’s modern novel,³ it is in Nietzsche where the term first receives sustained philosophical attention and becomes the fundamental crisis of modernity, rather than simply remaining one theoretical problem among others. “With Nietzsche,” Camus observes in *The Rebel*, “nihilism becomes conscious for the first time” (65). Although nihilism is one major consequence of Nietzsche’s famous assertion that “God is dead,” and that therefore the traditional center of meaning or value has been thoroughly discredited, it is in *The Will to Power* that the concept, and its complex valences, are given direct and fuller treatment. In describing the composition of *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche juxtaposes “thinking” and “nothing” twice: “A book for thinking, *nothing* else: it belongs to those for whom thinking is a delight, *nothing* else” (xxii). In Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, in “A Game of

Chess,” two speakers struggle to communicate, and the task of a object-less thinking arises: “What are you thinking of? What thinking? What? / I never know what you are thinking. Think” (114). The frustrated speaker does not know what the auditor is thinking because, paralyzed by mental torpor, the auditor has ceased to think altogether. Hence the urgent elicitation to do so and cover up the eerie silence.

In *The Waste Land*, as this paper argues, readers are prompted by the urgency to think, and to *think the nothing*, which is a looming, anxiety-laden presence in the poem. In fact, the word “nothing” figures prominently in the text a combined ten times, and the word “not” or its variation, “cannot,” which marks negation, or absence, appears thirteen times. These negations affirm the pregnant absences pervading the poem: the absence of relief from suffering, of communication, of sexual fulfillment. Hence, the “nothing” and the “nots” are not merely significant as linguistic derivations of “nothing,” but also essentially tied to the epistemological crisis of nihilism. The consequence that the true world, or Absolute, lies beyond experience or, even more disconcertingly, the view shared by both Eliot and Nietzsche that it is a fictional construct projected on the nothing, heightens the subject’s recognition of nihilism. The basis of the negations in *The Waste Land* of the “nots,” the “cannots,” are not, therefore, the cause of the nothing, but rather its effect; for nothing is not just a negation of what is, but is the indispensable condition of negation. “We assert,” Heidegger puts it, “that the nothing is more original than the ‘not’ and negation” (97).

Although scholarly work on Eliot’s relation to Nietzsche has begun to increase in recent years, the writings of the two figures have never been examined together under the rubric of nihilism. Any relation *at all* between Eliot and Nietzsche, to exacerbate the issue, has been slow and unforthcoming, in part because of Eliot’s conservative dismissal of the German thinker’s iconoclastic radicalism, in part because of the perceived incompatibility between Eliot’s Christianity and Nietzsche’s committed atheism, in part because there is scarce mention of Nietzsche in Eliot’s published writings, and hence a dearth of palpable evidence linking the two explicitly. We do know, based on the evidence available, that Eliot read Nietzsche as early as 1915 during preparations for his PhD examinations in philosophy (and, as he explicitly states, wished to continue on a program of reading him). In a letter dated 18 November, he writes to his mother: “As for the book on Nietzsche, I have finished

it, and now am reading some of Nietzsche's works which I had not read before, and which I ought to read anyhow before my examinations" (120). That book, *The Philosophy of Nietzsche* by A. Wolf, which Eliot reviewed and had published in the *International Journal of Ethics* in 1915, has often added to the suspicion of critics that Eliot held an extremely unfavorable view of Nietzsche. Linda Leavell, for example, writes that in the review "rather than acknowledge indebtedness, he [Eliot] censures" and goes on after "pointedly dismissing Nietzsche's theories of war, knowledge, the universe, and ethics" showing only mild enthusiasm for his theory of art, which he blames Wolf for having omitted from his study (111).

A closer look at the review, however, actually reveals Eliot's unfavorable view of Wolf's treatment of Nietzsche, rather than of Nietzsche's thought itself, and is rather prescient for identifying a celebrated quality it would take academic philosophers decades to fully appreciate (arguably not until the rise of postmodernism); namely, the impossibility of separating Nietzsche's dazzling style from the substance of his philosophy. Knowing Eliot's impending decision to abandon a career in academic philosophy in favor of becoming a literary writer himself, the opening remark in the review is hard to read as anything but positive: "Nietzsche is one of those writers whose philosophy evaporates when detached from its literary qualities, and whose literature owes its charm not alone to the personality and wisdom of the man, but to a claim to scientific truth" (426). Eliot's characteristic critical condescension notwithstanding, Nietzsche is marked by Eliot as a uniquely hybrid thinker who fuses philosophy and literature, the same disciplines Eliot would continue to synthesize himself throughout his career, albeit often from the opposite side, by transposing philosophical concepts into literature.

In the review, Eliot charges Wolf's book with being "carelessly written" and exhibiting "an admirable piece of simplification," especially for its lack of "reference to his [Nietzsche's] extra-philosophic interests" (426). In closing the piece, Eliot notably regrets "the omission of any account of Nietzsche's view on art" (427), but suspects there to be more philosophical coherence and profundity to Nietzsche's views on topics like "war, knowledge, the universe, and ethics" than Wolf's account admits: "What he does not show, and what, from the title of the book, we might call upon him to show, is that Nietzsche had *any* philosophic view upon the subject beyond voicing all the conflicting judgments which occur to every

thoughtful person” (426). Unsatisfied with the review’s account of Nietzsche, Eliot informs his mother that this is just a starting point and that he will begin to cover the writings on his own in greater depth. In other words, Eliot not only knew Nietzsche, but wished to know him even better than he already did through a concentrated study of the primary texts themselves.

Returning to Eliot and *The Waste Land*, the first modern uses of the term nihilism are telling, because nihilism first appears in epistemological debates in eighteenth-century German idealism. These issues remained lifelong preoccupations of Eliot in his criticism and philosophy. The subject of his Harvard dissertation, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*, firmly situates him in the early controversies surrounding nihilism, because it specifically grapples with the complex legacy of idealism through Bradley. The first serious philosophical deployment of the term “nihilism” appear in attacks on German idealism by writers such as Oberiet, Jenish, and Jacobi in the eighteenth-century. In this context, nihilism becomes a term of opprobrium leveled against idealism, specifically against Kant, for the radically debilitating epistemological implications of *The Critique of Pure Reason* (Marmysz 16). In his enormously influential critique, Kant would restrict the realm of knowable objects by arguing that human knowledge is limited to phenomena, and that the mind orders its experience according to mental (*ideal*) categories, such as time and space, which are not objects in the world, but operations of reason. What the mind discerns is shaped according to the preconditions of knowing, to which objects in the world must conform in order to be rendered intelligible in the form of experience. All human knowledge is limited, in turn, by the conditions of knowing, which stipulate that we cannot know the world as it is, in and of itself, but only as it appears to us, as what Kant calls phenomena. The ultimate nature of reality, or the world, what Kant names quite famously the thing-in-itself (*dang-an-sich* in German), is forever unknowable. All knowledge, in short, is subjectively conditioned; we cannot make claims to objectivity, because reality, *as it is*, lies outside the scope of cognition.

While Kant’s startling findings are often neutralized by the radical critiques of knowledge by later postmodern thinkers, it seems his contemporary detractors keenly understood the genuinely negative consequences of his *Critique*. Kant himself claimed his purpose in the *Critique* was nothing short of killing metaphysics once and for all,

leaving only empirical science in its wake; his contemporary, Schleiermacher, the founder of hermeneutics, once strikingly called him in German “the all-smasher.” Indeed, Obereit believed Kant’s “relegation of human knowledge to the realm of appearances . . . leads to the eternal banishment of humanity from reality itself” (Marmysz 16). In so doing, Kant was a nihilist because he irreparably cut off reality (ontology, what is) from epistemology (forms of knowledge, what is knowable), alienating these nodes forever from one another. Or worse, to Obereit’s dismay, Kant reduced what *is* (all being) strictly to what can be known. The main tenor of Obereit’s critique, Marmysz sums up, is that “If Kant is correct, then humans must despair of anything but a subjective kind of knowledge” (17). This form of nihilism, couched in terms of epistemological alienation between subject and object, reached a peak in Jacobi’s famous letter to Fichte, in which the followers of Kant are derided for advocating radical subjectivism and its feared corollary, solipsism. In a letter to Fichte, Jacobi writes:

I feel a terrible horror before *the nothing, the absolutely indeterminate, the utterly void* . . . I have nothing confronting me, after all, except nothingness. . . . Truly my dear Fichte, I would not be vexed if you, or anyone else, were to call Chimerism the view I oppose to the Idealism that I chide for *Nihilism*.” (Marmysz 175)

Kant’s epistemology is nihilistic from Jacobi’s point of view because beneath its complex systems of mental categories it risks reducing all knowledge to mere chimera or illusion. Why even bother expounding a theory of knowledge, Jacobi suggests with resignation, when we are grasping for what’s in our own minds and not for real objects out there in the world.

In *The Genealogy of Modernism*, Levenson raises some of the finer details of Eliot’s critique of Bradley’s philosophy, but he makes no mention of Kant or nihilism, even though both are integral to understanding the “nihilistic” strains in Eliot’s thinking. As Eliot’s thesis will show, by Jacobi’s criteria, Eliot would be similarly condemned, like Kant, as a nihilist for his adoption and recasting of Bradley’s views. Bradley considered his magnum opus, *Appearance and Reality*, which can be seen as a basic reworking of Kant’s categories of phenomena and noumena, a “skeptical study of first principles” (177). For Bradley, all the basic categories of reason, such as time, space, causality, and motion reveal appearance and conceal

reality. The world is divided into discrete objects, but this manifold plurality is artificial and masks the ultimate nature of reality as unified (178). This oneness Bradley terms the Absolute, a kind of Kantian “dang-an-sich,” or ultimate substratum of reality undergirding the plurality of given appearance. Though tempting, the Absolute is not to be confused with God and is, like Kant’s realm of “noumena,” ultimately unknowable with respect to a strict theory of knowledge. One of Eliot’s favorite passages in Bradley, it has been noted, was “Our principles may be true, but they are not reality” (178). Bradley’s iconoclastic statement recalls the definition of nihilism in *Fathers and Sons*: “A nihilist is a man who doesn’t acknowledge any authorities, who doesn’t accept a single principle on faith, no matter how much that principle may be surrounded by respect” (23). What makes Bradley’s recovery of Kant seem so radical is that it goes against the normative grain of the dominant Victorian epistemology of scientific positivism, denying that the world does exist, or that it can exist, completely independent of our minds. Whereas science in the form of Arcady’s naturalistic, positivistic proto-Darwinian experiments into cadavers characterizes nihilism in *Fathers and Sons*, it represents one more naïve faith in realism that a more sophisticated epistemological nihilism subjects to equal doubt. In other words, while Arcady claims that nihilism accepts no principle on faith, his statement belies a faith in the power of science to ascertain how the world actually operates.

If Bradley’s system was a complex variant on the Kantian distinction between phenomena and noumena, Eliot’s critique certainly pushes the skeptical consequences even further, casting deep suspicion on the very possibility of the existence of an Absolute. Eliot’s critique of the Absolute brings his epistemology closer to a perspectival Nietzschean framework because it argues that the Absolute is a kind of invention imposed on the void. Eliot contends, against Bradley, that there are only a number of individual finite centers representing a “unity of consciousness,” a “universe in itself,” which are single points of view in time. As Levenson explains, “Though it [the finite centre] is a temporary point of view, while it lasts, it constitutes the whole of reality” (181). Finite centers only roughly correspond to a “self” or “soul,” but the crucial point is that they constitute knowledge in a given moment in time. In an article published in the *Monist* not long after his dissertation was complete, Eliot writes that: “The Absolute responds only to an imaginary demand of thought, and satisfies only an imaginary demand of feeling.

Pretending to be something which makes finite centers cohere, it turns out to be merely the assertion that they do" (Levenson 181). There is no reason, Eliot insists, that the ultimate nature of reality must logically correspond with the demand, or, in Nietzschean terms, human need to posit unity in this tautological fashion. In fact, as Eliot illustrates, it is patently absurd to infer on the basis of an experiential plurality a metaphysical unity. "Bradley's Absolute," upon closer inspection Eliot concludes, "dissolves at a touch into its constituents" (Levenson 182). In a similar vein Nietzsche writes, "But as soon as man finds out how that world [the *true* world] is fabricated solely from psychological needs, and how he has absolutely no right to it, the last form of nihilism comes into being: it includes disbelief in an metaphysical world and forbids itself any belief in a true world" (*Will to Power*13). Both Eliot and Nietzsche think that Kant's *dang-an-sich*, like the Absolute, is a necessary but powerful fiction, one which emerges as a product of the hermeneutic need to assign meaning for pragmatic reasons to our experiences.

The most direct and devastating implication of Eliot's reformulation of Bradley is the threat of solipsism. To this problem Eliot devotes an entire chapter of his dissertation, and it comes to play a key role in *The Waste Land*, in one of the poem's main footnotes on Bradley.⁴ The question solipsism poses is how can we, as individual finite centers, individual subjective beings, restricted to our frame of vision, step outside and connect to other such centers? The problem of solipsism, which is a corollary to the problem of knowledge more generally, receives its foundational modern expression in Descartes' *Meditations*; it is, like nihilism, quintessentially modern. For Descartes, the famous "I," or cogito, is adduced as the one indubitable truth, and, by extension, the foundational first principle of all knowledge, even while the existence of the entire external world may be subject to radical doubt. The cogito, then, is immediately intuited (it is known directly), whereas the external world is mediated through the fallible and unreliable senses, thus creating the famous ontological split between mind and body (or, in the Latin Cartesian form, between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*). Solipsism, then, is the unavoidable condition(al) that states: if we can only have definite assurance of our own minds, how can we infer, with absolute certainty, the actual existence of other minds, which exist to us only as external objects of sensation? Solipsism has come to denote, rather misleadingly in common parlance, the belief in the self as the only reality and

therefore connoting a sense of intense personal isolation from one's environing world. In fact, strictly speaking, it is an epistemological deduction that the self is the only determinately knowable reality. There may indeed be objects or selves outside our minds, but we never know their contents with definite, or even definitive, certainty; we can only, as it were, infer them in a speculative manner.

What, then, is the relation between solipsism and Eliot's complex and fragmented literary poem? *The Waste Land*, in terms of its style, is textually mired in a plurality of fragmented, finite centers or points of view, what are often viewed by literary critics as disembodied voices from quite distinct linguistic registers. The problem of solipsism, more locally however, plays out in a passage, which indicative of a problem endemic to the poem, was accompanied by the famous footnote to Bradley: "We think of the key, each in his prison / Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison" (*CP* 49). In thinking of a way out of our subjective experience, the passage suggests, we merely reinforce the mind's inability to reach beyond itself. It is as if, to epitomize Kant's entire critical project, the mind, in the process of thinking, comes to know and admit its own limits. While Kant had reached an epistemological impasse in his *Critique of Reason*, Eliot, like Nietzsche, was liberated to stress the need for forging unity, of actively asserting meaning to counteract the encroachment of nihilism. The task of overcoming epistemological alienation, what Jacobi regards as the most disabling manifestation of philosophical nihilism, namely, the denial of Absolute reality as such, or as something knowable, is a painstakingly difficult intellectual task as Eliot concedes and one that would terribly vex him his whole career:

The life of the soul does not consist in the contemplation of one consistent world but in the painful task of unifying (to a greater or less extent) jarring and incompatible ones, and passing, when possible, from two or more discordant viewpoints to a higher which shall somehow include and transmute them. (*Knowledge and Experience* 147)

Such a task threatens to overwhelm *The Waste Land*, where a polyphony of voices, perspectives, historical moments, and dramatic scenes unravel to produce a frightening cultural collage.

It is important to stress that the ramifications of this kind of epistemological challenge extends into the field of culture. Nihilism,

neither in its genesis, nor in the way it was absorbed by Eliot, Nietzsche, or Heidegger is simply an abstract metaphysical problem. In 1928 Eliot draws just such a link between the epistemological fissure of consciousness and the cultural fragmentation of a postwar European society, for which he had, just a year earlier, devised a solution through the ideal of a Christian community: "I believe that at the present time the problem of the unification of the world and the problem of the unification of the individual, are in the end one and the same problem; and that the solution of one is the solution of the other" (Levenson 97). While the earlier debates shed much needed light on the epistemological crisis of nihilism, it is as a social force, with existential consequences, that it comes to its logical fulfillment. "Nothing would be more useful or more to be encouraged," Nietzsche writes, "than a *thoroughgoing* practical nihilism" (*Will to Power* 143). These practical consequences, among which include the severest of all, "the deed of nihilism, which is suicide," according to Nietzsche, follow in the wake of the loss of an Absolute, of the disbelief in a true world that is thought to firmly ground experience. This is the immediate pessimistic reaction of the "if . . . then," which Dostoyevsky's Ivan Karamazov espouses, with an ethical as opposed to epistemological connotation, in *The Brothers Karamazov*: that if God does not exist, then everything is permitted. Alternatively, one might posit, if God does not exist, as Nietzsche will suggest, all human endeavor may have proven to be *in vain*.⁵

These pessimistic strains of nihilism offer one possible interpretation to the crisis of meaning, but one certainly bound tightly to its development that requires elaboration. "Pessimism," Nietzsche insists, is "a preliminary form of nihilism" (*Will to Power* 11). Nihilism, as a psychological reaction, is itself ambiguous, for there are active and passive strains, a key distinction Nietzsche makes in his endeavor to anatomize the concept: "It is *ambiguous*: A. Nihilism is a sign of increased power of the spirit: as *active* nihilism. B. Nihilism as decline and recession of the power of the spirit: as *passive* nihilism" (17). The two dominant expressions of passive nihilism are Buddhism, by which Eliot was deeply influenced, and Schopenhauerian pessimism, which itself is a kind of philosophical reformulation of the basic tenets of Buddhism, namely, detachment, the will to not will, and a yearning to escape a life understood as suffering. Nietzsche writes, "The weary nihilism that no longer attacks . . . its most famous form, Buddhism; a passive nihilism, a sign of weakness" (18).

Thus, as Nietzsche insists, in a passage that bears striking resemblances to *The Waste Land's* formal technique and overall mood, "The strength of the spirit may be worn out, exhausted, so that previous goals and values have become incommensurate and no longer are believed; so that the synthesis of values and goals (on which every strong culture rests) dissolves and the *individual* values war against each other: disintegration" (18). The plurality of competing voices and values pervasive throughout Eliot's text, if not the highly evocative images of breakdown themselves, resonate precisely with Nietzsche's idea of disintegration. No spiritual formation or religious rite in the poem has the power to overcome the others and rule convincingly; the exhaustion, if not in the individual voices themselves, is reflected by the coexisting congeries of religious traditions: pagan, Christian, Indian, and Buddhist placed together in no apparent order and subject to no recognizable hierarchy. Thus, despite the fact that Eliot realized the task of overcoming the epistemological and cultural crisis of nihilism was painful and arduous, *The Waste Land* repeatedly exhibits traces, expressed through its voices, of an unconscious Buddhistic yearning for the cessation of willing altogether.

Eliot took up the study of Sanskrit, Indic philology, and attended a full year course on Buddhism at Harvard, but his fascination with these Eastern philosophies was far from the result of a scholar's pedantic curiosity (Ackroyd 47). In fact, Buddhism marks for Eliot, not a philosophical alternative or escape to Western thought and religion, but a practical, existential mechanism for understanding existence understood primarily as suffering. Peter Ackroyd writes, "Nirvana is extinction—the annihilation of desire, the freedom from attachments—and there was, as can be seen in his poetry, an over-riding desire in the young Eliot to be so free" (47). If we recall one of the most memorable tenets from his influential essay, "Tradition and The Individual Talent," where Eliot proposes that "the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (7), we can see how the liberating force of nirvana subtly assumes the guise of one of Eliot's key poetic principles. Similarly, in the opening lines of *The Waste Land*, the speaker, assuming the perspective of a corpse underground that is invaded by a weary human consciousness, prefers to be freed paradoxically by remaining in a state of organic stupor: "Winter kept us warm, covering / Earth in forgetful snow" (CP 37). Forgetfulness promises to lay waste to

painful memories and blanket us from consciousness of past pain. Thus, the germ of life strives, not for life, but for death, or more precisely, oblivion, a kind of incipient expression of the death-drive of the human figures in *The Waste Land* who wander around London in hopes of ending the horrors of aimlessness.

In “The Burial of the Dead,” a section whose title offers a stark irony, since these burials have failed, and the living are in a state of limbo, unable to die, “neither living nor dead,” living and dying (or living *as* dying) subtly intersect: “Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled, / And each man fixed his eyes before his feet. / Flowed up and down King William Street, / To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours / With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine” (39). What is startling is not simply that the church bells toll a sound that is dead (“dead” qualifying sound), but that death is precisely the note that is sounded. Indeed, the dead sound which strikes at nine, evoking the nine month period of gestation before birth, becomes a harbinger of life as a movement unto death, of a living death. Donne, who associates the tolling bells with death, lurks in the background of this passage. For Donne, in *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, we are “borne in death” (422). In “What the Thunder Said,” too, the same paradoxical idea recurs with a key addition: “He who was living is now dead / We who were living are now dying / With a little patience” (CP 47). The agony of *The Waste Land*, where “one can neither stand nor lie nor sit,” as these passages suggest, shows happiness to be defined predominantly as relief from a life overwhelmed by suffering. It is little wonder, and a fact Eliot no doubt knew, that the word patience derives etymologically from the Latin stem *pati*, which means ‘to suffer.’

Whether *The Waste Land* is “a chamber of horrors” as Levenson argues (175), or more textually a “reverberating echo chamber of meanings” as Marjorie Perloff argues (16), the overriding desire at work in *The Waste Land*, as Lettrichia rightly asserts, is “to get out of the waste land” (273). The overriding hindrance to that desire, a credit to Eliot’s resilience, I would add, is there is just no *easy* way out. Pearson and Morgan make this same point in relation to Nietzsche in their recent collection on nihilism: “Regarding the necessity of nihilism’s coming and arrival, he [Nietzsche] will not rest content with quick fixes or easy solutions, or with cavalier and hasty attempts to bypass it. The latter only serve to exacerbate the problem” (xii). The horizon in *The Waste Land* has been wiped clear of genuine

transcendence. The weariness that seeks escape into oblivion appears contagious in the post-nihilistic climate of modernity, as Nietzsche would remark, and one of *The Waste Land's* positive qualities, ironically, is its unflinching confrontation with nihilism. Like Nietzsche, Eliot faces the problem of nihilism head on. Yet *The Waste Land* cannot, surely no less than Schopenhaurian pessimism can, celebrate its condition of Godlessness. The failure of the various incitations and incantations to revive the topos of the dead god, so central to *The Waste Land*, and what it shares with ancient fertility rituals, is meant to produce anxiety and a deep feeling of loss. The streak of passive nihilism in Eliot's work brings him into direct confrontation with Nietzsche and, despite their shared disbelief in the Absolute and acceptance of perspectival relativism, creates an important tension in their responses to nihilism.

In *Literature, Modernism and Myth*, Michael Bell becomes one of the few critics who attempts to juxtapose Eliot and Nietzsche meaningfully, though he does so in a very cursory way, by dismissing the possibility that the two could share a sensibility he calls throughout his book the "mythopoeic relativity": "religious faith, for him [Eliot], was essentially incompatible with mythopoeic relativity. He could not, in principle, accept his own belief as myth" (124).⁶ For Bell, as with many other critics, Eliot is the pious orthodox thinker of conservative Christianity, and even his earlier skepticism and relativism expresses the teleological inevitability of a Christian quest for salvation. One of the most influential expressions of this position comes from conservative critic Cleanth Brooks in his essay, "Serious Poet": "Poetry is obviously a journey and soon enough shows itself to be a journey toward religion. *The Waste Land* . . . is a work which trembles with the concern for religion, and after *The Waste Land* most of the poetry actually has to do with religion and religious matters" (18).⁷ While agreeing strongly with the case for Eliot's poem rippling with religion and for his seriousness as an author, given how "serious" a dilemma nihilism presents itself to Nietzsche, Heidegger and other prominent modern thinkers of modernism, I disagree fundamentally as to the direction and meaning of this seriousness for Eliot.

A Christian typology, in Brooks' view, is inevitably read into every one of Eliot's statements and decisions backwards, not only troubling temporal chronology, but strategically occluding any possibility that he may have been at one point genuinely skeptical, agnostic, or even, unfathomably to his firmly entrenched reputation as

a conservative Christian, atheistic, in keeping with *many* of his equally “serious” fellow literary modernists.⁸ Eliot then becomes the one saving grace for Christian ideologists in a modernist tradition overwhelmingly siding with Nietzsche in its skepticism, doubt, atheism, and general hostility towards the venerations and failed promises of a waning Christian culture. There is no reason to *save* Eliot from this trajectory; he is firmly within it, as the attraction of non-religious readers to him—just as, conversely, the ongoing interest expressed by Christian readers in Nietzsche—continue to illustrate. The alleged secular-religious divide, not so much a divide as a dialectic, forms the basis for bringing these two seemingly antithetical figures in complex dialogue with one another, specifically through their shared interest in the problem of nihilism. Contrary to Brooks, Bell makes a quite productive observation when he quotes Eliot and then imagines what Nietzsche’s response would be:

“The void that I find in the middle of all human happiness and all human relations, and which there is only one thing to fill. I am one whom this sense of void tends to drive towards skepticism or sensuality, and only Christianity helps to reconcile me to life, which is otherwise disgusting.” Here is a textbook case for Nietzsche’s analysis of Christianity as a negative life symptom, and it is no wonder that Eliot’s allusions to Nietzsche were pre-emptively contemptuous. (Bell 124)

The “void” Eliot marks right in the center of “all human happiness,” of “all human relations,” is precisely a profound admission of powerful pull of nothingness, the void left behind in the wake of the acceptance of nihilism as a fundamental condition of modernity. Yet it would express, to Nietzsche, a symptom of decline and a movement colored by weariness and a lack of vitality, a decadent and undesirable side-effect of passive nihilism that reflects a “*decline of life*.”⁹ And this is why, presumably, Eliot was so careful to deny and suppress the influence of Nietzsche on his own thinking.

What is surprising is that Bell points to a far too obvious point of incompatibility—Nietzsche’s atheism and Eliot’s Christianity—when by Eliot’s revealing admission years later in *Notes Toward the Definition of Culture* (1948), he and Nietzsche are battling with the philosophical problems of the same tradition. Evoking Nietzsche in his late essay, a reference seldom remarked on by commentators who regard Eliot’s 1916 review of A. Wolf’s *The Philosophy of Nietzsche* and his letter to his mother as his only published references to him,

Eliot writes: "Only a Christian culture could have produced a Voltaire or a Nietzsche. I do not believe that the culture of Europe could survive the complete disappearance of the Christian Faith" (304). The crucial point here is not that the later committed Christian Eliot is at odds, in theory, with Nietzsche, a point so obvious as to be negligible. Rather, the point is that the issue of meaning and God, and, as Nietzsche sees it, nihilism are all entangled with the Christian tradition, all part of one continuously unfolding dilemma in Western culture.

At the very opening of *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche poses the haunting question so often quoted, "Nihilism stands at the door: whence comes this uncanniest of all guests"? As Nietzsche proceeds in his analysis, he begins to dispel the misconceptions that the causes of nihilism are "social distress," or "physiological degeneration" or "corruption" (7). These superficial reasons conflate symptoms with causes, just as in Eliot's poem what we see, in terms of fragmented images, are the consequences of nihilism and not nihilism *per se*. Nietzsche thus wants to unearth the source of nihilism, its subtle origin, the most common symptoms of which include disintegration, fragmentation, or loss of cultural unity. He concludes by locating nihilism not as exclusive of, or external to, Christianity but as lying at its very core: "it is in one particular interpretation, the Christian-moral one, that nihilism is rooted" (7). Recalling the passage from *Ecclesiastes*, "All things are wearisome; / more than one can express," for "there is nothing new under the sun" (1.1-1.12). Christianity, which Nietzsche calls tellingly "Platonism for the people" in *Beyond Good and Evil* (2), has, according to Heidegger, for whom Nietzsche leads the way with his interpretation of Christianity as essentially nihilistic, a deeper source: the Platonic split between the world of becoming and the world of being. It is essentially seen as a movement and protest against this world. With this move, which alienated Being from beings, Plato sealed the nihilistic fate of the West, preparing the way for Christianity's promulgation of a dualistic worldview at the core of this momentous schism.

The entire history of Western metaphysics from Plato, Heidegger provocatively suggests, is the gradual unfolding of nihilism, and Nietzsche's thought stands as its culmination: "The metaphysics of Plato is not less nihilistic than Nietzsche. In the former, the essence of nihilism is merely concealed; in the latter, it comes completely to appearance" (Marmysz 35). For Heidegger, all

traditional metaphysics from Plato onward is a form of nihilism. "This is because," Marmysz explains, "the metaphysician is concerned with representing Being as the totality of beings, and not with 'thinking' Being itself" (35). The incitation to think the nothing, which a confrontation with Being demands, is present in *The Waste Land*, where the word "nothing" repeatedly occurs, usually where meaning, human connection, or spiritual communion abruptly disintegrate at the very moment when they are about to be fulfilled. In "The Burial of the Dead," the hyacinth girl with her "arms full" and her "hair wet" briefly intimates a site of untroubled desire, but the pristine moment is shattered by the speaker who complains of a weariness that is difficult, as in *Ecclesiastes*, to even express: "I could not / Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither / Living nor dead, and I knew nothing, / Looking into the heart of light, the silence" (CP 38).

The negation of "not" being able to speak, which underscores the speaker's anxiety about communication, turns into the admission that he knows "nothing," and the nothing asserts itself with the full weight of its pregnant emptiness in the "silence." The emptiness undergoes a diffuse metamorphosis into a vast sea, "Oed und leer das Meer," both empty and desolate. For Heidegger, the confrontation with the oppressive being of nothingness, this nothing that is, reveals itself in human existence through anxiety: "Anxiety robs us of speech. Because beings as a whole slip away, so that just the nothing crowds round, in the face of anxiety all utterance of the 'is' falls silent" (104). The parallel is uncanny, as Eliot's speaker is literally robbed of speech, suddenly stripped of the expectation of discovery, left naked to face the inarticulate without any supporting linguistic or spiritual framework.

The difficult task of thinking the nothing resurfaces in "A Game of Chess," as the word "thinking" occurs three more times, in this case when the speaker finds his aloneness too intolerable to bear, asking his companion to speak up: "My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me / Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak. / What are you thinking of? What thinking? What? / I never know what you are thinking. Think" (CP 40). Eliot, we know, had been painfully afflicted by nerves and had gone to see a "nerve" specialist as he was drafting *The Waste Land* (Ackroyd 113). These passages where "nothing" appears most prominently, in fact, are the most explicitly biographical moments in the poem; here, Eliot's private torment, which precipitated his nervous breakdown, fuses into modernity's

broader cultural malaise.¹⁰ The speaker implores his companion, possibly a staging of Eliot's marriage difficulties with his wife Vivienne, to speak, to say something, anything, to cover over the chilling silence, but it is to no avail.

Just as the episode with the hyacinth girls illustrates, the attempted communication breaks down, and the emptiness becomes an unyielding, and increasingly menacing presence. These moments, which stand in stark contrast to the episodes in *The Waste Land*, such as the pub scene, in which the speakers engage in what Heidegger calls in *Being and Time* "idle chit-chat," offer no recourse to small talk that might bring even momentary relief. The resistance reveals Eliot's intense awareness of the "nothing," which he refuses to cover up, moments where "nothing" suffices to soothe. "That in the malaise of anxiety we often try to shatter the vacant stillness with compulsive talk," Heidegger argues, "only proves the presence of the nothing," and Eliot's poem refuses, in this exact vein, to rob these silences of their potent vacancy, allowing them a logic of their own (101).

As the scene progresses, the nothingness becomes more oppressive, as the speaker who had implored his counterpart to first speak and then think, asks: "What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?" (CP 40). The only answer he receives is a flat, monotonous "Nothing again nothing." The exchange then frustrates the questioner, who becomes increasingly impatient for an answer from his apathetic interlocutor: "Do / You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember / Nothing? / I remember / Those are pearls that were his eyes. / Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?" (CP 40-41). The repetition of "nothing" turns the nothing, through accretion, into a kind of increasingly real and palpable presence. It is almost as if by insisting on nothing, in a statement designed to derisively mock his interlocutor, the speaker admits there is something in his head, a something that does not provide a logical link for further dialogue: that is, a something that is precisely nothing. Eliot's continual insistence throughout the poem on the nothing is a way of breaking through what Heidegger regards as the silence of science and the Western tradition when it comes to thinking the nothing adequately. "The nothing," Heidegger asks rhetorically, "what else can it be for science but an outrage and phantasm?" (97). Eliot's anti-technological penchant throughout the poem, in his satirical send-ups of gramophone, for example, reinforces his understanding that nihilism

offers a powerful means of exposing science's pretensions to universal validity.

As such, the nihilism in the poem also presents a full frontal assault on the fantasies of scientific positivism to reveal the world as it is, as it presents itself to the senses, recalling Eliot's skepticism towards the naiveties of realism in his philosophy thesis. The more pressing question becomes, then, how do we think the nothing as an object of thought? "For thinking," Heidegger incisively observes, "which is always essentially thinking about something, must act in a way contrary to its own essence when it thinks of the nothing" (97). The most inherently difficult task for "thinking" is thinking the nothing, because thinking, as part of its grammar, looks for things to think about. Heidegger's possible solution is that Being is not a being. It is not a thing: "The nothing reveals itself in anxiety—but not as a being" (102).

The task of thinking the nothing in *The Waste Land* comes to a head near the closing of "The Fire Sermon" where the most overt biographical reference is made to Eliot's own psychological collapse: "On Margate Sands. / I can connect / Nothing with nothing. / The broken fingernails of dirty hands. / My people humble people who expect / Nothing" (CP 46). The lyrical "I" takes on Eliot's agonizing experience of mental deterioration and eventual break-down, pointing to "Margate," the actual location where Eliot spent part of his time recovering. Eliot felt the anxiety laden in the "nothing" throughout his life—his ongoing marriage turmoil, the stultifying environment of academia, the deadening tedium of his bank-job, the experience of a Europe first rent by bloody war then stilled into peaceful silence—all made Eliot acutely anxious and played no small role in precipitating his debilitating mental collapse. Although this striking passage holds a mirror to the mind in the very midst of breakdown, enacting its inability to make connections between things, it also suggests that here at Margate—and in the concluding section of *The Waste Land*—Eliot broke free from the oppressive worry about things, about objects and their various determinations, and affirmed the "nothing." Departing from the strict poetic form and demands that had strangled his inspiration to write, Eliot felt free, almost as if in a state of trance, when he composed the final section, telling Virginia Woolf later that "I wasn't even bothering whether I understood what I was saying" (Ackroyd 116). Here, if only for a moment, without the reassuring framework of Christianity, Eliot learnt to let go and *just be*, purely and

simply, refusing to cover the void—or escape the emptiness—he later confessed he felt all his life in the midst of human experience.

Endnotes

¹ Despite acknowledging that critics need to draw out its specific historical genealogy, a number of important commentators have considered nihilism to be a running theme in most of Western literature. According to Glicksberg, “From Sophocles to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Dostoyevski, Kierkegaard, and Tolstoy, there is scarcely an important creative figure who has not at some time been stricken with the fever of nihilism. It is always there to be faced—and overcome.”

² Drawing on Heidegger, Vattimo has argued that in nihilism the idea of history and destiny (in this case, particularly that of Western liberal bureaucratic society) come together to give it both historical and transhistorical implications: “The question of nihilism is not principally a historiographical problem. If anything, it is a *geschichtlich* problem in the sense of the connection made by Heidegger between *Geschichte* (History) and *Geschick* (Destiny).”

³ As Gillespie explains, Bazarov’s form of negation, aside from its rejection of religion, is also in support of an unstated cause, which the fear of censorship prevented Turgenev from naming: that is, the revolutionary overthrow of the ruling autocracy. This is why social institutions were unequivocally deemed corrupt and in need of replacement by the new men or “nihilists” in Russia.

⁴ The footnote from section 5 of *The Waste Land*, “What the Thunder Said,” has tended to overshadow the many more tacit connections between the poem and Eliot’s writings on Bradley, and has even led to the mistaken belief that either Bradley or Eliot, or both, were somehow solipsists. The footnote, which actually serves to *problematize* solipsism quite succinctly, rather than asserting its status as truth in the poem, reads: “my external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts or my feelings. In either case my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside; and, with all its elements alike, every sphere is opaque to the others which surrounds it . . . In brief, regarded as an existence which appeared in a soul, the whole world for each is peculiar and private to that soul.”

⁵ In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche repeatedly stresses that one of the best expressions through which to translate the temper of nihilism is by the phrase ‘in vain,’ or *umsonst* in German. That is where nihilism seems to convey how truly dispirited it makes humanity feel, because it makes our goals, beliefs, values seem as if they all failed to reach fruition. As he puts it with reference to the waning of Christianity: “One interpretation has collapsed; but because it was considered *the* interpretation it now seems as if there were no meaning at all in existence, as if everything were in vain” (35).

⁶ Critics are only now beginning to draw increasing attention to the parallels between Nietzsche’s and Eliot’s writings, but remain extremely hesitant to do so, and Eliot’s reticence on the topic only makes matters worse. M. A. R. Habib devotes a brief but revealing section in one of his chapters called “Nietzsche, Royce, Eliot,” where he argues that both writers share a rejection of the Kantian split between phenomena and noumena, thereby reducing reality to appearance, and both hold the belief that reality is comprised as a system of fluid relations, rather than as a set of fixed objects. See.

Habib, M. A. R. *The Early T. S. Eliot and Western Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. 145-148. Critics have also noted the far more obvious influence of Nietzsche's theory of tragedy on Eliot's ritualistic dramas and the more unexpected similarities between Eliot and Nietzsche's critical views of history. See Leavell, Linda. "Nietzsche's Theory of Tragedy in the Plays of T. S. Eliot." *Journal of Modern Literature* 31.1 (1985): 111-126; and Zilcosky, John. "Modern Monuments: T. S. Eliot, Nietzsche, and The Problem of History." *Journal of Modern Literature* 29.1 (2005): 21-33.

⁷ Quoted in Germer, Rudolf. "Journey of the Magi' in the Context of T. S. Eliot's Religious Development and Sensibility." *T. S. Eliot and Our Turning World*. ed. Jewel Spears Brooker. New York: Palgrave, 2001. 15-25.

⁸ Virginia Woolf, Wallace Stevens, Ernest Hemingway and Ezra Pound were all self-declared atheists and, if one permits agnostics and skeptics in the list, men like Robert Frost, the list of literary modernists who refused religion would be interminable. Significantly, Ezra Pound, with whom the early Eliot struck the closest friendship and literary partnership than any other modernist, began distancing himself from Eliot, and among other determining factors was Eliot's rediscovery of his Christian faith (as Pound perceived, his turn against his earlier, skeptical self). For Pound, Eliot's belief that, as Marjorie Perloff puts it, "a civilization that has rejected the Christian dispensation is doomed to decay" was a "powerful embodiment of weakness and deprivation [that] may well have seemed excessive." Pound, alluding to Eliot in "Credo" (1930), diagnoses the Christian conversion in the same terms Nietzsche generally applied to nihilism in its passive sense: "I believe that postwar 'returns to Christianity' . . . have been merely the gran' rifiuto and, in general, signs of fatigue" (173).

⁹ Nietzsche writes against the Christian hostility to the senses, what Eliot calls, with a mixture of horror and revulsion, sensuality: "To *have* to fight the instincts—that is the formula of decadence: as long as life is *ascending*, happiness equals instinct." See Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols."

¹⁰ Writing about Tennyson in the essay "In Memoriam," Eliot highlights, as a theme, what he sees as the indirect but no less significant relationship between an individual author's personal agonies and the general mood of his broader historical period: "It happens now and then that a poet by some strange accident expresses the mood of his generation, at the same time that he is expressing a mood of his own which is quite remote from that of his generation" (243).

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Cultural and Textual (Dis)unity: Poetics of Nothingness in *The Waste Land*

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Poets of modernism were by and large preoccupied with the idea of disorder. This preoccupation reflected itself in their style, as well as in general views on post-World War I culture. Fragmented society, detachment from the past and tradition in many aspects of human lives, gradual liberation from social constraints and norms, density of cities and mobility of their inhabitants—all of these factors led to new forms of viewing human culture. The Great Depression and its consequences strengthened the feeling of impossibility of loosening the grip of the past. The economic crisis also brought about a sense of pessimism in most men and women of the time. These were the social conditions that formed new aesthetics which consisted of two opposing stances: Pound's credo "Make It New" on the one hand, and the insistence on keeping traditional values on the other.

In *The Waste Land*, as well as in several of his essays, T. S. Eliot glorifies the concept of disorder, but eventually tries to make his poem more comprehensible and orderly by providing explanations to his allusions in extensive endnotes. He also insists on filling the fissures of modern difficulties with numerous references to a meaningful past. *The Waste Land*'s ideas of non-being and its sense of a nothingness of life that leads towards disorder are opposed to the implicit idea of establishing order. Likewise, in his essays, Eliot puts emphasis on the idea of imposing aesthetic / ideological order with his vision of an organic cultural unity. This duality of nothingness of life on the one hand, and establishing order and comprehensibility on the other, is reconciled by means of the aesthetic unity of opposites.

The insistence on the aesthetic reconciliation of the above dichotomies, which Eliot sees as possible only in reference to the past, bears ideological traits common to many modernist writers. An

aesthetic of nothingness realized through a paradoxical poetic of disorderly order leads to what Terry Eagleton terms as the “ideology of cultural disintegration.” The aim of the present paper is to scrutinize the interrelation of both Eliot’s theoretical poetics and the poetics utilized in *The Waste Land* regarding the ideological aspects of the aesthetic of disorderly order.

Although revolutionary when it comes to poetic forms, Eliot was rather conservative in relation to cultural changes. This reactionary attitude is seen both in his poetry and his theoretical concepts represented in his essays and longer studies, primarily in *The Waste Land* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. Defining ‘culture’ in the latter text, Eliot emphasizes the interdependence of the cultures of the group, the individual, class, and the society. He states that the culture of the society is fundamental and exceeds all the others; he further claims that we “find it in the *pattern* of the society as a whole” (*Notes* 23; my emphasis). It is obvious from this statement that Eliot sees the social hierarchy as something fixed and unchallenged. The concept of hierarchy realized through unified culture is further reinforced when he writes about its disintegration and the possibility of repairing the “malady.” The viewpoint that cultural fragmentation leads to disintegration and that this process relates to the disintegration of a class or between classes speaks in favor of social harmony and hierarchy. Being an advocate of high culture, Eliot is also a promoter of high class since he sees it as the principal bearer of cultural advancement. The questions about the control of, and deliberate influence on, culture speak for the ideological position that culture is “the property of a small section of society” (*Notes* 33). In addition to this view, Eliot also equates spiritual aspects of art and religion and sees religion as something that gives meaning to life and protects humanity from despair.

Writing on culture, Eliot is highly aware both of its power and of the human attempt to structure and frame it. Although he insists that both certain degrees of unity and diversity are necessary within a society in order to develop its culture, it is order he insists on, which again represents a measure imposed by the class in power. Allowing a regional “characteristic culture” with slight differences in regard to a larger community, he insists on harmonization of the neighboring areas and terms it an “absolute value of culture.” Furthermore, Eliot suggests that the *reconciliation* of the local and communal should be unconscious: “The unity with which I am concerned must be largely

unconscious, and therefore can perhaps be best approached through a consideration of the useful diversities" (*Notes* 51-52). Cultural unity is here based on loyalty, which stems from the family and then extends into a local community and finally into a nation. However, such a concept presupposes more or less a firm hierarchy and thus cultural unity is not unconscious but dictated and imposed. It is ambiguous whether with "unconscious" Eliot thinks of unawareness of the conceived concept, or whether it stands in for a natural process. If it is the latter, then it is a contradiction in terms. The idea of the necessity of studying culture also implies that culture is disorderly and that nothingness instead of meaningfulness pervades.

Eliot's concepts of tradition, order, myth, and poetic impersonality also lead to the idea of the organic unity of culture and society on the whole. The acquisition of tradition is represented as absolutely necessary for anyone who wants to take his or her place in the literary canon and change the existing order. The paradox lies in the idea that the artist has to accept the hierarchy and become part of it in order to change it. And this work would be futile by only learning about tradition; it demands its acquisition. To obtain tradition, Eliot says, involves acquisition of "*the historical sense*":

It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense . . .

[. . .]

. . . and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. (*Selected Essays* 14)

The idea of "obtaining" or "acquiring" tradition implies that what we acquire becomes an inherent part of us, while "learning" implies mere knowledge of tradition. Eliot suggests that the artist learns about and becomes part of a system if he wants to improve his position in the given hierarchy. Glorification of tradition as the only means of being a writer after one is twenty-five and insisting on becoming a systemic constituent leaves hardly any space for revolutionizing culture. The idea of tradition is certainly not in accordance with the modernist call "Make It New!" The explanation for becoming part of a system and revolutionizing it lies in the historic dialectics where the marginalia

oftentimes turns into the mainstream until, again, it becomes replaced by another marginalia. Eliot's biography and cultural work illustrate this transformation. A bank clerk, despised émigré, and writer of "nonsensical" lines develops into a commanding literary and cultural figure—a critic and writer who dictates the taste of his time. The marginalia embodied in Eliot's and Pound's work and influence thus becomes the mainstream that greatly influences culture on both sides of the Atlantic.

Tradition in *The Waste Land* is also insisted on by numerous references and allusions to the works of art of Eliot's predecessors. Copious citations evoke the past and create a counterbalance to the present. A commensurate relation of the two establishes a poetic dynamics of "pastness of the present," that is, the concept that the past is inseparable from the present and represents its indivisible constituent. This idea was developed further in the *Four Quartets*, but *The Waste Land* first introduces it. A shift from past to present and vice versa continually transforms our vision of the past and the present, providing new perspectives and suggesting a fluidity and instability of human categories and experiences. The oligarchy is *seemingly* replaced by a multitude. *Seemingly* because it is not the chaos of his time that Eliot views with positive attitude. By introducing the concept of the past by alluding to ancient works of art and history, Eliot tries to overcome the chaotic state and establish a balanced unity between the two. Thus the textual disunity which is achieved by Eliot's discursive style serves to create an aesthetic of harmony, which is yet again a way of his ideology acting against the normative. Non-compliance is here represented by the chaoticity of the society which is to be ultimately redeemed and replaced by stability.

Eliot's theory of impersonality, expounded in his essay "Tradition and Individual Talent," is also in line with the idea of cultural unity. Relying on a "continual extinction of personality" (*The Sacred* 17) and "depersonalization" of his experience, an artist is supposed to achieve a universality of emotion. The writer is just a medium "in which impressions and experiences combine" (*The Sacred* 20) in order to create an "artistic emotion," which is again supposed to express a general truth and a general symbol. Yet a general truth and a general symbol depend upon a combination of political, ethical, aesthetical, and ideological perspectives, and it is certain that they fluctuate and vary in different cultural contexts and

milieus. Thus the powerless and the powerful are likely to have dissimilar ideas of a *common* truth. Depersonalization to a great extent equals de-individualization in the theory of impersonality and can be read as markedly ideological. It is moreover so because Reason is supposed to be superior to emotion; that is, emotions are to be controlled by Reason. An escape from a personal emotion and the tendency to reach universality by means of Reason is by and large striving for an artificial unity. Since emotions are depersonalized, so is Reason. By knowing that the impersonality theory stems from the concept of tradition and that it encompasses a writer's endeavor to obtain it and become part of the canon, we find that Reason is presented as normative. Prescribed norms are essentially ideological and so is the cultural and textual unity achieved by depersonalization of one's emotions.

As the very title of Eliot's essay "Ulysses, Order and Myth" suggests, myth and mythic patterning are seen as organizing structures. Similar to the idea of tradition, the task of the mythical method involves "manipulating parallel[s] between contemporaneity and antiquity" in order to control and give shape and significance "to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (*Selected Prose* 177). Eliot's discourse advocates the ideology of forced harmony which is to be achieved by "controlling," "ordering," and "giving shape." Paralleling the glorious past with the history of his time, Eliot emphasizes the necessity of restoring the past and conquering the contemporary disorder. The dogma of the normative and structured society prevails and is represented as an absolute necessity if the present chaos is to be overcome.

The mythic in *The Waste Land* is presented through a number of allusions to fertility rites and vegetation myths derived from Frazer's *Golden Bough* and Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*. As Rebecca Beasley states, although *The Waste Land* repeatedly enacts a sacrificial drowning, it is death rather than resurrection that is emphasized, and the wasteland is not returned to fertility by the end of the poem." She adds that even the final refrain "'Shantih, shantih, shantih,' translated by Eliot as 'the peace which passeth understanding' is inadequate" as it does not represent a resolution (*Theorists of Modernist Poetry* 85).

However, these allusions to Frazer's and Weston's books could be given a slightly different reading than the one Beasley offers. By depicting the mythic past and its possibilities for overcoming its

own difficulties, Eliot simply “speaks” in favor of the past and its hopes for the better times to come. On the other hand, by giving a picture of the present, without the possibility or even an attempt to reach a resolution, he accentuates the downfall and degradation of the present society. This, of course, puts emphasis on cultural and social disunity in general as present day men and women are not able to act communally. How, then, do the final words “Shantih, shantih, shantih” fit the text? One explanation could be that they represent textual disunity which purposely conforms with cultural disunity. Alternatively, these words can stand for both the philosophic understanding and acceptance of the given condition, which again brings social “peace” and cultural / textual unity. In both cases, they represent the textual aestheticization which conceals the ideology of order and cultural unity. As Kenneth Asher put it: “mythology will be far more than just the literary method suggested in the comments on *Ulysses*. He [Eliot] is intent on ordering not only the literary representation of reality but the reality itself” (*T. S. Eliot and Ideology* 63).

Allusions to figures such as Frazer and Weston, as well as the employment of motifs drawn from myth, serve to demonstrate the impossibility of separating the past and the present. In ideological terms, some values are to be preserved regardless of the social changes. Stability based on hierarchy and order is insisted upon. This stability is required in every field of human action: education, politics, art, everyday affairs, and culture in general. Eliot’s allusions, however, contribute to creating a new poetic form, but as far as ideas are concerned, it is as if he replaced Pound’s credo “Make It New” with “Make It Difficult” in order to make art and culture inaccessible to common people. Writing on the metaphysical poets, Eliot states:

it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists in present, must be *difficult*. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into its meaning. (*Selected Essays* 289)

The necessity of “forcing” and “dislocating” language in order to give it meaning points to Eliot’s idea of creating order by giving words and, in the wider context, culture a certain set of meanings. This process of language violation aims at segregating different social

groups as the process demands “a refined sensibility,” which is a quality of the intellectual elite. And this intellectual elitism is rather related to aristocratic elitism. Culture, in this respect, is solely a matter of intellectual sophistication reserved for the highest social groups, while allusions, as the inevitable mark of refinement, serve to distinguish between the refined and non-refined, that is, between the higher and lower classes. Eliot’s use of allusions is not only, as Menand suggests, “aesthetic compensation for the loss of epistemological or metaphysical certainty” (*Discovering Modernism* 49), but it also advances the ideology of social ordering, a design which promotes hierarchical *status quo*.

Acutely aware of modern society’s rupture and the inevitability of social changes that are about to affect literature, Eliot tries to reconcile the disorderly aspects of social life (which are reflected in his poetry) with his inclination towards the continuity that tradition implies. This reconciliation could be termed Eliot’s “poetics of disorderly order” which he achieves by aestheticizing life’s disorder and the nothingness it leads to. The interface between the social, personal, and poetic is reflected in his attempt to give meaning to the futility and meaninglessness of life. Eliot here acts on two planes: theoretical, which entails the revision of the canon and introduces several new theoretical concepts, and poetic, which is supported by his theoretical concepts.

Let us first examine what Eliot’s views on nothingness and life’s disorder are. The often quoted statement that he was a “classicist in literature, a royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion” (*For Lancelot Andrews* ix) tells us that he appreciated order and tradition above all. The idea that anyone who wants to write after he is twenty-five needs to acquire a sense of tradition emphasizes Eliot’s standpoint that tradition should serve the purpose of persevering continuity in literature, just as literature serves to maintain tradition in general. The concept of objective correlative, “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion” (*Selected* 145) also suggests order as the most appreciated detail in a literary work of art. This point of view, coupled with the idea of new works of art altering the existing order in literary history, designated Eliot both as a challenger of the existing order and the keeper of traditional order on the whole. Establishing order and thus giving meaning to life and art seems of the utmost importance to Eliot. How then do nothingness and disorder fit into his poetics? In what way

does Eliot reconcile nothingness and disorder on the one hand and the idea of order on the other?

Observing a great number of images and topics that make up the themes and structure of *The Waste Land*, one cannot help but notice a multitude of contrasting and seemingly incoherent representations, references, and subject matters. The first part of the poem, "The Burial of the Dead," shows a disparity between spring's cruelty and winter's warmth related to European political issues, which is followed by the imagery of the roots and branches that grow out of stony rubbish. The limitation of "son of man's" knowledge is viewed by the man's ability to see "only / A heap of broken images" (CP 38). There ensues a number of literary allusions to the Bible and *Tristan and Isolde*, a prophecy by Madam Sosostriis, and an image of London's Tower Bridge with a procession of a dead crowd. Finally, with a couple of allusions to Webster's *White Devil* and Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal*, Eliot makes a reference to the myth of Osiris and concludes by threatening and identifying the poetic subject with a "hypocrite lecteur": "You! Hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!" (CP 39). Incoherence points towards disorder.

The same tone and the motif of inconsistency follow the second part, "A Game of Chess." The story of a neurotic woman waiting for her lover shifts to a constantly interrupted dialogue of the two women in a restaurant about their friend Lil, her husband who is supposed to come back from the war, and how she spent her money on an abortion instead of making herself smart and getting teeth. Both upper and lower classes live a meaningless life of despair and hopelessness which is emphasized by purposeful grammatical ambiguity and insistence on the word "nothing":

Nothing again nothing.

‘Do

‘You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember

‘Nothing?’ (CP 41)

"The Fire Sermon" includes references to many figures: Elizabethan poets and playwrights, Goldsmith, St. Augustus, Verlaine, etc. The picture of the dead Thames and of foggy London shifts to a passionless and meaningless love-making scene with Tiresias as a witness. An image of urban London shifts to that of the Elizabethan period and then the section ends with Carthage being burnt down.

Once prosperous, Carthage was destroyed and the implication is that such destiny is awaiting London as well. Barren love making gives no hope for the future. Here, also, the idea of nothingness is emphasized:

'On Margate Sands.
I cannot connect
Nothing with nothing.
The broken fingernails of dirty hands.
My people humble people who expect
Nothing.' (CP 46)

"Death by Water" continues by giving the picture of Phlebas the Phoenician who drowned, and the reminder that he "was once handsome and tall as you" (47), which is again a reminder of human transience based on the contrast of the past and the present. There is no consolation or hope for both life and afterlife, only a sense of loss and the inevitable decay of human flesh.

The final part, "What the Thunder Said," again with the references to many traditional literary works, gives a pessimistic representation of the dead and the dying and the falling towers of both Asian and European capitals. The invitation to give (datta), sympathise (dayadhvam), and control (damyata) is answered as this part finishes with "the peace which passeth understanding" (shantih). Utter pessimism prevails, and it is suggested that both physical and spiritual decay be accepted with peace. However, "the peace" is not spiritually rewarding or consoling, but mere acceptance of the inevitable.

Eliot's allusions to a large number of classical literary works and myths contribute to the organization of *The Waste Land*. The references contrast the glorious past and its tradition with the disreputable present which again reinforces the feeling of spiritual void and meaninglessness. Pointing out tradition as the prime and ultimate focus of art and life on the whole, Eliot implies life without it is unfulfilling and barren. A sense of tradition and continuity makes life orderly. The idea of orderly life is represented by a series of seemingly random allusions integrated by the idea of present rupture. This concept is further developed by Eliot's extensive endnotes explaining his sources and making more comprehensible his principle plan: "Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance*" (CP 50). What he

modestly (or perhaps preposterously) calls incidental symbolism, also adds up to the poem as a whole.

Other things that make the poem whole are the fragments which are not related to one another on a first reading. Nevertheless, they become related as, conditionally speaking, the storyline develops. Such is the case with Madam Sosostris's prophesy of death by water, which is fulfilled in the section of the same title. The sexual scene between the typist and the clerk gets its full meaning in the pregnancy of another woman, Lil. However, her pregnancy will be terminated and sex thus made equally barren, bringing nothing but the feeling of loneliness and disappointment. Furthermore, Lil's uncertainty related to her husband's return from the war is reflected in the scene with a neurotic woman awaiting her lover. Intertwined in this way, those episodes become more orderly and meaningful.

As the images and events flow into one another, so do the characters. All the characters and their stories are interdependent so that they represent a story of Everyman, the story of the Mankind. In this respect *The Waste Land* resembles medieval morality plays that also center on human vices that lead to the non-being of humankind and our fall. This is even more so with the introduction of the androgynous character of Tiresias through whose eyes the whole action is observed. The sense of unity fills the fissures of non-being embodied in separate incidents and individual characters. With Tiresias, a multitude is reflected in oneness, while fragments of human consciousness still make a single consciousness of nothingness. As North notes, "the mixtures of styles, languages, and genres in *The Waste Land* signify a lost linguistic unity, but only by dramatizing its loss" ("Eliot, Lucacs, and the Politics" 178). In this respect, this poem could be considered a lamentation for the loss of general unity.

The insistence on the City as the venue for most of the incidents also contributes to a sense of wholeness in the text. Although Eliot names different geographical sites, London streets and the Thames are the main focus of the poem. This almost Aristotelian unity of place ultimately contributes to the establishing of order. Moreover, the political enmities and personal tragedies caused by the atrocities of World War I throughout Europe are reflected in the chaotic lives of the London inhabitants. They are passionless and dysfunctional due to the death and suffering that encircles them. Future prospects are prophesied to be gloomy and to lead to fatality. The post-World War I society in London, as well as elsewhere, shares the sense of an

ominous present and an unfulfilling future. Futility and pointlessness permeate every aspect of human life as well as many images that symbolize those feelings. Whether it is the image of a crowd of dead people over London Bridge ["A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many / I had not thought death had undone so many" (*CP* 39)], or the image of the Thames that does not testify that the city is alive ["The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers, / Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends / Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed" (42)], or the thunder's lament ["Over endless plains" (48)] all evoke the sentiment of loss and decay. It is these very emotions that give an overwhelming tone of hollowness to the poem.

Cultural and social disintegration in general can be overcome by an ideology of *cultural knowledge*, as Terry Eagleton suggests:

What the poem signifies, indeed, is not "the decay of Europe" or fertility *enabled* by such arcane or panoramic motifs. . . . Cultures collapse, but Culture survives, and its form is *The Waste Land*: this is the ideological gesture of the text, inscribed in the scandalous fact of its very existence. (*Criticism* 149)

By employing the term *cultural knowledge*, Eagleton refers to knowledge represented by numerous allusions and references to the ancient works of art and tradition. This knowledge is often related to London and its magnificent past. In so doing, Eliot uses the City as an objective correlative not only to convey the sense of futility and despair of post-war London and society in general, but also, by aestheticizing London, he presents an ideology that suggests the necessity of cultural and social order.

These images, which are desolate and empty, populated with the ghosts of the past, create the cityscape poetics which gives unity to the cultural disintegration. These poetics, which primarily rely on the aestheticization of the city, reconcile cultural, textual, and ideational oppositions and serve to propagate an ideology of organic unity of culture; that is, the unity which is in favor of the domineering class.

Even the structure of *The Waste Land*, with its discursive style and its seeming incoherence, gives the impression of a contradiction to Eliot's concept of cultural unity. This novelty of introducing a multilayered consciousness, and a number of poetic subjects, makes the poem structurally rather disjointed and for many readers renders it

unintelligible. Different parts of the poem, even sections within one part, are difficult to relate to each other and fail to make much sense even to many knowledgeable readers accustomed to such a way of writing. However, as Lawrence Rainey suggests, “in the new climate of taste, one that Eliot himself did much to usher in, there was no longer a tension between the text of *The Waste Land* and the claims to coherence” (*Revisiting The Waste Land* 117). Making the “incoherent” and fragmentary an acceptable poetic idiom, Eliot succeeded in creating a new aesthetic form. Such a “disjunctive form” with “the absence of transition” (*Approaches to Teaching* 140), at first glance, shows a disruptive and disunified cultural reality; however, when scrutinized more carefully, the poem is clearly loaded with the ideology of its contrary states: order and unity that propagate no changes. And this unchanging condition is in favor of the royalist and Anglo-Catholic politics that Eliot stood for. This is a locus where his poetry, poetics, and social engagement meet and overlap to the greatest possible extent.

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***The Waste Land* and Critique**

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Personal Relief or Cultural Critique?

The epigraph to *The Waste Land* drafts, published in 1971, was Eliot's claim that the poem was nothing more than the relief "of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life" (North 112). If that is true, then the poem's criticism of society and culture cannot have any independent importance and the poem's value would best emerge when it is seen against Eliot's own biography. Most important recent studies have read the poem in personal terms. The death of a close friend in the First World War, the difficulties of his marriage to Vivienne Haigh-Wood, his continuing love of Emily Hale, and even Eliot's use of make-up have captured critics' attention. On the other hand, critics have tried to show that the poem has some social importance by revealing its complicity with the so-called ideologies of modernism: among others, sexism, heterosexism, racism, and the metaphysics of the self. By undermining the poem's commitment to these ideologies, the critic performs an important social service. Both of these critical approaches, though, give short shrift to the experiences of early readers, who often read the poem as a social and cultural commentary, either nihilistic or redemptive, on modernity.¹

The dominance of these approaches is understandable. Many early readings that focused on the social and cultural elements of the poem too quickly took Eliot's notes on the poem as authoritative; this yielded a reading of *The Waste Land* as a narrative of mythical regeneration (Southam 126-128). Such readings underplayed the complexity of the poem, the disturbing effect it can have on the reader, and the elements of ideology that are genuinely present in it. But it is a mistake to dismiss the poem's criticism of society and culture on the basis of these earlier interpretations—after all, even the

best reading of it as a personal poem still insists that the protagonist's "personal wasteland is a universal condition" (Mayer 268). Eliot's experiences between the wars were hardly unique, and the emotions he may have felt probably differed very little from the emotional responses of others at the time. Still today, even outside the academy, the poem remains popular. We might account for this fact by saying that the poem is a status symbol (Rainey 81), and that readers feel more pleasure in having read the poem than in reading it. But the poem's popularity also suggests that, even for readers unaware of the facts of Eliot's life, there is something intellectually and emotionally compelling about his most famous poem. In fact, *The Waste Land* can be read profitably as many early readers did—as cultural critique—even given Eliot's own attempt to dismiss it as "rhythmical grumbling" [an assertion that was probably an attempt to gain more attention for *Four Quartets* (Moody, *Tracing* 115)]. Traditional interpretations of the poem as a narrative of regeneration are certainly inadequate, but the poem has social and cultural value beyond these analyses. The best future readings of the poem will have to balance biography and history, emotion and reason, the personal and the general.

One way to improve this balance is to read *The Waste Land* on analogy with critical theory: through its critique of the world on the one hand, and our ideals on the other, *The Waste Land* tries to offer a way out of the negative world in which the poem finds itself (see Moody, *Tracing* 129). I will begin by discussing what I mean by "critique," and then argue that the poem is centered on a social critique of the world (the unreal city and sin) and a cultural critique of our ideals (love and myth). The essay will close with a reading of the poem's final stanzas informed by these criticisms. The poem has value as a cultural and social critique, as early readers sensed, but it goes beyond the idea of criticizing our society from a specific standpoint. It is utopian, not because of what exists, but despite it.

"Critique" can mean something like "an argument against." A critic has a certain standpoint and we are used to reading works of literature which criticize on the basis of an ideal standpoint. Plenty of poems follow *The Waste Land's* criticism of modern culture and society; Laurence Binyon's *The Burning of the Leaves*, for instance, is filled with the vocabulary of *The Waste Land*—flame, ruin, fallen towers, ghosts, loss—but concludes its survey of post-war Europe with the

claim that “Earth cares for her own ruins, naught for ours. / Nothing is certain, only the certain spring” (Allott 50). Spring and nature, here, are the standpoints against which the ruins of the blitz can be measured; spring will come again.

But critique also refers to a more specific form of philosophical thought: the investigation of the standards that we use. Philosophy traditionally uses human reason to reveal the real structure of the world. In the eighteenth century, Kant asked: how do we know that reason is up to the task? That question was the start of critical philosophy. Instead of trying to reveal the real structure of the world, Kant tried to work out what our reason must be like and what it could do. In other words, he asked, given that we have the experiences we do, what must we be like for us to have these experiences? His question led him to an investigation of the conditions of the possibility of our experience (e.g., Kant 122). In the nineteenth and especially the twentieth century, this approach was expanded in two ways. First, Fichte and Hegel took it beyond its purely philosophical origins and into the study of society and culture. Second, while Kant and Hegel were concerned to justify the existence and necessity of reason—they investigated reason as a standard in order to give it a firm basis—thinkers following them often used a similar method to criticize social and philosophical assumptions. Marx subtitled *Capital*, for instance, “a critique of political economy.” He sought to discover the conditions for the possibility of our economic system. But whereas Kant wanted to defend reason against skepticism, Marx made a critique of capitalism’s dominant ideologies in order to show that it contradicted itself: the proclaimed freedom of individuals paradoxically leads to their enslavement.

Many later Marxists took a communist economic system as the viewpoint from which to judge capitalism (see Postone 43-83), but critique need not take such a perspective at all. Rather than taking one standpoint as the right one and looking down from it on the world, critique implies that we should see if any given standpoint measures up to its own standards. Kant attempted this for reason, which he wanted to defend, and Marx attempted it for capitalism, which he wanted to surpass. This is called imminent critique: we take the standpoint of the culture or society which we are criticizing and see what we get out of it. Ultimately, thinking in this way leads beyond Kant’s conditions of possibility question. He looked backwards to ask, given our experience, how things must be; critical theorists look

forward as well, to ask how things could be better given the world we live in: of what possibility is our society the condition?

A critical theory, then, is part of an attempt to make this utopia—the way things could be, at best, given the world we live in—actual. As with earlier critical philosophies, a critical theory tries to explain how things must be given our experience. It then goes on to ask this second, forward looking question, but not from a particular standpoint. It tries to draw out the consequences of the ideas and facts of the world as it is, so a critical theory is on nobody's side. All political positions and social and cultural forms are equally subject to its arguments. The key is to investigate the standards we use, in the context of the world in which we use them, and to see how those standards and that world can be improved.²

And this, I think, provides a productive analogy for reading *The Waste Land*. Unlike much modern literature, but like a critical theory, *The Waste Land* has no ideal within it. The poem criticizes the world with the metaphor of the unreal city and shows how the ideals we hold onto in the face of this unreal city—love, literature, and myth—are insufficient. But instead of looking like simple opposition, the poem leaves us with a feeling analogous to what Eliot would describe in 1949 as “a hope inseparable from a despair so different from that of the nihilists” (Moody, *Thomas Stearns* xxi), perhaps remembering his own lines from *Four Quartets*, to which *The Waste Land* might have led him:

The only hope, or else despair
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre—
To be redeemed from fire by fire. (CP 144)

Four Critiques: the Unreal City, Purging Sin, Love and Literature, Mysteries and Regeneration

In an article about *Ulysses* published in 1923, Eliot wrote that “instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method” (*Prose* 178). We might read this as a defense of his own poem, published the previous year: just as *Ulysses* is structured around the myth of Odysseus, so *The Waste Land* is structured around the myth of the Fisher King, who will lead to the regeneration of the “unreal city.” But the final lines offer us no obvious salvation:

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
Poi s'ascese nel foco che gli affina
[Then he hid himself in the fire that refines them]
Quando fiam uti chelidon – O swallow swallow
[When shall I be like the swallow?]
Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie
[The Prince of Aquitaine at/to/in the ruined tower]
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
Shantih shantih shantih. (CP 50)³

The only line here which Eliot did not quote is “These fragments...” The fragments themselves, this suggests, are the quoted lines which precede this one. The meaning of line 430 is particularly opaque, resting on a number of uncommon meanings. ‘Shored’ usually means to run a ship aground or bring it into port, but it has a number of alternative meanings, most importantly here, cleansed. The heroine of a novel might lament her ruin, but in the plural, ‘ruins’ means the injury done to a person or thing. And ‘against’ in this context means towards with hostile intent, as in many biblical phrases (Luke 14:31). A speaker who claims to have shored fragments against her ruins would have cleansed those fragments in order to use them as a talisman to ward off her downfall or injury. The fragments themselves sum up *The Waste Land*’s four-fold critique. The first two fragments sum up a critique of our social realities, what the poem calls the Unreal City and the sin it harbors. The two last fragments point us towards the poem’s cultural critique of our ideals: love, sex and literature on the one hand, and the charlatanry of mysteries and the inefficacy of mythological regeneration on the other. The poem is an unremitting critique of myths and the regeneration that they promise.

The first fragment, “London Bridge is falling down,” is the first line of a well-known nursery rhyme. There are many versions, but they all suggest that London Bridge is falling into ruin, and we have to build it up again. In the version that Eliot seems to quote, the singers suggest that they “build it up with mortar and bricks.” But water, they point out, will wash the mortar away, so they will “build it up with silver and gold.” But that will be stolen, so “we’ll set a man to watch at night” . . . and so on, with no solution to the problem. This line sums up the poem’s critique of the Unreal City, where “Under the brown fog of a winter dawn, / A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many” (CP 39). In

this passage, the speaker asks a ghost about a corpse the ghost had “planted,” just as London Bridge was said to be built on the bodies of sacrificed children (Gomme 346). The city, here temporarily identified as London, has been built on the sacrifice of innocence.

We might yearn for an earlier kind of city, one of “inexplicable splendour” (CP 45), not built on sacrifice; perhaps we look back to the beauty and justice of a Renaissance London, the city of “Elizabeth and Leicester / Beating oars / The stern was formed / A gilded shell / Red and gold” (45). But the poem scoffs at this yearning for a golden age: the form of this seemingly peaceful verse is uncomfortably close to the form of an earlier verse in this song. “Leicester” echoes “the river sweats”; the red and gold boat is just a red-sailed barge; and Elizabeth’s winds carrying the peal of bells downstream are matched by today’s barges washing logs down Greenwich reach. If we had any lingering doubts that Elizabethan London was no better a city than modern London, they are removed by the White Towers from which the bells peal: throughout the poem, towers are falling and inverted. The unreal city of modern life is no better or worse than cities have always been.

Here the unreal city seems to be identified with London alone, but later the poem broadens the identification to the bases of European civilization (Jerusalem, Athens, and Alexandria) and one of its cultural capitals, Vienna (48). The unreal city turns out to be not a place, but an entire society. In this context, the nursery rhyme’s impossible task of building up London Bridge takes on a new meaning. *The Waste Land* suggests that the nursery rhyme singers are wrong to prop up the bridge. Rather, we should let the whole city fall. No matter how we try to secure the foundations, we cannot hide the nature of the city, and something will always go wrong: erosion, thievery, laziness . . .

But what, other than brown fog and wishful thinking, is wrong with the unreal city? In short, it is filled with vice. The second fragment, which can be translated “then he hid himself in the fire that refines them,” ends a speech given by Arnaut Daniel in Dante’s *Purgatorio* (XXVI.148) in which he grieves for his past sins and hopes that he will make it through purgatory. This canto was particularly dear to Eliot (*Essays* 255-256), who was perhaps attracted by the theme of poets paying penance for their wrongs and finding a new form of poetry in prayer (Dante, *Purgatorio* 595). The sinners pile up as quickly in *The Waste Land*’s unreal city as they do in

Dante's divine comedy: the adulterers of "A Game of Chess," the deserting nymphs, traders like the "invert" Mr. Eugenides, the young man carbuncular (a date-rapist?), and the Thames maidens of "The Fire Sermon." Nobody in the unreal city is terribly bothered by their turpitude ["My people humble people who expect / Nothing" (*CP* 46)], and they show little inclination to repent. The poem itself, though, shares more of Arnaut's shame, and tries to replicate his pilgrimage through a kind of purgatory. The pilgrimage takes place in a desert landscape, a space of endless, mindless, thirsty movement: "Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think" (47). The mindset which is, in terms of sin, a teeming city, is a burning desert in terms of salvation.

Arnaut's experience shows us the necessity of fire for purgation and links to Eliot's references to the Buddha and Augustine. Eliot compresses the Buddha's fire sermon to "burning burning burning burning" (46), but this speech originally told us that the senses and the mind burn us "with birth, aging and death, with sorrows, with lamentations, with pains, with griefs, with despairs" (Ñanamoli). While Arnaut is cleansed by flame, for the Buddha we are deeply pained by it. We should aim to be free from the burning of this world.

In this section Eliot also alludes to Augustine's *Confessions*, "To Carthage then I came / . . . O Lord Thou pluckest me out / O Lord Thou pluckest / burning" (46). For Augustine, nothing human, nothing within the 'unreal city,' can save us—"Why then should I be concerned for human readers to hear my confessions? It is not they who are going to 'heal my sickness'" (Augustine 180)—and he was removed from the city of sin only by God's hand. Similarly, our salvation will not be achieved through anything within the unreal city. In the terms of Arnaut's purgation and the Buddha's sermon, we can say that there is nowhere for us to stand in this world outside the flames. But if we are as lucky as the Buddha and Arnaut, perhaps the fire will burn itself. We might be able to free ourselves from the world in which there is only burning if we go *through* the burning itself, if, in a sense, we let everything—senses, mind and world—burn itself out. At one stroke we will be purified and escape from the flames of purification. Fire is necessary for purgation; but that fire itself must also be burned; and that cannot be achieved by anything within the unreal city.³

The Waste Land enacts this burning by critiquing the world around it. It recognizes that everything is aflame; that is, it recognizes that there is nothing in this society which can function as a source of critique. I have suggested that the poem criticizes the unreal city as a place of vice, but the critique itself remains somewhat opaque at this point. Anyone can say brown fog and sin are bad. It is in thinking through the last fragments of the poem that we can see what it would really mean to let the fire burn itself. We will be left with an extraordinary, radical rejection of the world as it exists.

The first and second fragments sum up the poem's critique of modern society; the third and fourth fragments move on from social critique to interrogate cultural ideals. Cultural forms are often taken to be antidotes to social ills—Eliot himself did this later in his life—but *The Waste Land* is as much a critique of cultural ideals as it is of the society they are meant to ameliorate (Williams 224-238). In the third fragment, the ideals of love and art are rejected as possible origins from which to critique the Unreal City and sin. "When will I be like the swallow," refers to the myth of Philomel, which turns up twice before this: once following the prospective liaison of Sweeney and Mrs Porter and once depicted above the mantel in "A Game of Chess." The quote comes from the *Pervigilium Veneris*, when the poet asks "when shall I be like the swallow, that I may cease to be voiceless?" a question an ignored poet might well ask. The swallow is a bird of beautiful song, "tunes of love issue . . . trilling from her mouth," tunes which listeners fail to decipher as "a sister's complaint of a barbarous lord" (North 64). Although the poet is requesting that we give heed to his song as we give heed to the swallow, our attention would be ambiguous: we understand the swallow to be singing of love when she is singing of brutality. Does the poet really want this kind of ignorant audience?

In fact, Philomel, the swallow, is as voiceless as the poet and will only gain her voice when we humans hear the "love song" of the swallow for what it is, a tale of barbarism. We have to stop believing that the swallow is talking of love [as in Tennyson's *The Princess*, from which "O swallow swallow" is quoted (IV.81)]. This is confirmed by the passage in "A Game of Chess": "And still she cried, and still the world pursues, / 'Jug Jug' to dirty ears. / And other withered stumps of time / Were told upon the walls" (CP 40). The story of Philomel, which we mistakenly hear as a love-story in the swallow's song, is just a "withered stump" disgracing a sylvan scene.⁴

Love, as we see, hear, and think about it is a thin veneer, beneath which lie adultery, rape, murder, and cannibalism.

Sweeney and Mrs Porter's lustful liaison is a less subtle tale of love: the old army song about Mrs Porter is really about prostitutes; "they wash their feet in soda water" means something like "they should take care not to give venereal diseases to the soldiers" (Southam 168-169). The story of Sweeney and Porter ends with a quote from Verlaine's poem *Parsifal* based on Wagner's opera of the same name. In the opera, Parsifal receives a footbath (although not with soda water) before approaching the Holy Grail. So *The Waste Land* links war-time prostitution to both "love" and the myth of the grail. It even undermines Verlaine's ecstatic line ("and O those children's voices, singing in the dome!") by following it with "Twit twit twit / Jug jug jug jug jug jug / So rudely forc'd" (CP 43), a reference back to Philomel's swallow song. We are reminded that people might attend to the beauty of children, but just as often bury them under bridges, or, like Philomel, feed them to their fathers. And this swallow song has the additional benefit of suggesting that Sweeney is a twit and Porter a jug. The poem elsewhere pictures love as a downfall, as with the Thames daughters ("Richmond and Kew undid me") and the "lovely" woman who stoops to folly; or failure, as in the Hyacinth girl passage; or a commercial transaction as with Mr Eugenides; or the root of deceit and confusion with Albert and Lil.

For each instance of love, *The Waste Land* also casts a withering glance at the forms in which we represent that love to ourselves. Interspersed throughout these stories are allusions to *Hamlet*, Marvell, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *Tristan and Isolde*, and more, as well as those already mentioned. *The Waste Land* is not rejecting artistic representation altogether, but the poem certainly has a jaded take on art's focus on love. In particular, two of the most pleasant traditional themes in the representation of love are very much put in their place: spring, which I will discuss below, and the *carpe diem* theme, famously put forth in Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." *The Waste Land* turns Marvell's "time's winged chariot" into the rattle of bones and the sound of motor cars bringing Sweeney to Porter: here *carpe diem* is not a literary motivation to an active and love filled life, but a spur to prostitution. To press home this critique, Eliot uses a fourteen line form at the beginning of "The Fire Sermon" that looks like a sonnet (see Moody, *Thomas Stearns* 89). As with a Shakespearean sonnet, it closes with a couplet; but whereas poems in

the Shakespearean sonnet form tend to celebrate love, Eliot pairs this first paragraph with a second sonnet (187-199) that breaks down into the song of Mrs. Porter, her daughter, and their foot bath. Between the questioning of *carpe diem*, the disintegration of the sonnet form, and the allusions to the pained song of the swallow, *The Waste Land* could be a manifesto demanding that art not be about love, but about pain and disgust.

When literature is not speaking of love, it often speaks of timeless myths, and the final fragment sums up *The Waste Land*'s critique of mythological regeneration and mysterious knowledge: love and literature will not save us, and neither will a myth of regeneration or some esoteric knowledge. "Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie" is a line taken from de Nerval's poem *El Deschidado*. It brings to mind the Fisher King (who sits in a decayed kingdom, much as the Black Prince is here in a broken-down tower) and the tarot, since the falling tower is a tarot card, generally interpreted as pointing to chaos and disillusion. The tower itself stands for "false concepts and institutions that we take for real" (Wang). It could not mesh better with *The Waste Land*'s attempts to disenchant our myths, but given Eliot's professed unfamiliarity with the tarot deck (see note to line 46), it is probably unsafe to assign any firm meaning to the towers which recur throughout the poem. The conjunction of these two allusions does, though, point us to the poem's last critique of ideals. Both the mythical understanding and control of the world, and the possibility of its mythical regeneration, are undermined.

Madame Sosostris tells the cards in *The Waste Land*. Tarot, like other mysteries and myths, are a way to order the world and to understand it. Such myths and mysteries seem quite powerful, especially if, as with the tarot, they promise clairvoyance. If we can predict events, then we can control them. But Sosostris advises her customers to fear death by water when they should fear a "handful of dust" (CP 38). Her lack of skill shows us that modern "knowledge of the mysteries is a debased parody" of the ancient rites (Moody, *Thomas Stearns* 83), which are represented in this poem by Tiresias: he travelled to hell, metamorphosed into a woman and back again, prophesied, and warned Pentheus against suppressing the cult of Dionysus in Euripides' *Bacchae*.

But just as Elizabethan London was no better than twentieth century London, so we should be wary of assuming that there was a Tiresian golden age of myth and mystery. 'Madame Sesotris' is the

professional name of Mr Scogan in Huxley's *Crome Yellow*, who reads the cards at a charity fair while dressed in drag. So Madame Sosostris is the cross-dressing modern analogue of the trans-sexual prophet Tiresias, "old man with wrinkled female breasts" (CP 43), and if she is misled, we can assume that Tiresias was too. Modern tarot might be debased, but it has not fallen from something more pure: prophecies and visions have always been perpetrated by charlatans, and even in ancient times the mysteries were 'debased.' But then we cannot appeal to myths and mysteries in the face of the city's turpitude. They are, and always have been, symptoms of that turpitude, not cures. We have a right to be skeptical when Eliot writes that "what Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem" (note to line 218), given how simple the explanation seems. But it is true insofar as what Tiresias sees is myth and the mysteries playing themselves out, without salvation for those who embody them.

The same can be said for the ideas of regeneration that *The Waste Land* goes on to critique: the myth of the Fisher King and the mythical symbolism of spring. Spring is usually, and for good reason, held out as the ideal season in poetry. It is the time of regeneration and rebirth. But this can only be true if the world which is being reborn is a good one. If that premise is denied—if the world in question is a bad one, like the unreal city—then its rebirth or regeneration is only the repetition of evil. In that case we could reasonably say that "April is the cruelest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land" (CP 35), because if the world is not inherently good, the regeneration of it in spring is baleful. The same would go for the supernatural regeneration promised by the myth of the Fisher King. The most explicit reference to this myth (ll. 423-425) denies the value of wholesale regeneration (see below); the Fisher King should not want to regenerate the state of mind represented by the unreal city and the desert. At best, the speaker could set his lands in order—a task to be performed just before death (Isaiah 38:1).

This, then, is *The Waste Land's* version, or subversion, of what Eliot called the "mythical method." The mysteries that promise esoteric understanding are the practices of charlatans; they cannot give us the control over events that we seek. The myths of regeneration promise the regeneration of a degenerate world and further imply that any regeneration will be purely personal. *The Waste Land* takes the standpoint of these ideals and follows out their logic: love and literature are hollow, based on exploitation; myths of regeneration

falsely assume a good world but are in fact the result of an evil one. The poem is a critique of the myths and mysteries, which are in fact tied to, and promise the continuation of, the unreal city. It is not a reprise of them.

DA!

The four fragments that *The Waste Land's* final speaker "shores" sum up the most important trends within the poem: these are the fragments that the speaker, a new Hieronymo, fits for us. Because they conclude the poem's critiques of the realities and ideals of the unreal city, the speaker can use these fragments to be free of those realities and ideals, hold them against ruins. But the final two lines throw the critical nature of the poem into doubt. The thunder's implied commands—"Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata."—"to give,' 'to sympathize,' and 'to control,' seem to provide us with a standpoint or three within the poem, on which we can base our criticisms of the modern world.

The least likely standpoint for us is *Dayadhvam*, 'sympathize.' The gloss on this command gives us an image of people trapped in themselves, as in a prison, unable to reach out to others (*CP* 49). It makes sense to escape from oneself if the world around one is a good one, but we have seen from the foregoing that the world around us is not good at all. If the people escape, they would be turning themselves over to the sin of the unreal city. The command to sympathize cannot be carried out: it would require escape from the self as prison, but life outside is worse than it is inside.

More promising is *Datta*, 'give.' We are told that we have given "The awful daring of a moment's surrender / Which an age of prudence can never retract" (49). This goes to the heart of what many of us want to believe: that one moment of bliss is the benchmark against which we should set the dullness of prudence. But it would be a mistake to read "by this, and this only, have we existed" (49) as a plea in favor of the moment of sexual surrender. We can look kindly on such surrender only if the regeneration of the world as it exists is a good thing. In a bad world, that by which we exist—here, literally sex—cannot be affirmed. Inhabitants of the unreal city might well feel sympathy, even envy, for lovers who surrender to moments of passion, but that does not mean we can escape the desert by emulating them.

The most promising command is *Damyata*, control. The gloss to *Datta* recorded a loss of control, reason's surrender to passion. By contrast, *Damyata* is glossed with the image of a boat which responds properly to the commands of its pilot in a calm sea, just as reason can control the 'boat' of passion: "your heart would have responded / Gaily, when invited, beating obedient / To controlling hands" (49). But this passage is less optimistic than it looks. Eliot's initial imagery of the unreal city was suggested by Baudelaire's *Les Sept Vieillards*, (note to line 60) which ends with the imagery of a boat: "My reason tried to take over, but in vain: its efforts were all thwarted by the storm, and my soul danced and danced like some old mastless barge heaved on a monstrous shoreless sea" (Baudelaire 179). Reason is the controlling faculty in the human boat, the controlling hands of Eliot's image, while the heart or soul is that which is to be controlled. The speaker in Baudelaire's poem fails to control the soul, because rather than a calm sea, he encountered a tempest. Similarly, *The Waste Land's* image is conditional: your heart would have responded, but the condition which would produce this result is not in place. Reason did not invite the heart to respond, and we are plunged back into *Datta's* surrender of reason to passion. The poem does not tell us why, but this section might be tied up with Eliot's visit to a psychotherapist during the time he was working on *The Waste Land* (Miller 370-371). "Would have responded" could be a diagnosis of some kind, opening the possibility that in the future the heart will respond gaily.

At best we can say that it might. But, between the glosses on the thunder's DA and the final paragraph I have been discussing, we read "I sat upon the shore / Fishing, with the arid plain behind me / Shall I at least set my lands in order?" (*CP* 50). The Fisher King was supposed to bring rebirth to a world which, *The Waste Land* implies, deserved to lie in ruins. He is setting his lands in order so that he can die; against death the speaker holds his fragments. The thunder's commands are like these fragments: not standpoints from which the world can be criticized, but critiques of the world and our ideals of community, individuality, passion, love, and reason.

Still, the poem ends with a prayer for a peace that must be pursued in the burning of what burns us. The unreal city's society and culture burns and must itself be consigned to the flames. There is no existing image of a better city to be salvaged from it. The paradox of the poem is that the reader should understand this total negation as the closest we can come to regeneration: the poem takes up the realities

and ideals of modern culture only to rigorously criticize them. It points to a utopia by way of critique alone.

For a post-war, liberal, secular audience there is something very unsettling about this. The ideals we tend to hold onto, if we want to hold on to any, are the ideals which *The Waste Land* attacks: the righteousness of individual desire and passion, the possibility of regeneration and the value of art. With nothing to put in their place, we seem to be left only with nihilism—or a leap of faith, such as Eliot's turn to Anglicanism, his own "despair so unlike the despair of nihilism." *The Waste Land* comes before this turn, of course, and the analogy I have drawn between the poem and critical theory suggests that we might find an alternative to either genuine nihilism or conservative religion in the idea of critique itself. Like Eliot's religion, critique can be seen as "the way of despair" (Hegel 49) in which one never seems to come to the end, but must, nonetheless, keep criticizing, in the hope that the non-existing ideal will be reached. On the one hand, then, Eliot's religious turn might not be the only way forward from the total critique of *The Waste Land*. We might keep hoping to find something more congenial at the end of the critique: the possibility for which this world is the condition. On the other hand, we could re-investigate Eliot's understanding and commitment to the Christian religion, to see how it might involve more than knee-jerk bigotry. We might need to question the received narrative of Eliot's later career, to consider whether his later poetry, and his social and cultural criticism, can be read in a way which is not out only to bolster or to undermine a presupposed conservatism, but instead carries on this critical project.

Endnotes

¹ "Critical analysis is now thought of in terms of bringing to light the ideologies of the self and of modernism that the poem tries so scrupulously to hide . . . the poem is now read deconstructively as a means of getting beneath the surface of modernity in order to expose the workings of its cultural drives and desires" (Selby 139). For particular instances see Miller, who suggests that *The Waste Land* was an elegy for Jean Verdenal (Miller, 126-135) and uses Eliot's use of make-up to bolster his case for a reading of the poem informed by Eliot's latent homosexuality (380-393); Sharratt both states the plausibility of the idea that *The Waste Land* is a "reflection" of Eliot's state of mind following his first marriage, and suggests that "personal" readings of the poem are driven by an attempt to undermine the modernist canon (Moody, *Companion* 224, 232). For earlier readings, see the articles collected in Tate,

particularly Aiken's "An Anatomy of Melancholy" and Brooks' "T. S. Eliot," and the reviews and new critical readings in North, 137-209.

² I have written only about Frankfurt School critical theory here, which is a specific approach to intellectual inquiry, rather than the general field of critical theory, which is often taken to include every sort of twentieth century theory. Even within these bounds, what I have said here about critical theory is obviously very selective. The foundational essay is by Horkheimer (188-243). The issues are dealt with clearly and concisely by Geuss. For a reasonably approachable take on Kant, see Pinkard 19-45. For a good explanation of immanent critique, which focuses specifically on Adorno, see Jarvis 3-11.

³ Compare Donne's "I am a little world," in which the speaker asks God to give his tears the power to wash the world before realizing that "it must be burnt; alas the fire / Of lust and envy have burnt it heretofore, / And made it fouler; let their flames retire, / And burn me O Lord, with a fiery zeal / Of thee and thy house, which doth in eating heal." For Donne's poem (Donne 310-311), as for *The Waste Land*, a dry world is purified through fire, and, as for Augustine, purification or salvation cannot be discovered in the world of the present.

⁴ This phrase comes from Cowper's "Conversation," in a passage very relevant to the themes of speech and love which culminate in this fragment. In fact, Cowper's poem echoes almost every motif in *The Waste Land*: lust, speech, disgrace, sterility, and flame: "Not even the vigorous and headlong rage / Of adolescence or a firmer age, / Affords a plea allowable or just, / For making speech the pamperer of lust; / But when the breath of age commits the fault, / 'Tis nauseous as the vapour of a vault, / So withered stumps disgrace the sylvan scene, / No longer fruitful and no longer green, / The sapless wood divested of the bark / Grows fungus, and takes fire at every spark" (Cowper 83).

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“The Room Enclosed”:¹ Eliot’s Settings

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Dust inbreathed was a house . . .

—“Burnt Norton”

“My house is a decayed house,” writes T. S. Eliot in “Gerontion,” and yet little attention has been given to the domestic spaces Eliot recreates throughout his poetry (*CP* 21). While critics have attended to many facets of Eliot’s writing, there seems a curious elision. Yes, his poetry harks to the landscape,² and yes it is often a City Poetry,³ but the speaker who wanders in Eliot’s *Prufrock and Other Observations*, *The Waste Land*, and *Four Quartets* does so on the street and in tea rooms, bedrooms, old parlours, typists’ rooms, and old houses.

Rooms are described throughout contemporary and modern American poetry within stanzas, so that the room might be imitated or reflected in the shape of the stanza. Grappling with particularly twentieth century questions of place, the stanza comes to take on its literal etymology, becoming a kind of linguistic room or inner space in which poets can register their concerns and impressions of city life. In returning to the etymological roots of the word *stanza*, Eliot not only engages with an old conceit of western poetry but also reinvents that conceit to accommodate the conditions of twentieth century urban life. And as the stanza has been such a place to respond to contemporary experience, the pages of Eliot’s poetry become places riddled with the tensions of domesticated city life.

While attention has been given to the relationship between Victorian architecture and fiction (as in Victoria Rosner’s *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* and Julia Brown’s *Bourgeois Interior*), Eliot’s urban poetry also bears traces of struggles with the environments it describes. For example, when Eliot’s speaker expresses feelings of suffocation at tea with the lady of “Portrait of a Lady,” he does so from within closed stanzas. The closure is enforced

through rhyme, as in the lines “Now that the lilacs are in bloom / She has a bowl of lilacs in her room.” Here and elsewhere, specifically throughout “Prufrock,” even the idea of a bloom is trapped by the “room” where it takes place.^{4,5} With these situations rendered in the space of their room-like stanzas, Eliot’s earlier poetry offers insight into—and replication of—the intensity of domestic closure, through the stricture and eventual erasure of form. This exceptional departure from a sense of informing order occurs in *The Waste Land*, in which the lack of elucidating form is a structuring absence.

Such poetry is answerable. Mikhail Bakhtin writes of this phenomenon in “Art and Answerability,” in which he disapproves of art that is

Too self-confident, audaciously self-confident, and too high-flown, for it is in no way bound to answer for life. And, of course, life has no hope of ever catching up with art of this kind. “That’s too exalted for us”—says life. “That’s art, after all! All we’ve got is the humble prose of living.” (1)

The “humble prose of living” is taken up by Eliot when he writes “I made this” [“Marina” (*CP* 72)]; note that this “humble prose of living” tends to allude to the place of living in Eliot, too, as his poems use rooms and post-war cities—particularly in the case of *The Waste Land*—as vantage points for observations. In this way, this poetry is comprehensively “answerable.” What Bakhtin abstractly seeks as a “unity of answerability” becomes actualized in the unity of Eliot’s attempts to address the space of life in his poems (2).

Bakhtin’s short essay on answerability ends with a call to make art that matches life. When life is particularly urban, though, it comes up against the strictures of living spaces—particularly rooms. There appears to be a physical and emotional reaction to urban life stimulating the poet to make more emotionally accommodating rooms within his or her poems, rendering forms inwardly, often to critical effect. Philosophers, environmental psychologists, and urban theorists have considered the implications of such a Russian doll effect of experience in houses. Edward Casey reflects on multiple conceptions of space, eventually arguing that the parameters of experience had in a house are more informative than the actual physical parameters of the house.⁶ Casey claims that the home, however small, becomes a “place-world, a world of places.” As Casey continues with this line of thinking, he arrives at a point relevant to Eliot’s rooms:

What matters [in a house] is the degree of intimacy and intensity of our experience there; when these are acutely felt, the very distinction between universe and world . . . becomes otiose. . . . By exploring the intimacy of a house *room by room*, that is to say, place by place . . . The exploration is not architectural, much less geometrical; it is a matter of rooms as dreamed, imagined, remembered—and *read*. (290)

Whether in the room of a “one night cheap hotel” or the one described in “A Game of Chess,” what is being described in Eliot’s poetry extends beyond the room and answers to life at large, or “the world.” And as we move from Eliot’s first rooms—“a life composed so much” [“Portrait of a Lady” (*CP* 8)] where intimacy and intensity are often cause for squirming—to Eliot’s last rooms, marked by “the walls, the wainscot and the mouse,” we note an exploration not just of space, but of reading.

Rooms are described in the Victorian manner—as privacy containers—throughout Eliot’s “Prufrock” and lend themselves to traditional readings. By the time of *The Waste Land*, though, with all walls down, “reading” the universe as “imagined” becomes difficult. Tracing the evolution from the stricture of “Prufrock,” to the seeming formlessness of *The Waste Land* to the *Four Quartets* cannot help but make one curious: how do Eliot’s poetical turns towards and away from architectural spaces (stairs, corridors, corners, and windows) direct his reader? What outside / inside barriers are being broken down by this generally philosophical wandering, and what new poetic barriers come to stand for walls in this inner-outer space?⁷ Out in this open space, where is the reader meant to stand?

In her work focused on domestic spaces and writing, Victoria Rosner affirms that literature springs from, and is generated by, the spaces constructed for private life: the house’s rooms, kitchens, corners, and frames (2). Her only note on Eliot is that

Many British modernist writers focused their attention on the structure and function of domestic spaces and found little to praise. “My house is a decayed house,” complains the speaker in T. S. Eliot’s ‘Gerontion,’ charging the Victorian home of lingering past its time. In modernist texts whatever smacks of the radical—transgressive sexuality, feminism, or the spirit of the avant-garde—is either accommodated with difficulty by the domestic or simply shunted outdoors . . . Yet . . . though old-fashioned rooms are unsatisfying, they can be hard to think beyond and hard to leave behind. (2-4)

It is worth considering if Rosner's claim holds: is the difficult outside? In Eliot, almost definitely not. Firstly, because what Rosner calls difficult, Eliot contains within the stanza—note how all the women of all of his poems are left inside a kitchen, bedroom, or parlor, while the speaker roams within and without the rooms and stanzas. But mostly because Eliot is concerned not with “transgressive sexuality, feminism or the spirit of the avant-garde,” but, with, rather, the plain old spirit. In this case, it ends up outside, for as “Gerontion” continues from the place of Rosner's insight,

The woman keeps the kitchen, makes tea,
Sneezes at evening, poking the peevish gutter.
I an old man,
A dull head among windy spaces. (*CP* 21)

The domestic here “accommodates” the “smack” of otherness with “difficulty.” It is, likewise, difficult to decide whether Eliot here, and elsewhere, is attempting to “reconstruct the form of the home in order to redefine its purpose and meaning” (Rosner 4), or, rather, evacuating the home. With the speaker becoming, most tangibly, an object on a stand in a corridor, “A dull head among windy spaces,” and, most ephemerally, an empty house, what is happening to the actual architecture of the house and the anatomy of the man? If, as critic Diane Fuss writes, “Memory must be our most interior property” (7), what happens to our sense of interior when it starts to slip? Are these poems concerned with the place of memory—not in meaning-making, but in place-making?

As “Gerontion” ends, it becomes possible to think that what is happening is the beginning of a new movement towards space in Eliot's poetry. Foucault writes: “The anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space, no doubt a great deal more than with time” (23). While “Gerontion” lends itself to being read as the story of an aging man mourning the slip of time, with Foucault's advice it can be reread as a poem concerned primarily with evacuation of space. Appropriately, the poem that begins as a mid-life crisis contained within the unit of answerability of a “decayed house” ends with a departure into another space: “Tenants of the house, / Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season” (*CP* 23). The sounds of these lines help to locate the reader in an unstructured *space* and not *place*. While the poem begins clearly with a sense of place, it ends in “thoughts” which

supersede “house” and are muted out by “season” in the flow of “s” sounds. We become, as in *The Waste Land*, led into a nowhere. Again, Sheldrake notes: “The most fundamental fact of human existence is that because people are ‘embodied’ they are also ‘somewhere’” (9). Yet as Eliot ends on the thought of “a dry brain,” the reader too thinks it, which is a very funny thing to do, as it is in some way like trying to gesture to your hand to go away. This disembodiment happens again in “Burnt Norton,” when “the roses / Had the look of flowers that are looked at” (CP 118). That is, the speaker and fellow imaginer are actually called to disembody by the poem’s end, so that here and also in *The Waste Land*, the reader, through having followed Eliot’s speaker into the backwash of the spirit, gets the sense that he or she is disembodied, truly nowhere.

“Staring forms / Leaned out”:⁸ Evolving Form

In his book *In the Process of Poetry*, William Watkin writes:

James Breslin is correct in noting that O’Hara’s New York is significant in that it finally moves beyond the city as purgatorial journey evident in such poets as Eliot and Ginsberg. New York in O’Hara is not an “unreal” city; rather it is the *centre* of the real, but here the real is conceived of in a post-surrealist sense of an encounter with total novelty, total otherness. Breton notes that it is only in the city that the surreal encounter can exist, and Lacan fills in the detail of what this means, which is essentially the encounter with the *tuche* or mythical real. (133-134)

If Watkin, Breslin, and Breton’s convergent notions of the city’s realness hold and if Eliot was marking a relation of London to purgatory in *The Waste Land* and throughout his street-filled poems, then one comes to wonder, in Eliot’s poetry, where the “*centre* of the real” lies. The recurrently neatly set center of personal life—the “room”—becomes more important.

Recall Rosner’s study of Eliot’s ancestors: “Though old fashioned rooms are unsatisfying, they can be hard to think beyond and hard to leave behind” (2). While “Prufrock” dwells in the “unsatisfying” aspects of “old fashioned rooms,” *The Waste Land* attempts to “think beyond” them, with hints of the “leaving behind” available through the publication of *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript*.

The dissatisfaction with rooms, though, is also a dissatisfaction with old-fashioned form, with stress lying not only on “old,” but also on “fashioned.” Densely wound poems like “Portrait of a Lady,” implicitly bound in the tension of its own closure (as in the aforementioned “bloom” “room” lines), seem to intend a “single reading” (though it could be argued that the density begets an opening up).⁹ Hejinian rejects such closure, finding it “fascist” and preferring instead a democratic process in poetry. This so-called “rejection” is one which governs much of avant garde poetry’s bravado. Perloff takes up the question of whether or not closure invites reader participation: “By emphasizing its writtenness, its literariness, the poem calls attention to the complexity of its constructedness” (9).

Yet it is Eliot’s genius that has one believe that the poem knows more than he does. As Ezra Pound writes: “I should probably go to some length discussing Mr. Eliot’s two sorts of metaphor: his wholly unrealizable, always apt half ironic suggestion, and his precise realizable picture” (419). Eliot’s “Prufrock” explicitly “calls attention to the complexity” of constructedness: He “shall remain self-possessed” (“Portrait of a Lady”), never to unravel in tone—albeit wishing to “dance, dance / Like a dancing bear, / . . . chatter like an ape”—nor in form—as even “ape” is held to and contained by the rhyme of “shape.” So the issue of construction informs and offers a generative tension to “Portrait of a Lady.” In feeling the tension of lilac and music blooms in rooms and chattering outlined in shapes, the reader is moved to want to get out.

In a 1962 letter to the Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, Eliot writes: “I want my readers to get their impressions from the words alone and from nothing else” (qtd. in Ricks xix). Therefore more important and moving than the soil on the feet of the girl in “Preludes” is the fact that she curls her fingers around her toes (her body’s end) on the edge of a bed, at the edge of a stanza, and that this impresses onto the reader an awareness of parameters. Heidegger further delineates the parameters of things: “It is not that there are men, and over and above them *space* . . . by the name ‘man’ I already name the stay within the fourfold among things” (156). Heidegger here hints at a feeling of being entrapped in a body (as Bachelard does), while also suggesting a Russian doll like relationship between man and space. In Eliot’s “Prufrock” lines, the fourfold of the room is felt as the fourfold of the body. “The fourfold among things” is understood as a matter of mimicking, or reflecting, or just fitting,

relations. "Preludes," also, is concerned with these relations, because in its end it folds back on itself by re-appropriating images (as a prelude does to a song); namely, citing the curling of smoke around a city block.

Eliot's leaving the reader to "get their impressions" reflects an understanding that something ineffable emerges when let alone, as in *The Waste Land*. There is no doubt, Eliot once "sought a theme" (as writes his contemporary, W.B. Yeats in "The Circus Animal's Desertion") for *The Waste Land*, and Pound, with his crayons, pens, and straw hat, struck through traces of this seeking, writing things like "Per'aps be damned," "You Tiresias should damn well know," "'one' wee little red mouse," "too easy," "trick of Pope etc not to let rhyme diffuse 'em," and "really??" (*The Waste Land: A Facsimile* 45, 47, 11, 45, 39). Emerging from the editorial process is the poem's theme itself—spared of distractions of redundancies, excesses, rhyme, meter, allusions, the personal, and the somehow then already overdone in literature (even by Eliot himself).

This emergence may be traced in *The Waste Land: A Facsimile*. The drafts show that among other thematic and stylistic components, *The Waste Land* once held a much stronger sense of rhyme, meter, allusion, particulars, some eleven extra characters (including "Tom" himself)—some of whom had actual agency (all in rhyme, meter, allusion and particulars)—a sense of causality, a traceable narrative voice, and, above all, nine women in rooms: Jane, Fresca, Amanda, Lady Kleinwurm, Magdalene, Jenny of the bard, Venus Anadyomene, Lady Katzeegg, and The Duchess. Yet Bachelard's note resounds: "entrapped in being, we shall always have to come out of it" (213). Having mulled over this sentiment throughout "Prufrock," Eliot offers less of the feeling of entrapment in *The Waste Land* so characteristic of "Prufrock," and more, simply, of the coming "out of it." As a result, the published poem feels skeletal in contrast to the drafts: thin, condensed, bare, elusive, and somehow freer. What Pound suggested Eliot reduce ended up being the very sound of modern tinkering, ultimately trumping all modern sense through truly functional form. Kasimir Malewitsch, a Russian painter, is said to have "went into the desert, he said, to find pure feeling's form" (qtd. in Gilbert 33).

It is as though Eliot, in willing to accept the edits that make his poem bare and sometimes hallucinogenic, arrives at modernity's "pure feeling's form": the reader is led through a deserted landscape

and given only the necessary, and in this way, the purest form of feeling. Amidst these layered winks to and from the modern audience, one begins to gain a sense of what a poem must do to imply that everything was spared. Though, as Bachelard continues, there is a feeling that “In this ‘horrible inside-outside’ of unuttered words and unfulfilled intentions, within itself, being is slowly digesting its nothingness . . . In vain the spirit gathers its remaining strength. It has become the backwash of expiring being” (217). Considering “these fragments I have shored against my ruins” (*CP* 50) as “the backwash of expiring being” shifts the dimensions of the poem’s space into perspective. This poem occurs mainly outside, with rooms entered only momentarily, and described not as cluttered, but stilted (as in “The Game of Chess” and “The Fire Sermon”).

Accordingly, as the drafts expose, the descriptions of the rooms were evacuated of rhyme. Where “Prufrock,”¹⁰ as a collection, clearly dealt with the ‘horrible inside-outside’ of unuttered words [reconsider: “I feel like one who smiles, and turning shall remark / Suddenly, his expression in a glass” (“Portrait of a Lady” III)], *The Waste Land* lingers on “slowly digesting its nothingness,” [as “London bridge is falling down” (*CP* 50)] ending clearly with the vanity of “the spirit” that “in vain . . . gathers its remaining strength,” asking, but not acting: “Shall I at least set my lands in order?” (50), Bachelard’s explanation of spiritual survival is one in the spirit of his own work which intends, essentially, to justify spatial creations. In Bachelard’s case, these creations are architectural. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* might also, in this spiritually determined way, offer spatial creations—rooms as “dreamed, imagined . . . read” and written—that is, rooms in stanzas.

Noting how the stanzas of “The Fire Sermon” evolved actually helps understand some of the poem’s large and unpronounced intentions. As John Mayer notes: “It is the unpublished poetry that shows how voice emerged as encoder of meaning” (82). In the case of “The Fire Sermon,” where voice seems to disappear, the meaning that surfaces does so as a matter of focus, as attention eventually is given to Tiresias, above all. “The Fire Sermon,” in particular, underwent more edits line for line than any other section of the poem, so that the eventual product was a section devoid of original instances of, mostly, domestic situations, women, rhyme, meter, allusion, London-specific references, and character exposés. Controversial sections were cut,¹¹ giving rise to controversial emphasis. “Fresca,” for example, a

character originally introduced in the beginning of "The Fire Sermon," was let go, but survives in "Gerontion."¹² Along with her, girls named Jenny, Mrs. Porter (who marginally lives on), Magdalene, Aeneas's mother, Venus Anadyomene, Lady Katzeegg and Minerva were lost, in, usually, the form of structurally sound quatrains, drenched in rhyme.

Paying attention to the missing female characters in *The Waste Land* distracts from a simpler point: *The Waste Land* once held the image of a girl named Fresca, described in a parlor room in the poem, and along with her a Jenny and a Chloe touching objects in the room, and also rhyme. Published, they and their rooms are gone. The domestic is erased, finally emphasizing the remaining characters, particularly Tiresias, and their roomlessness, or roaming. Tiresias since has received not only critical attention, but also, more fundamentally, rhythmic and narrative attention as The One who "foresees" and "knows" the activities of all other, and, so made minor, characters. Thus, in effect, the section of "The Fire Sermon" which could once have been considered a love(less) scene between The Typist and "Young Man Carbuncular," instead becomes more centrally concerned with the third person present and omniscient, Tiresias. Originally, he appeared in the following stanzas:

A bright kimono wraps her as she sprawls
In nerveless torpor on the window seat;
A touch of art is given by the false
Japanese print purchased in Oxford Street.

I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs,
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest,
Knowing the manner of these crawling bugs,
I too awaited the expected guest.

A youth of twentyone, spotted about the face,
One of those simple loiterers whom we say
We may have seen in any public place
At almost any hour of night or day.

Pride has not fired him with ambitious rage,
His hair is thick with grease, and thick with scurf,
Perhaps his inclinations touch the stage—
Not sharp enough to associate with the turf. (*The Waste Land: A Facsimile* 45)

Surviving, instead, as

I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
 Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest—
 I too awaited the expected guest. (*CP* 44)

Pound did not slash through the manuscript of this section as he did with the entire expository eighty-three line beginning of “Death By Water.” Rather, he put parentheses around settings, as in the above second line: “window seat” (noting that it wrongly implies being in a “lodging house”) crossed out sexual issues, as in “Knowing the manner of these crawling bugs” (writing: “Too easy”), and crossed out ages and details of urban life: “A youth of twentyone” and “purchased at Oxford Street” (*The Waste Land: A Facsimile* 45). So, as happens throughout the drafts of the entire poem, rhyme dissolves, meter retreats, details fall away, along with cities [Mayer goes as far as to name these deleted sections, “the city poem” (67)] and times, allowing for a subtle but undeniable shift in tone and attention, from kimonos, sprawling, and nerves, to the larger, less personal and more opaque: Tiresias, foretelling the universe, expecting and waiting.

The kimonos, nerves, beds, seats, personae, and café talk would have fit in well with “Prufrock.” However, *The Waste Land* is tonally and formally a different poem, and Pound and Eliot recognized this difference: Eliot aimed for it, answering to Pound’s edit: “cadence reproduction from Prufrock or Portrait of a Lady” by slashing doubtful, and relationship obsessed lines:

And if I said “I love you” should we breathe
 Hear music, go a-hunting as before?
 The hands relax, and the brush proceed?
 Tomorrow when we open to the chambermaid
 When we open the door
 Could we address her or should we be afraid?
 If it is terrible alone, it is sordid with one more. (*The Waste Land: A Facsimile* 107)

And so it seems that over and over Eliot cut out images of the domestic. In a modern way, then, what is cut is the very mention of the modern: the Apartment, the City, Consumption, the Talk, Relationships. Had “The Fire Sermon” not purged these details, today Eliot scholarship might be preoccupied with the influence of Thomas

Gray or John Dryden on Eliot,¹³ or even on the way women keep showing up in Eliot's poems: in rooms.

The Waste Land had different objectives, at once not immediately apparent and seeming to depend sometimes on this opacity. Earlier, Eliot writes in *Knowledge and Experience*, "If we attempt to put the world together again, after having divided it into consciousness and objects, we are condemned to failure" (30). In the editing of *The Waste Land*, consciousness and objects are divided. The fact that the conceived world is difficult to put together again frustrates the first reader, and condemns the stubborn critic to failure, as can be seen by the abundance of sometimes reductive scholarship available. Yet when the alternative is picked up—when the world's "consciousness" and "objects" are accepted as "divided," something made "new" and large, like "pure feeling's form," surfaces. For example, when a room is described in "A Game of Chess," Eliot initially offers it as a place where

other tales, *from* the old stumps and bloody ends of time
Were told upon the walls, *where* staring forms
Leaned out, *and hushed* the room *and closed* it in.
There were footsteps on the stair (*The Waste Land: A Facsimile* 11,
emphasis mine)

This description survives, with consciousness, as Eliot expounds, somehow separated from objects:

And other withered stumps *of* time
Were told upon the walls; staring forms
Leaned out, *leaning, hushing* the room *enclosed*.
Footsteps shuffled on the stair. (CP 40, emphasis mine)

The room itself is unhushed in this editorial decision, rising from the periphery ("hushed the room and closed it in"), becoming the place setting for stories and shuffling. Italicized above are the connectors: "from," "where," "and," "it in," and "there were," in the first version, which become "of" ";," "ing," "ing," (nominalizations) "en- -ed" and "-ed." Words that explicated connections (like "and hushed the room and closed it in") are replaced by words and motions that ask for reader participation—words that actually linguistically and poetically cue the reader to connect (as in "hushing the room enclosed"). Trying to dismantle these consolidated lines, and "put [them] back together

again” sabotages and suffocates the point: that this is an instance of modern poetry taking shape, coming into its own. Mayer explains: “The most important kind of play that Eliot learned from Laforgue was the play of the mind itself” (82).¹⁴ In the revised version of the lines, the mind plays on itself to “have a vision” of the street from the room (throwing the room into a kind of negative relief) “such as it hardly understands” (“Preludes” III). The problems with certainty which Eliot wrestled with throughout the earlier poems become realized in a certain way in *The Waste Land*: agency is relinquished with the passive voice, and the mind plays on itself out in the open—almost always outside of “enclosed” rooms.

In these revisions of domestic settings, the poetry ends up barely strung together, spared of any incidences of redundancy, and asking for total engagement from the audience for sense to surface. Segments that once had so much to do with the domestic may have endured such editorial intentionality because, as Gilbert notes, a room has a “power of assimilation” (5). *The Waste Land* emerges instead as a poem concerned with *dissimilation* and exposure, as is hinted by the poem’s early command: “[Come in under the shadow of this red rock . . . / And I will show you fear in a handful of dust” (CP 49)]. Early on in the poem, the reader is lured “under the shadow” of the natural and the linguistic (parenthesis), to be shown his immortality outright. For contrast’s sake, it is worth reconsidering “the eternal footman” of “Prufrock,” who shows nothing and says less in his “snicker.” The two images both essentially enforce humility, but *The Waste Land*’s does so with a release, offering a concrete emblem of ashes, and following the jolt with a Tower of Babel moment: “*Frisch whet der Wind / Der Heimat zu . . .*” (CP 38).

For all the domestic moments that were deleted through the editorial process, Pound’s imagistic vision is gained: that of connecting nothing with nothing by way of omission, creating an economy of words; a poverty enforced so that “fear in a handful of dust” may be disentangled enough to emerge, clearly “shown.” For example, Pound responded to this stanza from the first typed draft of “The Fire Sermon,”

Out of the window perilously spread
Her drying combinations meet the sun’s last rays,
And on the divan piled, (at night her bed),
Are stockings, dirty camisoles, and stays.

with: "Inversions not warranted by any real exigence of metre" (*The Waste Land: Facsimile* 45). But Eliot barely revised the room or moment, printing it:

Out of the window perilously spread
 Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,
 On the divan are piled (at night her bed)
 Stockings, slippers, camisoles and stays. (*CP* 44)

Removing "And," "are," "and," and "dirty," and changing "meet" to "touched," effectually keeps the rhyme and substance of the room, but changes, subtly, the metre of the stanza. While the caesura in the first line remains, and actually emphasizes what Pound called "inversions not warranted by any real exigence of metre," the rest of the stanza's iambic pentameter, interrupted, melts away. This relieves the stanza and others in the section from being in any way compared to Gray's "Elegy." It also stops the stanza from feeling like a romantic or empathetic domestic moment. By removing the word "dirty," Eliot stops the reader from feeling sad or disgusted for the girl, as he also does with the removal of the adjective "squalid" from "food" in the previous stanza, stopping sympathy, which is eventually called for in the poem's "Mystical"—and, for that matter, less concerned with the domestic—ending.¹⁵ If the first three sections of the poem rattle in a way the last two calm, it may be because of the tinkering with rhyme and meter here exposed. What once filled the mouth with song somehow comes to trip the tongue with missing beats.

Likewise, "The Fire Sermon[']s]" room is not a room full of the usual: furniture, people, and places for people to sit and look, but rather "spreads" and "piles." The convertibility of the bed must hint more subtly than the word "squalid" did at The Typist's socio-economic status. Yet she still makes room for soft things, with the "stockings, slippers, camisoles and stays," not only feeling tender (exposing self-pampering), but sounding so, with the alliterated "s" sound almost offering the feel of satin or silk to slide out of this stanza and into the next. But this is not a stanza in its final form: as the poem was drafted, the typist, young man carbuncular and Tiresias were described in separate rooms, or stanzas, with embodiment coming to feel contained and layered ["The most fundamental fact of human existence is that because people are 'embodied' they are also 'somewhere'" (Sheldrake 9)]; as the poem survives, The Typist,

Young Man Carbuncular, and Tiresias are swept together, stripped of the privacy that stanza breaks and walls afford. In the drafts of this section, the stanza breaks feel like walls, in much the same way that stanza breaks mark the passings of half hours in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night.” In a 1916 letter, Eliot writes, parenthetically, that more important than punctuation is the absence of punctuation.¹⁶ Without the separating help of stanza breaks (which tend to feel liminal—forms of punctuation and absence at once), Eliot here makes a point through process. What once led to a space and a move out to Oxford Street, and then into Tiresias’s mind, slips instead (in final form) immediately into anti-romance: “I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs.”

As earlier mentioned, these “Fire Sermon” stanzas are gone partly because they once too heavily relied on the rhymes and meters of Victorian tradition. Not only were these stanzas elegiac quatrains, but the rooms, in all their separated descriptions, felt Victorian. The separate descriptions of the room feel separate because of their stanza breaks. In much the same way that Pound’s famous “In a Station at the Metro” functions, the imagining mind of *The Waste Land*’s reader moves in the original draft from room to room, and in final form from character to character, assimilating. In this way, in the original version of “The Fire Sermon,” the reader almost instinctively makes a collage of the rooms with characters in them, further underscored by the fact that in no one stanza or room are two different characters described. That is, the separation of place, mood, and people is further complemented by the separation of activities within stanzas. So if one were to glance quickly at the first “Fire Sermon” one could see it, in some subtle way, as one would see an apartment complex—a peek into a window finding characters twirling, entering, and leaving via corridors unseen. The section survives, however, as a chunk—as lines 215 to 257, separated only by the appropriate break before line 249, marking literally and figuratively the moment and movement where “She turns and looks a moment in the glass.”

So the section of “The Fire Sermon” is revised in an architecturally progressively postmodern way. Introducing his *The Conscience of the Eye*, urban theorist Richard Sennet writes,

To care about what one sees in the world leads to mobilizing one’s creative powers. In the modern city, these creative powers ought to take on a particular and humane form, turning people outward. Our culture is in need

of an art of exposure, this art will not make us one another's victims, rather more balanced adults, capable of coping with and learning from complexity. (xiv)

Sennet introduces his book as concerned with what the eye sees and how the mind balances itself accordingly, citing the fact that when public life and private life were almost one (stripped of separating walls), citizens were somehow more responsible, each carrying within him or her a sense of *sophrosyne* or "grace," living "centered," and, as it were, front and center, understanding their place between the "difficulty and diversity of life." Sennet's book ends with a call to Apollo. Eliot's poem ends with "*Datta, Dayadhama Damyatta*," or Give, Sympathize, and Control. Could such inclinations be at heart in the stripping away of walls or formal structure in "The Fire Sermon"? For, as it survives, the three characters carry about their intersecting businesses in one unseparated room or stanza or, better yet, out in the open of the unbroken stanza.

Observing the evolution of stanzaic form in Eliot's poetry, from "Prufrock" to *The Waste Land*—from the clearly deliberate almost-sonnets of "Preludes," to the skeletal river song of *The Waste Land*—one notes the dissolution of rhyme, rhythm, and other formal elements seemingly synchronized with the dissolution of the poetry's focus on domestic space, and the emergence, instead of an attempt to reconstruct the idea of space, outside, "Ringed by the flat horizon only" (CP 48). Ginsberg explains being moved by modern poetry (quoting, first, Williams' "The Clouds"):

"Plunging upon a moth, a butterfly, a pismire, hup . . ." And then he waved his hands in the air—he just gave up. So I suddenly realized it was just like somebody talking in a bar, not finishing the sentence, but just giving up with a gesture of impatience, and that it was a syntactical fact of speech that had never been written down before in poetry (268)

While Williams and Eliot distinguish themselves in their differences, the sense of a poet "waving his hands in the air" is given by *The Waste Land*'s opacity. "The gesture of impatience," becomes, in *The Waste Land*, "a syntactical fact of speech that had never been written down before in poetry" (Ginsberg 268), albeit altogether different from Williams'. By studying its omissions, *The Waste Land* becomes a poem altogether obsessed with capturing the feel of a wave of a hand, and with it, dismissing all that architecturally, formally,

poetically, traditionally, and lyrically stood in Eliot's speaker's way before.

Where Eliot's earlier, more domestic poetry offers speakers walking and so testing or marking the limits of rooms, and Eliot's mid-life speakers (in *The Waste Land*) take down walls, Eliot's later speakers do the ineffable: they turn structures out, grasping for doors and the outside.¹⁷ No longer answering to cities in *Four Quartets*, for example, poetic form becomes a vehicle for movement, very much in the direction of away. The question is no longer how to get out, but where to turn. Alan Williamson writes of the "real space" "generated out of rhetorical space" (153-160).¹⁸ He stresses that "the whole thrust . . . is to create a garden, in spite of all resistances and disclaimers" which "belongs to a series of synchronicities in Eliot's private history, elements, as he said, of 'acute personal reminiscence (never to be explicated, of course, but to give power from well below the surface'" (160).¹⁹ Williamson concludes: "Eliot's steps into mythic space are generally accompanied by an unusual effort to integrate instinct and spirit" (164). How is this "mythic space" accommodated by poetic form? And what of Eliot's steps into urban domestic space?

The cigarette-smoking city subject of "Prufrock," has, by this time, quit. *Four Quartets* is not the place of afternoons "grey and smokey" nor "cigarettes in corridors," nor the romantic though escapist "tobacco trance,"²⁰ and not even of "Tiresias, throbbing waiting," but rather "the scene" of unruffled waiting, recognition, and sobriety in not overcluttered, but eerily silent, desolate spaces. *The Waste Land* seems to deconstruct the world that Eliot spends much energy replicating and reconstructing in "Prufrock." In *Four Quartets*, this emptied-out house of poetry is realized—at least inasmuch as actual emptied out estates inspired three of the four poems.

But for all this talk of space, what about time? Bakhtin's notion of the "chronotope" here is significant:

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history²¹

Throughout *The Waste Land*, and specifically in the poem's domestic moments, "time . . . thickens," and memory follows suit. Spatially, this plays out as every line lingers on itself, with each last word either dissolving what has come before it, or opening, "charged," onto the next line, as in the earlier referenced "sylvan scene" where and when

. . . there the nightingale
 Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
 And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
 "Jug Jug" to dirty ears,
 And other withered stumps of time
 Were told upon the wall; staring forms
 Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed
 Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.
 Footsteps shuffled on the stair.²²

So in a poem so governed by "indicators . . . fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole," Eliot's actual "spatial and temporal indicators" become worth noting. In musing about space, Eliot turns to time [as in "other withered stumps of time" the physical is temporal: "*still* she cried, *and still* the world pursues . . . *leaned* out, *leaning*" (emphasis mine)]. These word choices insist not only on the fact that cries and pursuits are unrelenting, but also that the lodging of these activities in art allows them to at once be "still," "leaned," and "leaning" while perpetually present tensed.

This turning from space to time occurs most explicitly in the form of the river's song which begins "The Fire Sermon" and which ends with the reference "But at my back in a cold blast I hear." Eliot writes in a 1930 letter to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*:

As I spent the first sixteen years of my life in St. Louis, it is evident that St. Louis affected me more deeply than any other environment has done. These sixteen years were spent in a house at 2635 Locust street, since demolished. . . . The river also made a deep impression on me . . . And I feel that there is something in having passed one's childhood beside the big river, which is incommunicable to those who have not. . . . Of course I have spent many years out of America altogether; but Missouri and the Mississippi have made a deeper impression on me than any other part of the world. ("Notes to Harvard Lectures" 28-29)

It is interesting that Eliot revisited the importance of his natural surroundings. It is more interesting that he did this in 1930. By 1930, Eliot had written and published "Prufrock," *The Waste Land*, and

“Ash-Wednesday.” Eliot’s 1930 letter interestingly turns, too, from a remembrance of the river to a musing on the large way that memory can work: “I find that as one gets on in middle life the strength of early associations and the intensity of early impressions become more evident; and many little things, long forgotten, recur” (29). This reflection throws personal light on *Four Quartets*, one of his most deliberate works, which features in its original composition a description matching the above memory of Eliot’s childhood demolished house on 2635 Locus Street: “Houses rise and fall, crumple, are extended; / Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place / Is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass” and “Dust in the air suspended / Marks the place where a story ended. / Dust inbreathed was a house—.”²³

Negative space comes to serve as foundational to the later poetry’s descriptions. If, as Casey and other theorists concerned with place explain, the first sense of place is had in the home, the effects of seeing or knowing one’s childhood home demolished could very well lead one to turn outwards. In her book on how domestic space framed the writings of Freud, Dickinson, Proust, and Keller, Diane Fuss observes: “The architectural dwelling is not merely something we inhabit, but something that inhabits us. They understand the interiority itself as built structure, as ‘imagination merely made.’ Nowhere is this more the case than in modern conceptualization of the recesses of human memory”(6). Fuss’s study insists that domestic space frames Victorian and modernist writing.

It is unclear whether Eliot comes to “understand the interiority” he writes of in “Prufrock” as “imagination merely made,” or, in some larger less tangible way, ill-fitting; awkward; unaccommodating; destructible. The very recurrence of spatial obsession suggests a turning and *returning* obsession, marking the parameters of a motif: “Though I do not hope to turn again.” He writes in “Rhapsody of a Windy Night” of a moment when “the world gave up the secret of its skeleton,” and it seems that he pursues this secret throughout his writing, evoking a sense of gaping and grasping most visible in *The Waste Land*’s skeletal verse.

Endnotes

¹ T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems. Four Quartets*, 1. 106.

² Nancy Hargrove's *Landscape as Symbol in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot* (1978) is the most extensive study of this.

³ Among others, John Johnston's *The Poet and The City: A Study in Urban Perspectives* and Robert Crawford's *The Savage and The City* classify Eliot as a city poet.

⁴ Marjorie Perloff and Lynn Hejinian both write about traditional closed poetry in their "Avante Garde Eliot" and "The Rejection of Closure," respectively, and Perloff describes processes like these at great length.

⁵ Eliot's "Portrait of a Lady," for example, goes on to offer rhyming stanzas of relatively equal length, separated by wide breaks (both on the page and in thought) and roman numerals, "composed so much," that one can almost hear the distinct setting of porcelain inside rooms as the Lady sighs, "I shall sit here serving tea to friends."

⁶ Casey, 289-291.

⁷ Although this study focuses on the interior places made and described in twentieth century poetry, it is worth mentioning that the word "street" occurs three times as often as the word "room" in *Prufrock*, and twice as often in *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*. Robert Crawford writes: "Prufrock carries his streets with him. They 'follow' like his own 'tedious argument,' rather than *leading* as normal streets do. St. Louis, as Eliot acknowledged, remained insistently a part of his own life." Though streets are mentioned more often, and have received more critical attention (offering Eliot as a City Poet), descriptions and imitations of rooms, in their informative and confessional tendencies, constructively warrant readerly attention.

⁸ From *The Waste Land* ll.105-106.

⁹ Perloff writes about this one-true reading aspect of Eliot extensively, as does Barbara Hernstein-Smith in her *Poetic Closure*: "What we must add, however, is that in "Portrait of a Lady," as in "Prufrock," "Gerontion," and "The Hollow Men," the inconclusiveness is only a thematic element, and that all these poems are, in terms of their respective structures, successfully closed" (249).

¹⁰ Crucially, note that there were explicit attempts, outlined in the marginal notes of *The Waste Land: A Facsimile*, to make the *The Waste Land* different from "Prufrock."

¹¹ Although cut, the section on Fresca still manages to receive critical attention: Lyndall Gordon calls the removed section of the poem Eliot's "final antifeminist statement"; Sharon Stockton calls it "the most damning judgment in the poem," where Fresca becomes "a grotesque image of female fertility"; and Koestenbaum frames it as "Eliot's misogynistic portrait." It is also controversial because, as John Haffenden explains in detail, it appears Vivienne Eliot wrote a similar poem at a similar time, which then survives as a domestic conversation through poetry. Other scholars have given the section attention because it appears to be the first section written of *The Waste Land*.

¹² This section is originally written, formally speaking, in Elegiac Quatrains, a form explored by Gray and contemporarily reconsidered by Eliot in his June 1921 review of Dryden's "Annus Mirabilis."

¹³ Further, Mayer notes that when these plays are escorted in, "we cease being readers and become the '*semblable*'—the very double of the protagonist" (86).

¹⁴ Eliot, from Footnotes.

¹⁵ Consider: "Dayadhavam"

¹⁶ Christopher Ricks spoke of this during his presentation of the "Marina" transcript in Oxford University's New Bodleian Library on 11.24.08.

¹⁷ Recall: "Our echoes / Inhabit the garden" in "Burnt Norton" ll. 19-20.

¹⁸ "Simultaneity in *The Waste Land* and *Burnt Norton*."

¹⁹ In his postscript, Williamson explains his own wish to show that Williams and Hart Crane, too "were all involved in a common enterprise of the archetypal imagination" (166).

²⁰ In "Portrait" and "Rhapsody."

²¹ "Time Space" 53.

²² *The Waste Land* ll. 100-107.

²³ *East Coker* I and *Little Gidding* II.

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***The Waste Land* and the Virtual City**

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T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* has been treated by many as the representative poem of the last century, "a masterwork great enough to justify the whole 'modern experiment'" (Mayer 241), a leviathan poem on the crises in Western culture and religion and one that is fraught with "hundreds of fragments of the Western present [and] of the Western past" (Brooker 104). However, *The Waste Land* achieved a style of its own—the whole poem is composed of a mix of scenes and fragments which are organized in a way that is reminiscent of a cinematic montage, historical montage, or literary montage.¹ *The Waste Land* turns away from the realism employed by other writers in their portrayals of London and instead offers an "Unreal City," more governed by the principle of the grotesque. Eliot's City is a city of extremes: a melee of localism and cosmopolitanism, of reality and fantasy, of de-centering of perspectives and sense of excess that gives rise to a mélange of texts and styles, as well as to a sense of anachronisms that constitute a recognizable wasteland of virtual reality.

The City—the cinematographic and phantasmagoric city with locatable topography of London streets—is also the Unreal City with cosmopolitan hyperspace.² The poem is a grand city poem filled with traces of voices, histories, events, and experiences that unexpectedly interlace only to become undone before being recombined. Nature in the City is no longer associated with the first nature that represents the site of origin and being.³ Nor is the City surrounded by the "second nature" of artificial social constructs. It is, in my view, surrounded by a "third nature" in the form of copies of copies, the reproductions of simulacra.⁴ *The Waste Land* can be considered one of the representatives of art that Walter Benjamin might term the second age of mechanical reproduction with the development of information

technology, as the poem is inscribed with the potential character of textual dissemination, textual flânerie, and the archiving of cultures.

The concept of the city as an environment for modern man began to take shape in the early nineteenth century; since then critics have argued that the modern city has undergone at least three phases of development.⁵ The first is marked by concentrated settlement, the sudden shift from the rural to the urban, the growth of population, and the emergence of industrial capitalism. The second takes the form of a city centre surrounded by a suburban ring, which exemplifies “successive migration”: overcrowding in the centre results in the flight of the more prosperous to the suburbs and other outlying areas, leaving behind them the poor and unskilled of the old districts (Walkowitz 31-32; Sharpe and Wallock 10). The third outlines the presence of de-centered or multi-centered “urban fields” that are characterized by sprawling urban areas with no clearly defined centre. The once-mighty cities have thus come apart, and the new information technologies have created an urban civilization without cities (Brian J. L. Berry 52; Sharpe and Wallock 11). Some have also maintained that there have been three corresponding self-perceptions: the Enlightenment City of Virtue, the Victorian City of Vice, and the Modern City beyond Good and Evil, in other words, a New Jerusalem, a Babylon, and a Babel (Schorske 95-114).

It remains an ongoing speculation whether or not the city will give rise to a fourth wave of urbanization or produce another version of “post-anthropogenetic domain,” such as the sphere of artificial life (Featherstone and Lash, “Introduction” 4). However, the city’s role in the formation of stable identity and the context for sociability has become problematic. As a result of its move towards a cosmopolitan hyperspace that acknowledges no exteriority and becomes immaterial and transparent, the city tends to disregard and upset the traditional boundaries of physicality and locality, time and space, nations and cultures. *The Waste Land* recounts Eliot’s endeavour to represent the city not so much a built environment as social, cultural, and textual geographies. Eliot’s City offers an emporium of urban texts to interrogate the epistemological quest for urban legibility, to challenge totalizing discourses and master narratives, and to give rise to a more flexible, eclectic, and appropriate urban reconceptualization and reassertion of difference and otherness.

The Unknown City and the Unreal City

New human aggregates generate new sensations, problems, attitudes, and energies, while simultaneously exposing older perceptions, values, conventions, and limitations. The city is both backdrop to and inspiration for artistic and theoretical endeavours of all kinds; and for centuries in many works the frontiers are eroded between the political, the moral, and the aesthetic. For example, Charles Baudelaire characterizes his writings as literary *flânerie* on the streets of nineteenth-century Paris in order to articulate the new experiences of space, time, and society. His work remains an attempt to depict the trajectory of urban epistemologist, the *flâneur*, and to decode the mysteries of urban streets. Walter Benjamin's "Paris—the Capital of the Nineteenth Century" was completed in 1935 as an "exposé or draft" ("Translator's Note," *Charles Baudelaire* 8) of his ideas on culture and society in which he saw connections between Baudelaire's lyric poetry and the age of high capitalism of Second Empire France (Collier 26).⁶

When Benjamin describes *flânerie* as going "botanizing on the asphalt" (*Charles Baudelaire* 36), he suggests at least three things which are related to each other. First, the poet / the *flâneur* as the marginal figure evolves a language and an imagery to record the fleeting, multiple, mundane everyday experience. Second, it is from such fragments and overlooked bits that we read the world, and thus the collected detritus is the true museum. Third, by doing so, the poet / the *flâneur* develops his consciousness to be able to register events, moods, and impressions instantaneously via the "snapshot techniques" similar to the camera: "[a] touch of the finger now sufficed to fix an event for an unlimited period of time. The camera gave the moment a posthumous shock, as it were" (*Charles Baudelaire* 132; qtd. in Collier 26-27). Such snapshot techniques of lyric poetry register not so much a sense of photographic realism as a problematics of phantasmagoric surrealism. As Susan Sontag points out in her introduction to *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, this is Benjamin's "microscopic gaze" (19) at the "Surrealist city" with the "metaphysical landscape" that teems with "possibilities, positions, intersections, passages, detours, U-turns, dead-ends, [and] one-way streets" (13).

In his introduction to *Unreal City: Urban Experience in Modern European Literature and Art*, Edward Timms places T. S. Eliot's *The*

Waste Land at the center of a wider European context: a rich tradition from Baudelaire to Brecht of European writing on the theme and variation of the unreal city (1). The writers in this literature “assign to subjective perceptions a higher truth than to photographic accuracy” (4) in order to take the pulse of city life and touch the nerve of urban anxiety. It is a heightened subjectivity overloaded with perceptual experience in the city which is inscribed with dynamic patterns of historical change. Thus, the city, ceasing to be merely a social environment, transfigures into the “unreal city” located between the extremes of reality and phantasmagoria, between that of hope and dread, or between “distant Utopia” and “imminent Apocalypse” (7). Indeed, *The Waste Land* epitomizes not only the unknown city with which Eliot comes to terms daily with his London, but also the unreal city Eliot tries to remap or redefine in the tradition of European urban literature.⁷ *The Waste Land* is meant to be a machine-age text, characterized by a spectacular form of heterogeneous moments in an ongoing montage. The poem is a hypertextual panorama of images, styles, scenes, and cultures which are engaged in a perpetual collage of disintegration and reintegration, or “detournement” of re-cycling and re-positioning.

As I have remarked elsewhere, T. S. Eliot repeatedly shifted from one urban culture to another: from St. Louis to Boston, from Harvard to the Sorbonne, from Paris to London, and from Marburg to Oxford. When the trajectory of Eliot’s urban detour finally settles down in London, it is a signature effort to become attuned to the total phenomenon and sensibility of the age, a resolute advance to the city as the primary solution to the oscillation between social and intellectual conflict. Eliot’s writings on the city engage with a number of recurrent themes, motifs, and methodological concerns which elucidate the intricate dimension of the cityscapes. Among them, the most significant recurring motif in Eliot’s city writings is the shifting perspectives of the flâneur figure. Eliot has continued to evolve his flâneur from “the man of the crowd,” to “the man at the window,” then to the producer of literary texts, and finally to the collector of the city archive.⁸ Indeed his lifelong passion for city street exploring and observation has some special influence on his creative power. Characteristically, there are plenty of streets, roads, lanes, and ways in Eliot’s poem, all the way from “Prufrock’s” half-deserted streets to the disfigured street in “Little Gidding”—the depictions of which all suggest the act of strolling or other modified form of flânerie.

What Eliot annexes as his poetic territory is not simply the city with its sophisticate, but also the fragmented scraps of urban life, the sordid, drab, urban landscape which is presented in sharp contrast to both the civilized city of materialism and the Romantic countryside of spiritual regeneration (Gordon 38-39; Crawford *The Savage and the City* 10). Furthermore, by assimilating the city of daily life (pointedly identifiable through specific place names) to the Unreal City (be it Dante's City of Dis, Baudelaire's Paris, Tiresias's Thebes, Stetson the Londoner's Rome and Carthage, Burbank's Venice, etc.), Eliot transforms the literal city into a visionary city (Mayer 259), or as I would like to term it, into the Unreal City of virtual reality. Most critics have observed that Eliot collects "a heap of broken images"—the scrapes and traces of urban life—in a way that is similar to the montage, surrealist, or impressionistic principle of juxtaposition. Or in terms of Ezra Pound, who once commented on *The Waste Land*, "the life of village is narrative," while "[in] a city the visual impressions succeed each other, overlap, overcross, they are cinematographic."⁹

However, what remains underestimated is the graphic nature, the virtual mobility. We should note the spatially and temporally fluid subjectivity of this form of visuality of Eliot's text, which directs the reader to a literature of flânerie, characteristic of rhapsodic textualism, a hermeneutic of seeing. We might also take note of the changing perspectives of the flâneur figure, such as that of detective, visual textual decipherer, literary textual producer, and archaeologist of the city archive (Yang "The Flâneur in T. S. Eliot's 'Eeldrop and Appleplex—I'"). Eliot's urban discourse reveals not so much the individual encounter with urban experience as the aesthetic gesturing toward the textual topography of the City, which as a literary subject has featured prominently as a complex textual network and has become the confluence of personal, cultural, and artistic concerns.

In the light of Benjamin's critical theory on the media age, *The Waste Land* might mark the beginning of the second era of mechanical reproduction in which people feel overwhelmed by the speed, scope, intensity, and volume of cultural production and reproduction, and in which the new mass technologies not only enter culture, but also reflect, mediate, and revise the very nature of human experience itself (*Illuminations* 222).¹⁰ As A. Walton Litz points out, *The Waste Land* is not so much "about spiritual dryness" as it is about "the ways in which that dryness can be perceived and expressed;" he regards the poem as "a museum" and "the record" of a literary sensibility

expressing anxieties when exposed to increased cultural complexity, with a repertoire ranging from “Pound’s verses,” “Augustan irony,” “collage Cubism,” cinematic montage, to parody and ventriloquism of “the English music hall” (7-8). Obviously, the poem is an intertextual panorama of images, styles, scenes, and cultures which are engaged in a perpetual collage of disintegration and reintegration. Here we are given a vivid picture of a postmodernist tendency to criticize fixed categories and identities, as well as the nature of syncretism and hybridization of the poem. Constructed as a build up and overload of culture industry, *The Waste Land* appears as a mosaic of competing cultural styles; it is infused with forms, categories, and the content of high culture as well as other chunks and scraps of popular and vernacular forms (“Augustan irony,” “the English music hall,” etc). What unfolds in front of the reader is a text (or culture itself) as an infinite, unstable network composed of variable codings and representations. The poem witnesses Eliot’s attempt to reflect aspects of this new mode of human existence and to define the new character of twentieth-century literary and urban textuality. It represents a dedication to make art new in a way that requires a constant dialectic of innovation and obsolescence.

The Waste Land is possessed by the image of the Unreal City as a spectacle of all the places of the world, and this city is characteristic of floating identity and infinite hyperreality. The poem is a geographical poem as well as an historical poem. It has an intense relationship to the particularity of place and the experience of the time. For example, the poem is filled with particular London landmarks, including even those of Eliot’s daily journey to work in the City. The crowd in the “Unreal City” is seen flowing over London Bridge, up the hill and down King William Street, drifting through St Magnus Martyr (a church adjacent to London Bridge), the Billingsgate Fish Market, Lower Thames Street, Upper Thames Street, St. Mary Woolnoth (a church situated just opposite the Lombard Street façade of Lloyds Bank), the Cannon Street Hotel, the Strand, and Queen Victoria Street (Mayer 248; Rainey 9-10; Kenner 27).¹¹ Furthermore, the Thames Daughters’ mortal places can be found on a map of the greater London area: Highbury, Richmond, Kew, and Moorgate (Kenner 27). However, this sense of realistic geographical unity is bound to be undermined when confronted with the principle of the grotesquerie, the phantasmagoric, the extra-temporal, and the extra-spatial. For example, a sense of inhuman desolation which suffuses

and characterizes *The Waste Land* is established with a depiction of the City as haunted terrain, in which a spectre stops the passerby in full daylight ["Unreal City" . . . / There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: 'Stetson! / You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!'" (CP 39)]. On the one hand, while the scene realistically reflects the dwindling number of living inhabitants of the City around the 1910s, it might also reflect Eliot's experience of the city during the war when all the young men had left for the trenches, leaving only the weak, old, and disabled men to populate the city. Another possibility is that it might depict the postwar environment as "ghost" place, or it might describe the decline in population between 1901 and 1911, as residents were increasingly moving out (or were driven out) to suburbs, thus enabling the City to be converted into "a collection of office buildings" in "the grand manner of Edwardian commercial development" (White 9, qtd. in Rainey 11).

On the other hand, the principle of grotesque, phantasmagoria, and multiple-layeredness operates on this contemporary Londoner who is accosted as a veteran of the First Punic War. What has been evoked is not just the war fought between Rome and Carthage (the first truly "world war" in terms of the views of critics such as John T. Mayer), but *all* the wars, ancient or contemporary, fought for political and commercial supremacy, that repeat the same patterns of chaotic confusion and self-destruction (Mayer 260; Rainey 85). The "Unreal City" could be specifically identified as London, but it contains allusions and references to Dante's Hell, Baudelaire's Paris, and even Eliot's American West (Mayer 260; Rainey 81-84; Brooker and Bentley 35).¹² As Eleanor Cook points out, *The Waste Land* is not just a London poem, but also a European poem and a Mediterranean poem that involves three maps—one of a city with London as the center, one of an empire with Rome as the center, one of a world with Jerusalem as the center—which overlap and illuminate the others (341-343).¹³

Eliot's City is a city of extremes: a melee of localism and cosmopolitanism, of reality and fantasy, of de-centering of perspectives and of a sense of excess that gives rise to a mélange of texts and styles, as well as to a sense of anachronisms that constitutes a recognizable wasteland of virtual reality. In Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and in Benjamin's writings on the modern city around the turn of the twentieth century, we find references to nomadism, movement, living on the borders, and marginality. The poem is replete with vivid descriptions of the Unreal City that are layered with obsolete

signifying objects and images. In every vibrant moment of urbanization, the most contemporary and futuristic cultural constructions already contain, and are contained within, the imprint of the past.

In my view, the most striking feature of the modern city is the sense of mobility, fluidity, border-crossing, and category turmoil, more so than the presence of simultaneous anachronism. Therefore, a world of mobile subject or of mobile object has been highlighted, as well as a world in which the subject and the object become joined and dispersed irrespectively in an “increasingly fluid information field” (Featherstone *Undoing Culture* 128). In addition I propose another reading of the virtual spaces of the Unreal City in terms of the process of exoticisation of the urban landscape, or, to put it another way, the process of making the city strange (Featherstone “The Flâneur, the City” 914). To some extent, Eliot’s Unreal City in its own way envisions the phase of the de-centered city, the virtual city, where the urban landscape has become too complex and transient, too exoticized and unintelligible to be fully known and understood by its native inhabitants. If one definition of the exotic is “matter out of place” (Douglas, qtd. in Featherstone, “The Flâneur, the City” 914), if the physicality of the city itself generates more controversy than consensus, if the conception of the urban is no longer synonymous with locale, if the time-eliminating and space-spanning properties of the new information technologies are creating an urban civilization without cities (Sharpe and Wallock 11), then a new kind of flânerie of hypertextual and archival nature will render possible a more complicated politics of experiencing, reading, and representing the City.

The Textual City and the Virtual City

The Waste Land, one of the twentieth century’s most powerful and controversial works, has experienced “des tours de Babel” since its publication in 1922. It has become a landmark in the history of literary criticism, and has been included in every new start and dead end of the aesthetic and critical paradigms which have journeyed into new contested terrain.¹⁴ Traditionally, the poem has been read as an anguished meditation on the inadequacy of theological myths, which is underscored by the ironic addition of the quest myth to the poem’s framework of allusion (be it the Fisher King myth, the Grail legend, or

other Vegetation or Fertility rites). Or, as it has been pointed out, *The Waste Land*—an essential text in any account and diagnosis of the advent of modernism in western literature and culture—records the humanist's failure to find a satisfactory place within the economic, social, political, or cultural order of the time. In short, the poem expresses the “disillusionment of a generation” and functions as a “social criticism.”¹⁵ For every reader of *The Waste Land*, a range of critical questions arise and intertwine. For example, is there a single or unified consciousness—an identifiable speaker or protagonist—that presides over the poem? Is the poem formally broken or organically unified? Is it personally univocal or impersonally polyphonic? Do the many shards of narrative that appear, disappear, and reappear mean that the poem is governed by a disquieting logic and an overreaching epistemology? Or is the poem simply the outcome of a wild, irredeemable pathos (Rainey 39)? Why is the poem so insistent about its embeddedness in the streets, with its topographicality, its oscillation between unconnected anecdotes or random facts with the knowable or locatable topography of London?

I maintain that the poem marks Eliot's decisive break with the grand metanarrative and that it represents an ambivalent jeremiad over “the loss of aura” in modern culture (Benjamin *Illuminations* 221-223). Instead of using realism, with its epistemological intention to totalize and represent the reality of a whole world and life, the poem favours textual anarchism (a kind of rhizomatic and destabilizing structure) in order to create a work which is intrinsically and openly incomplete. As urban cartography under the general rubric of “the waste land,” this poem lays bare its own process of composition, and it is one that refuses to produce a unified narrative or a sense of cultural coherence, as the fundamental elements that are brought into or excluded from the poem's framework are revealed. I argue that the City or the Unreal City of the waste land is constructed as a textual city; it is composed of many messages from a variety of sources which—unfolding within the distinctive historicized context of time and space—are characteristic of graphic nature and virtual reality, sources which tend to upset any usual chronological sequence and logical order, and to transgress any linear and causal narrative. The poem also uses the image of the Unreal City as the text, as a locus of human imprints; it is a human textile of archiving cultures which works by nonhierarchical, lateral, and complementary movement to

establish a sort of perpetual interchange between the text and the world.

The style of the poem relies on “shifts in spatial surface,” rather than “development in temporal depth,” in order to represent a cross-referenced jumping across the various fragmented chunks.¹⁶ Many traditional thematic concerns, therefore, seem to become evident in the poem: the collapse of religion as a cultural force; the collapse of a shared god concept; the loss of cultural stratification, centrality and order; as well as the arousal of the fleeting, the rootless, and arbitrary character of modern life. However, I would like to suggest that *The Waste Land* is also a complex twentieth-century art work of textual wandering which celebrates an endless, de-sublimated, de-mystified spectacle as it disregards any narrative conventionality and thematic representation in favor of overwhelming visual and aural display.

I argue that the poem can be approached in light of hypertextual flânerie, which is a method for reading texts and for reading the traces of the urban textuality. These forms of readings are, as critics such as Terry Eagleton and Paul Morrison would charge, marked by “a hypertrophy of marginalia” and “a surplus of profuse and esoteric allusions” (Lamos 109; Eagleton 146-148; Morrison 94-95). Furthermore, hypertextual flânerie is a method of writing characterized by “multiple crisscrossings among the texts,” so that the text becomes “a series of itineraries without any discernible end” (Lamos 107). I maintain that the poem can be read as Eliot’s poetic equivalent of Benjamin’s “unconscious optics.” As Benjamin indicates, the cinema itself expands the field of representation with its “lowerings and liftings,” “interruptions and isolations,” “enlargements and reductions” in ways which render possible the entirely new structural formations of the subject and object (*Illuminations* 236-237). Eliot’s hypertextual flânerie correlates with Benjamin’s analysis, as the poem is characterized by textual fluidity, disseminative pliability, and epistemological undecidability at the expense of conventional narrative cohesion and structural unity. That is, the encyclopedic excessiveness and incessant allusiveness of *The Waste Land* foregrounds the poem’s intrinsic hyperreality, heterodox textuality, and infinite supplementarity.

From the outset in Eliot’s first draft “He Do the Police in Different Voices,” *The Waste Land* has been composed of various modes of the cinematic close-up and slow motion to expand space, to extend movement, so much so that, in Benjamin’s terms, the subject

goes supernaturally “traveling” and “gliding” in the midst of the overwhelming “ruins and debris” of object culture “by the dynamite of the tenth of a second” (*Illuminations* 236). The most fantastic, grotesque “flight” of the poem starts with the original epigraph from Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, which indicates exactly the principle of unconscious optics by which the poem is conceived. Kurtz is imagined to have re-experienced his life in the last moments of agony before death. It is as if within such a fantastic chronotope—the dimension of dying or madness in which Kurtz lives over his life again—that a subjective playing with, or violation of, elementary temporal and spatial relationships is rendered possible. Hence why Eliot emphasizes the appropriateness of the Conradian epigraph in response to Pound’s objections: “It is much the most appropriate I can find, and somewhat elucidative” (*Waste Land Facsimile* 125). Indeed, the epigraph makes visible a montage of moments of coherence and incoherence. There is a discontinuous surface movement of images or there are abrupt shifts in the level of textual articulation. It is a spectacle of sheer happening that expands space, extends movement, yet subverts conventional narrative chronology, plot development, or characterization.

The Conradian epigraph defines Eliot’s new aesthetics of fragments and incompatible juxtapositions; it conveys a surrealist collage of the unconscious, the fantastic, the oneiric, and the mundane nature of everyday life. The epigraph also evokes a virtual world of a non-causal, non-teleological textual flux in the poem’s matrix. A new fluid universe of the data network of the archive is constructed, in which the anonymous spectator / flâneur becomes exposed to a new flux of imagery and becomes attuned to the details, “the minutiae of everyday life,” in an attempt to construct (or reproduce) a personal, social, or cultural history of the Unreal City in his age: “Shall I at least set my lands in order?” (*CP* 50).

Since the poem is constructed upon a quasi-surrealist principle of cutting and assemblage, of montage and sabotage, of the tele-visual and tele-aural flow, it enjoys a mobilized virtual gaze which renders possible a spatially and temporally fluid subjectivity:

(I John saw these things, and heard them)
 (“The Burial of the Dead,” *Waste Land Facsimile* 9)

I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives

Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
(CP 43)

Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there is only you and I together
(CP 48)

By means of visual and textual *flânerie*, the mind of a *flâneur* figure (be he St. John, Tiresias, or the unknown third one who passes through everyday life as an eternal outsider and masquerader) accesses or zooms into the matrix. Consequently all traces of human action become visualized and articulated in the urban spectatorship of the wasteland. For example, with shifts of focus from scene to scene and from voice to voice, “The Burial of the Dead” commences with a series of international episodes via spectacular form or tele-visual flow. It is a method of literary montage in which the kaleidoscopic and fortuitous juxtaposition of signs and displays calls attention to multiple perspectives by using multiple languages. In the manuscript version, there is a Boston night out filled with sensual pleasure in wine, women, and orgy, as well as a police chase through the redlight district, all voiced by a city-dwelling observer who seems to recognize not only the city’s immense disorder but also a potentially new cultural and aesthetic order emerging from it. There is café talk in Munich composed of the child Marie’s voice recalling the broken promise and broken memories of the Hofgarten experience, as well as a woman from Lithuania insisting in German that she is not Russian but “echt deutsch”—a true German—while her words articulate ethnographic hybridity, cultural confusion, identity fluidity, and representational anxiety. There is Madame Sosostriis, a contemporary equivalent of the Cumaean Sibyl and Tiresias (Brooker and Bentley 60), and she is known to be “the wisest woman in Europe” with “a wicked pack of cards,” who is now suffering from a bad cold (which might hamper her power of clairvoyance), yet she still gives advice for the things that she is forbidden to see (CP 38). There is Stetson, a contemporary Londoner, who is accosted by an acquaintance in a scene of carnivalistic mystification which evokes the First Punic War. Finally, there is the City with its flowing morning crowd, and it is simultaneously both real and unreal, both London in 1922 and Dante’s Ante-Hell (Brooker and Bentley 83). Eliot concludes “The Burial of the Dead” by quoting Baudelaire’s extraordinary address to the reader from the poem “Au lecteur”: “You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon

semblable,—mon frère!” (CP 38). It represents not only another voice from another country and another time, but a “cursive-recursive alternation of places and times” (Brooker and Bentley 131) which enters the text to address the question of the relation between the textual producer / writer and the consumer / reader. The concluding remark of “The Burial of the Dead” encourages both receptive and critical attitudes on the part of the reader / audience, and emphasizes the potential of the textual *flânerie* and its unlimited reproducibility.

The poem as a whole is characterized by a sense of methodological reflexivity: the construction of the text as montage also reflects the montage in the modern / postmodern urban cityscape (Featherstone, “Archiving Culture” 172). To use Benjamin’s terms, the text is constructed like a city with “a thousand gateways” (qtd. in Frisby, “The Flâneur in Social Theory” 100), with its eschewal of conventional narrative structure by an author who acts as an archive researcher-flâneur strolling through the textual architecture of the Unreal City. Additionally, the reader of *The Waste Land* is encouraged to indulge in intellectual *flânerie* by browsing through and jumping across a series of sketches and scenes which are bereft of spatiotemporal and logical-causal connections. The reader is thus encouraged to engage with a panorama of text-as-city with many portals of entry, as he or she circles and crosses through the same place from different directions (Featherstone, “Archiving Culture” 172). I would like to suggest that it is through the concept of hypertext and literary montage that the very nature of reading itself, or “Eliot’s location of his subject in the reading process itself” (Brooker and Bentley 8) will unfold fruitfully. By definition, hypertext facilitates multiple entry points and non-linear associational, cross-referenced jumps across material; and literary montage permits a fuller range of photographs, pictures, images, sounds, and voices to be accessed or allowed to run concurrently with the text (Featherstone, “Archiving Culture” 173).

Similar principles of palimpsestic immediacy and hypertextual correspondence also govern other parts of the poem. For example, “What the Thunder Said” presents itself as the center of cultural diffusion or divergence by which texts, as part of the archive, circulate with the emphasis on their textual dissemination and reproduction. Textuality, as a concept, refers to the condition of existence of texts themselves produced in time and in society by human beings to replace the conventional notions of author, language, origin, and

representation. Instead of “a static block” of words, the text is viewed as “a dynamic field,” open to the author, the reader, or other texts (Said 157). Alongside familiar motifs of the nightmare journey (the Chapel, the Quester, the Grail legend, the Fisher King), along with the oscillating images of the city and the Unreal City (London, Paris, Jerusalem, Alexandria, Athens, Vienna, Carthage, Hell, and the other real and mythic cities), the poem now moves outside of western culture, to India and the fable of the thunder god Prajapati. This new location, India, marked by its Oriental exoticism, is now included or translated into the Occidental matrix in order to generate a panoramic archive that is characteristic of counterpunctal eclectic positions and perspectives. The Hindu fable is superimposed on, juxtaposed, or hypertextually linked with the fertility myth in the archive of the wasteland as an exemplification of unity combined with infinite variations. What has been highlighted is the subversive interplay between verbal production and textual revolution, as well as the nature of instability or disunity inherent in the process of translation, representation, and textuality. A physical envelope that is marked with or defined by a specified name of place and time is thus established by the use of the past tense and the precise topography of “Ganga” (the Ganges). Inside such a rim is Eliot’s philosophic strategy of deconstructive textuality with its aim of upsetting any form of monocentrism, be it metaphysical, philological, ethnological, or cultural.

The textuality of “What the Thunder Said” evolves as follows. Once Ganga was sunken, and the jungle crouched silently with limp leaves awaiting rain, while the black clouds were gathering far distant, over Himavant (*CP* 48). At last, the voice of the Thunder sounded from the distance. There then follows a quickened threefold textual representation, whereby three concentric positions with *différence* are offered: first the translations from thunderclap into speech (“*Da*” as an onomatopoeic contrivance of verbality), secondly into Sanskrit (“*Datta*,” “*Dayadhvam*,” and “*Damyata*” as the dissemination of textuality to burst through semantic horizons), and finally into Westernized representation (obituaries, a solicitor, Dante’s Ugolino, Shakespeare’s Coriolanus, and Christianity as indicators of the Western components in this textual triangle, which emphasize the perpetual displacement of textuality and the fundamental undecideability of the text).¹⁷ At the center of “What the Thunder Said,” the noise of the thunderclap signifies the origin of the Hindu

fable and renders possible Eliot's deconstructive account of logocentrism that involves the Logos, an original, and a copy or representation. Prajapati, the intelligent heart of the universe, communicates to the world through the voice of the Thunder, and what the Thunder says is simply "*Da*," which is repeated to three different groups of hearers. Outside that Logos center is the survival of three "*Das*" which are translated into three Sanskrit glosses to extend or disseminate the textuality. The three sets of interpreters literal-mindedly take "*Da*" as the clue to a particular word starting with the same letter, by means of etymological genealogy, in order to make sense of the voice or sound of the Thunder. Gods, who are naturally unruly, take "*Da*" as the cue for "*Damyata*" ("control yourselves" or "self-surrender"); men, who are prone to avariciousness, believe that the Thunder must mean "*Datta*" ("give"); and the demons, who are generally hostile to others, think that Thunder's command is "*Dayadhvam*" ("be compassionate").

Outside the fable is the Western retelling or re-interpretation of the fable. The narrator of *The Waste Land*, who is the fable's modern hearer / reader, learns of the triad of thunder words and their Sanskrit translation and the interpretation of these precepts, and he in turn re-interprets or represents such Oriental cultural drama by responding with images and texts that are heavily laden with empirical and materialistic components within the narrator's own cultural consciousness. What results is an increasingly (de)constructive textuality from one translation to the other. The Logos is made to convert itself naturalistically into an appearance, a phenomenon (the thunderclap). The speechless One, the Word, has to be incarnated first into a verbal noise ("*Da*"), and then it is disseminated into babbling multiplying words, as Eliot recorded later in *Four Quartets*: "Words strain, / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden, / . . . The Word in the desert / Is most attacked by voices of temptation" (CP 121-122). What has been achieved is a scene of writing within a scene of writing and so on without end (*Dissemination* 223), a sense of "supplementarity" of textual dissemination that keeps tracing, retracing, and effacing itself during the process of translation and representation (Said 207). The Word remains constantly displaced and becomes undecipherable semantically. Not only are the hierarchical levels scrambled,¹⁸ but also the text's questionable authority and stability—as well as the contingency and anti-representationalism of the language—are also exposed.

“What the Thunder Said” then moves towards a more de-centered, private order and finally reaches the most notorious concluding strophes. By its nature, hypertext works in a less hierarchical and more lateral way in linking information (Caygill 8). The fragments in the concluding section of “What the Thunder Said” are removed from the contexts of their various origins and from their significance, as they are relocated as an agglomeration of literary allusion and translation. The fragments consequently create a de-centering effect upon the “English” orthodoxy and its hierarchical interpretation, and they also dramatize the very concept of heterodoxy and inauthenticity. What results is an interlacing network of itemized fragments derived from archiving cultures, be they the Oriental, the Occidental, the Indo-European, the Judeo-Christian, the Greco-Latin, the community, the human, the Origin, or the divine. There is an exemplification of unity combined with infinite variation, as the poem is characterized by the continual alternation of distance and closeness, of presence and absence, of sympathy and alienation. The poem’s powerful range allows the reader to traverse the boundaries of time and space, language, religion, and culture. As Brooker and Bentley perceive, neither the mind of Europe nor the mind of Asia can serve as a unifying point of view for *The Waste Land*. Positive or negative readings will not suffice either, since the finale of the poem is a shattering balance, or a zero sum of everything added up (207). *The Waste Land* has never pretended to represent a coherent wholeness of an intellectual totality. Instead, the poem’s intrinsic hyperreality, heterodox textuality, and infinite supplementarity facilitates lateral jumps out of spatial surface of a particular page or text into another, and renders possible a kind of hypertextual flânerie which is characterized by disseminative pliability and epistemological undecidability.

Conclusion

In his 1923 review of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Eliot focused on one of his generation’s recurrent anxieties: the possibility of art as an aesthetic concept and practice in the twentieth century. He thus paid Joyce a handsome tribute by suggesting that due to being “in advance” of his time, and consciously or unconsciously aware of the obsolescence of the aesthetic forms that his age could offer, Joyce had used the myth of the *Odyssey* to manipulate “a continuous parallel

between contemporaneity and antiquity,” in order to deal with the “living material” of his time (“*Ulysses*, Order and Myth” 177). Even though Eliot expresses considerable enthusiasm over Joyce’s artistic discovery and innovation, the mythical method or ritual method will not suffice as a comprehensive index to the composition of *The Waste Land*, as some critics may claim (Leavell 145-152). Later in his career, Eliot acknowledged the artistic influences which inspired him, and he praised Baudelaire and Laforgue for salvaging the chaotic and fragmentary nature of modern life in all its everyday banality and ugliness, as they incorporated it into a kind of artistic or methodological sensitivity (“What Dante Means to Me,” *To Criticize the Critic* 126). It seems that Eliot was attempting to chart a literary cartography of the urban life, as well as to record the physical and aesthetic shock brought about by it, in terms of a kind of realism that stands on the boundary between reality and fantastic phantasmagoria.

Like Baudelaire and Benjamin, Eliot tries to develop the revolutionary tendencies of art within the production reality in capitalist and consumer society so as to challenge the criterion of bourgeois aesthetics. What has been achieved is, paradoxically, a relentless destruction or accumulation of “the aura” of artistic creation by means of new production or reproduction techniques used in the technosphere / telesphere. On the one hand, such artistic methodologies might destroy the century old aura of a work of art, which, in terms of Benjamin, is the prerequisite for the art’s autonomy and authenticity. Or, as Iain Chambers argues when approaching Benjamin’s theory from the opposite direction—by shifting the focus on the aura from the qualitative to the quantitative—the more an image, style, or object is reproduced in social contexts (in prints, films, photography, etc.), the more an aura of it is created rather than destroyed, since it “guarantees a historical presence and reproduces an aura” (7-8). For Baudelaire, the key feature of the modern metropolitan experience is the sense of newness and transitoriness: the city creates an endless spectacle of commodities, fashions, social types, and cultural movements, which are bound to be replaced rapidly by others (Benjamin *Charles Baudelaire*; Featherstone, *Undoing Culture* 149-150). In Benjamin’s work, the nineteenth-century Paris in his arcade project appears as a phantasmagoria of the world of commodities; it is a dream world in motion, in flux, in which all values are transitory and relations are fleeting and indifferent, in which the so-called reality dissolves into a simulacrum, into a

construct (Chambers 62). Eliot's Unreal City in *The Waste Land* realizes the secular infinity of reproduction, of copies of copies, and simulacra: be it London, Paris, Boston, Rome, Jerusalem, Athens, Carthage, or Dante's City of Dis, or the virtual city and data city of information. The poem, in advance of its time, realizes not only the worldliness of the text, the dissemination of textuality, but also the hypertextuality of the cybersphere / telesphere.

The Waste Land can be read as an example of the city archive, which is composed by T. S. Eliot: the avowed collector who abandons nothing *en route*, be it Shakespeare, Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughts (*Selected Essays* 16). In the Unreal City of *The Waste Land*, phantasmagoric simulations dissolve the realist sense of space and time, originals and reproductions. The Unreal City works as complex simulacra of a third nature where visualsapes, soundsapes and even imaginary cyberscapes and infoscapes provide ways of looking simultaneously into human experience and the nature. En route to "epistemological nirvana" (Perl and Tuck 163), both Eliot and Benjamin recognize the contingent truths and values of the fleeting appearances of urban life. They acknowledge that the world in its infinite reproduction (which leads to a building up of a transgressive space that dislocates established frontier and order) is our unique—and indeed our only—habitat and possibility.

Endnotes

¹ The term literary montage is borrowed from Walter Benjamin's *Das Passagen-Werk*, quoted by Iain Chambers, *Border Dialogues: Journeys in Postmodernity* 51. Chambers uses "historical montage" when describing Benjamin's way of representing the nineteenth-century Paris (12).

² In *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson concludes his account of the postmodernist city space with an analysis of the new "hyperspace" of the Bonaventure Hotel in LA's city centre. For Jameson, this postmodern hyperspace is the mutation in space which, different from the space of high modernism, characterizes "a practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and the aleatory" (25). After such a schizophrenic experience, the human subject loses the capacity for orientation and cognitive mapping (39, 45). However, as Mike Gane points out, Jameson's description of the hyperspace of the Bonaventure Hotel is influenced by Jean Baudrillard's ferocious critique of the high-modernist Pompidou Centre in Paris, which is known as the "Beauborg" (Gane 143). Jameson's viewpoint has been criticized for confusing high modernism with postmodernism in architecture. Critics claim that the space in the Bonaventure does not represent something new, as it is just another form of massified modernism, "a claustrophobic space colony attempting to miniature nature within itself," with its "systematic

segregation from the great Hispanic-Asian city outside" (Gane 150-152, see also Shumway, Cooke, Davis, Jacoby). Baudrillard, who is labelled a postmodernist (or even "the high priest of postmodernism"), holds such a title in contempt and insists that he has "nothing to do with postmodernism" (Gane 158). According to Baudrillard, postmodernity is "the simultaneity of the destruction of earlier values and their reconstruction;" it is "renovation within ruination," and everything is "retroactive" and "including" (*Cool Memories* 171; qtd. in Gane 159-160). Using a profoundly anti-modernist and anti-postmodernist stance, Baudrillard offers his account of the revolving cocktail bar at the top of the Bonaventure Hotel in his *America* (59-60). A detailed comparison of Jameson's description of the Bonaventure Hotel and Baudrillard's essay on the Pompidou Centre and the Bonaventure Hotel is provided in Gane's *Baudrillard's Bestiary* (143-156). I argue that Eliot's *The Waste Land* interrogates the problems of the reality principle, the fiction principle, and the simulation principle in its use of the undecidably real and unreal, visible and invisible.

³ There have also been a series of dialogues on human beings' relation to nature and the pluralization of nature by technology. According to Timothy W. Luke, the first nature is the original nature, the ecological biosphere that surrounds and influences human life. The first nature is seen of cosmogenic or theogenic origins that have provided "the key mythic point of origin and field of action for human communities" (28). It is characterized by the "bioscope / ecoscope / geoscape of *terrestriality*," which is unable to be produced (28). The second nature is a new anthropogenic domain of artificial technospheres; it, therefore, finds expression on the "technoscape / socioscape / ethnoscape of *territoriality*" (28-9). As Walter Benjamin proposes in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," technology has been ascribed to the creation of the built environment and material urban landscape that human beings have collectively produced and inhabited. The third nature is another anthropogenic domain that assumes its forms in the "cyberscape / infoscape / mediascape of *telemetricity*" (Luke 29). It is the second humanly constructed world that is not built on the real life in the material environment, but on the virtual reality of the digitalized information world, through the infrastructure of the Internet and cyberspace. And for more than two decades a flood of scholarship has centered on the open ranges of the third nature (Poster, Mitchell, Chambers, Jones, Der Derian, Featherstone "Archiving Culture").

⁴ The concept of simulacra and simulation is associated with Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard assumes the proliferation of images in advanced capitalism, with the expansion of commodities and the advance of technologies of visualization and simulation. People thus live in an age in which signs (or images) are no longer required to have any verifiable contact with the reality they represent. Baudrillard hence provides a handy and much-quoted synopsis of the four stages through which representation has historically evolved. First, the sign is the reflection of a basic reality, the sign is a good appearance, and the representation is of the order of sacrament. Second, the sign masks and perverts a basic reality, it is an evil appearance, and the representation is of the order of maleficence. Third, the sign masks the absence of a basic reality, it plays at being an appearance, and it is of the order of sorcery. Fourth, the sign bears no relation to any reality, it is no longer of the order of appearances, but of simulation (*Simulacra and Simulation* 6). In fact, as Mike Gane points out, Baudrillard's conceptions of simulation, production, and

reproducibility are akin to those of Benjamin, as they both go beyond the point of taking productive forces at face value (96, 167 n3).

⁵ See "From 'Great Town' to 'Nonplace Urban Realm': Reading the Modern City," in *Visions of the Modern City: Essays in History, Art, and Literature*, 9-15. However, Sharpe and Wallock also point out that the three phases in the development of the modern city, though well documented by historians and social scientists, have not been widely adopted (40, n18).

⁶ Thanks to Benjamin's reading of Baudelaire, there has been a critical controversy over the historical specificity of the figure of the flâneur. Drawing on Benjamin, historians, urban sociologist, and literary critics have used the flâneur to explain the tumult of metropolitan life, to trace the class tension and gender divisions, and to represent alienation and detached relationships between individuals as well as the self and the society. See the discussions in Keith Tester, ed.; Susan Buck-Morss (1989, 2004); Janet Wolff; Elizabeth Wilson (1991, 2004); Deena Weinstein and Michael Weinstein; Chris Jenks; Mike Featherstone (1998); Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz ed.; Richard D.E. Burton.

⁷ The term "the unknown city" is borrowed from the book title *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space*, which is in turn inspired by Henri Lefebvre's "The View from the Window" (or "Seen from the Window"): "[The] Unknown, the giant city, to be perceived or guessed at." See *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space* 2. See also Henri Lefebvre, "Seen from the Window," *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time, and Everyday Life* 33. I would like to identify the view of Lefebvre's Unknown City seen from the window with a more detached (physically if not emotionally), filtering, and intellectual perspective of the flâneur figure at the window. It remains my conviction that Lefebvre's Unknown City seen from the window implies a panoramic urban spectatorship, a cognitive mapping, a textual flânerie of the city.

⁸ See my forthcoming articles, "Rhapsody on a City of Dreadful Night: the Flâneur and Urban Spectacle" to be published in the *Yeats Eliot Review*, and "Revisiting the Flâneur in T. S. Eliot's 'Eeldrop and Appleplex—I'" to be published in the *Orbis Litterarum*, where the points made in the present paragraph are substantiated in more detail. For example, I have argued that the flâneur cannot be reduced to the voyeuristic spectator or the mere idler, and flânerie as activities must include acts of observation and conversation, as well as those of reading, writing, and producing texts of metropolitan life. Therefore, Eliot's work belongs to the urban literature of flânerie, characterized by an ensemble of observing, reading, deciphering, recording, and reconstituting street scenes and images from the city.

⁹ Quoted in Williams, *T. S. Eliot: The Waste Land* 15. Quoted again in "Unreal City—Theme and Variations," Edward Timms's Introduction to *Unreal City: Urban Experience in Modern European Literature and Art* 3.

¹⁰ Many similar concerns which resonate with Georg Simmel's and Walter Benjamin's preoccupations with consumer culture are evident in Eliot's series of London Letters, which were written during 1921 and 1922 for both American and French audiences and were published in *The Dial* and *Nouvelle Revue Française*. In *The Dial* "London Letter" dated September 1921, Eliot, while discussing Stravinsky's *Rites of Spring*, expressed a similar response to the emergence of mass culture in this early twentieth-century moment, as well as concerns about the potentially dialectical interactions between these two distinct literary and cultural structures. Such discussions of Eliot's and Benjamin's critical theory on the media age, however, are

beyond the scope of this essay. Also, according to Mark Poster, his introduction of the term as well as the concept of “the second media age” aims to draw attention to “certain innovations,” or a “cognitive mapping,” rather than insist on an absolute divide “in the streets of everyday life.” The insertion of a period suggests neither a binary logic (the first versus the second), nor a periodization (a passage from one state of being to another). Instead, it emphasizes “a complexification,” “a multiplying or multiplexing of different principles in the same social space” (21-22).

¹¹ The City in which Eliot worked at that time differed geographically and conceptually from what it is now. In the poem it refers to the financial district in London, located just beyond the north end of London Bridge, home to Britain’s major commercial banks, including Lloyds Bank in Lombard Street, where Eliot worked for from 1917 to 1925. The Strand, running northeast from Trafalgar Square parallel to the Thames, together with its prolongation, Fleet Street, connects the City (the financial district) with Westminster (the political district) (Rainey 81, 110).

¹² As Mayer points out, “Stetson” might recall Eliot’s American background, since it refers to a “mythic figure in the Western cowboy,” or the “heroic struggle between good and evil in the cinema Western” (Mayer 260). Generally speaking, “Stetson” is understood as a style of hat worn by cowboys.

¹³ In terms of place-names, Cook identifies in “What the Thunder Said,” ll. 374-375, “Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London” the seat of three ancient empires in one line, two modern ones in the following line. Obviously, it is Rome that was once both a great city and the capital of a great empire and that lies behind Eliot’s vision of London and the British Empire, with the name of Vienna, capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, suggesting a line of succession, for the Austro-Hungarian Empire saw itself as heir to the Holy Roman Empire, which in turn saw itself as heir to the Roman Empire (342-343). For Eliot’s viewpoint on such a line of succession, see Eliot’s “Virgil and the Christian World,” broadcast from London, September 9, 1951. Reprinted in John Hayward ed., *T. S. Eliot: Selected Prose* 97.

¹⁴ The term, “des tours de Babel,” is borrowed from Jacques Derrida. See Joseph F. Graham ed., “Des Tours De Babel,” *Difference in Translation* 165-207. For the critical history of *The Waste Land*, see Lawrence Rainey, ed., with annotation and introduction, *The Annotated Waste Land with Eliot’s Contemporary Prose*; Jewel Spears Brooker and Joseph Bentley, *Reading The Waste Land: Modernism and the Limits of Interpretation*.

¹⁵ See Eliot, “Thoughts After Lambeth” in *T. S. Eliot: Selected Essays* 368; hereafter references to this edition are given with abbreviation *SE* and placed in parentheses within the text. Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound* 1; hereafter cited as *WLF*. Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* 221.

¹⁶ These terms are borrowed from Ellen E. Berry’s discussion of Gertrude Stein’s art, and I have modified them in order to serve my own purpose. See “Modernism / Mass Culture / Postmodernism: the Case of Gertrude Stein,” in *Reading the New: A Backward Glance at Modernism* 167-190. In the following analysis of the simulative nature of *The Waste Land*, I am indebted greatly to Mike Featherstone’s theory on the flâneur, virtual public life, and archiving cultures. See Featherstone, “The Flâneur, the City and the Virtual Public Life” 909-925; “Archiving Cultures” 161-184.

¹⁷ In terms of Derrida, dissemination does not mean or signify. Instead of signifying a return to the source of origin or the Father, dissemination entails a kind of figurative castration. That is, the text in its writing enjoys the possibility of its infinite generality and multiplicity. What Derrida points towards is “a scene of writing within a scene of writing and so on without end, through a structural necessity that is marked in the text” (*Dissemination* 223). Text, as the uniquely written phenomenon, enjoys the property of “supplementarity,” and is capable of repeating itself without exhausting itself and without keeping anything in reserve (*Of Grammatology* 161; Said 205).

¹⁸ For example, Mayer notes that in “What the Thunder Said” the voice of the Divine simultaneously expresses itself on the lower level, naturalistically as “matter, noise, and an appearance,” as well as on the higher level, metaphorically as “an intelligible sign to be interpreted” (285).

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Falling Towers: *The Waste Land* and September 11, 2001

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The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 were the first national shock of the new century, yet the public knew how to respond. As Roger Angell wrote in *The New Yorker* only a few weeks after the attacks:

There's nothing new about this if you've lived awhile. . . . We woke up to Hiroshima, Dallas came at lunchtime, and My Lai by slow degrees. Young people have been looking at us lately and saying, "I don't see how you could have done that, gone through so much. It's beyond my imagination," and we think, Kid, there's nothing to it. Just wait and see. (30-31)

Angell copes with unimaginable violence by comparing it to historical antecedents. This is the strategy that T. S. Eliot uses in *The Waste Land* and theorizes as the mythical method in his 1923 essay "Ulysses, Order and Myth." It is also the strategy that Galway Kinnell uses to write about 9/11 in "When the Towers Fell," which was published in *The New Yorker* to commemorate the first anniversary of the attacks. Modeled on *The Waste Land*, Kinnell's poem reminds us that both poets faced the same aesthetic dilemma: how to represent violence in a secular age. Although Eliot later declared himself "an Anglo-Catholic in religion, a classicist in literature, and a royalist in politics" (*Lancelot Andrewes* vii), in 1923 he was not a believer. The turmoil of his personal life and postwar London left him adrift, groping for a lifeline. He found one in the work of Yeats and Joyce, just as Kinnell found one in *The Waste Land*.

"When the Towers Fell" takes its form but not its meaning from *The Waste Land*. As Kinnell's title suggests, the twin towers of the World Trade Center provide what Hugh Kenner would call a

“subject-rhyme” with the ruins of past civilizations that Eliot names (423):

Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal

“Unreal” conveys the enormity of events that are all too real, just as young people tell Angell that 9/11 is beyond their imagination. Numerous verbal echoes reinforce the historical parallel. For example, Eliot’s “By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept” can be heard behind these lines:

And I sat down by the waters of the Hudson,
by the North Cove Yacht Harbor, and thought
how those on the high floors must have suffered. . . .

Eliot’s symbolic geography in “Flowed up the hill and down King William Street, / To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours” leads to these lines:

The plane screamed low down lower Fifth Avenue
lifted at the Arch, someone said, shaking the dog walkers
in Washington Square Park, drove for the north tower. . . .

Like Eliot, Kinnell portrays individuals across the social spectrum:

The banker is talking to London.
Humberto is delivering breakfast sandwiches.
The trader is already working the phone.
The mail sorter has started sorting the mail.

Like Eliot’s erudite literary and historical references, Kinnell’s references are not likely to be familiar to readers, even to readers of *The New Yorker*. In addition to Hart Crane’s “For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen” and Walt Whitman’s “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed,” Kinnell quotes texts about violence in other languages, though he provides translations citing “The Testament” by Francois Villon, “Death Fugue” by Paul Celan, and “Songs of a Wanderer,” by Aleksander Wat. Despite these striking similarities, there is a crucial difference between the two poems: Kinnell replaces

the distinctive voices of *The Waste Land* with the consistent tone of a single speaker. This contrast highlights the indeterminacy of Eliot's response to the cultural crisis he faced.

Not everyone considers the meaning of *The Waste Land* indeterminate. In *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide*, David E. Chinitz summarizes the debate between those who emphasize the "fundamental radical indeterminacy" of the poem and those who, in Helen Davidson's words, see it as a valorization of "'myth over history, spatial form over time, an orderly past over a chaotic present, and the transcendence of art over the pain of life'" (162).¹ The conservative position finds support in Eliot's definition of the mythical method in "Ulysses, Order and Myth." Since this essay is widely regarded as a guide to *The Waste Land*, James Longenbach holds Eliot "partly responsible for this misleading way of reading the poem" (455). It is misleading, however, only if the mythical method is understood as a reactionary attempt to impose beliefs of the past on the present. I am arguing, however, that the essay, like the poem, reflects the uncertainty of the postwar period.

In the past, communal beliefs had justified or condemned the most horrific acts, but nineteenth-century challenges to faith made any consensus about the meaning of events unattainable. In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor describes the turn of the century as a time of extraordinary insecurity: "The idea could be accredited that there is no morally credible publicly established order, the diametrical opposite of the previously established synthesis" (408). Despite "widespread agreement that something was missing, there was no consensus on what it was" (400). The First World War accelerated the "fragilization" of all beliefs, from the religious to the scientific (304). Even "for the staunchest believer," he claims, faith became "one human possibility among others" (3). For Taylor, secularism is not an absence of belief but a surplus of competing beliefs.

Both *The Waste Land* and "Ulysses, Order and Myth" reflect this cultural crisis. In *A Genealogy of Modernism*, Michael Levenson links the poem to its era in terms that illustrate Taylor's conception of secularism. Levenson notes the absence of a consistent point of view (190), the use of parallels in place of narrative (200), and the "anthropological temper which understands by comparing, which sets systems of belief in relation to one another, and which disallows the special claims of any single system" (202). As he shows, "In *The Waste Land* Eliot acknowledges the greatest range of attitudes and

faiths, with the consequence that none comes to final dominance” (202). The poem switches between aristocratic and common speakers and literary and colloquial language without transitions. We hear *Tristan and Isolte*, music hall songs, and the Upanishads. The incongruous juxtaposition of characters, quotations, tones, discourses, and images generates irony and destabilizes meaning.²

Eliot began *The Waste Land* after reading the “Circe” episode of *Ulysses* (Chinitz 42), and he acknowledged his debt to Joyce in “*Ulysses*, Order and Myth.” The essay accounts for the mythical method as a formal response to the “immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (177). These conditions produce an aesthetic dilemma, because without purpose and order, the logic of narrative collapses. Eliot claims that the novel is finished, and a new form has appeared. Yeats and Joyce have made “the modern world possible for art” by “manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity” (177). Joyce’s use of the *Odyssey* is “simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance” to modern life. Although the acts of “controlling” and “ordering” have acquired the negative associations of political control and repressive order, they are fundamental to the aims of “shape” and “significance.”

Eliot speaks of a single “continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity,” but his examples contain multiple parallels. For example, Yeats often refers to traditional Celtic myths, but his 1921 volume *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* locates current social disorder in patterns drawn from various civilizations, including those of Egypt, Byzantium, and China.³ While Eliot mentions Joyce’s use of the *Odyssey*, *Ulysses* also coordinates its account of a day in Dublin in 1904 with innumerable other systems. Each episode is assigned an organ of the body, a color, a symbol, an art, and a “technic” (Gilbert 29), and there are recurring references to icons of high and low culture as various as *Hamlet*, the Wandering Jew, and *Venus in Furs*. Eliot recommends a comparable range of sources for the mythical method: “It is a method for which the horoscope is auspicious. Psychology (such as it is, and whether our reaction to it be comic or serious), ethnology, and *The Golden Bough* have concurred to make possible what was impossible even a few years ago” (177-178). This eclectic array, stretching from the occult to social science, from historical to imagined antecedents, suggests that Eliot sought patterns wherever they might be found.

By constructing a relationship between the anarchy and futility of the present and something else, in fact, anything else, the mythical method makes discrete events, which are meaningless in isolation, parts of meaningful patterns. The multiplicity of incompatible patterns keeps each of them contingent. In the absence of a social consensus about the relationship between cause and effect, past and present, acts and consequences, the mythical method constructs arbitrary relationships. Far from being an authoritarian quest for stasis and order, the mythical method maintains the structure of meaning without affirming a particular meaning. The difference between the mythical method and myths is its multiplicity. It is a structure, not a set of beliefs.

This conception of the mythical method encompasses Eliot's and Kinnell's different ways of implementing it. "When the Towers Fell" uses historical parallels to express a specific point of view, conforming to Andrew Von Hendy's description of the mythical method in his 2002 book *The Modern Construction of Myth*. Like most critics, Von Hendy associates the mythical method with belief and applies this definition to *The Waste Land*. He argues that Eliot believes there is a "permanent stratum of the human mind" that produces myth and that Eliot employs *The Golden Bough* as a "salvific escape" from "pointlessness" (147). Von Hendy is more explicit than most critics, however, about the need to reject key premises of "*Ulysses*, Order and Myth" to sustain this interpretation. He does not share Eliot's perception of a cultural crisis. Seeing no aesthetic dilemma, he mocks Eliot's doubts about the possibility of art in the modern world, "as if the artist could not come to grips with this world until he succeeded in imposing upon it a pattern out of the remote past, a grid of 'myth'" (146). Although Von Hendy acknowledges Levenson "for the pioneering recognition of the radical challenge posed by the contrast of 'mythical' to 'narrative' method" and the "'contextual development' of *The Waste Land*" (351, n. 18), he contradicts Levenson's point by disputing Eliot's assertion that narrative is no longer possible. Von Hendy claims that *The Waste Land* itself has narrative unity.

Positing a single speaker, Von Hendy increases the coherence of the poem. He uses Eliot's footnote about the centrality of Tiresias to justify a reading of the poem as a monologue in which Tiresias is not only the "quondam first-person narrator's designation of himself" (147) but also "personifies the 'superorganic' mind of Europe" (148).

Although Eliot's note begins, "Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character,' is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest," it goes on to describe a series of symbolic parallels: "Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias." This note resembles Joyce's schema for *Ulysses*, yet Von Hendy, like many others, shields Joyce from his objections to the mythical method. He regards Joyce's use of myth as "parodic" (149), whereas Eliot's is "one-sided" (150) and a "return to sacred origins" (151). As Denis Donoghue comments, "It seems clear that 'myth' is a word that, when used, incurs a remarkable degree of animus" (225).

Donoghue traces Von Hendy's line of interpretation back to Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* (1967). Kermode distinguishes myth from fiction and denigrates myths as "agents of stability" that "call for the absolute" (224). Since Kermode's example of myth is anti-Semitism, his argument is well armored, especially because elsewhere Eliot expressed anti-Semitic and authoritarian views. Nevertheless, Donoghue demurs: "I don't follow Kermode's logic" (224). Donoghue is one of the few critics who perceive irony in the mythical method: "The mythical method seems to me to issue from the same source as irony: the impulse to redeem the penury of events by bringing one motif to bear upon another, through a relation of likeness or dissimilarity" (225). He focuses on the "relation" between motifs rather than the motifs themselves, structure rather than content. Allowing for multiple "relations" or parallels, Donoghue recognizes the indeterminacy of Eliot's essay as well as *The Waste Land*.

Although Von Hendy fails to see the irony and contingency in *The Waste Land*, his reading fits "When the Towers Fell." In contrast to the discontinuity of *The Waste Land*, Kinnell's poem is a coherent narrative. His first-person speaker unifies the disparate elements of the poem. This speaker begins with the intimate "we" of a couple "at our high window" looking at the towers before the attacks, withdraws to an individual "I," moves to the public "we" of the city, and then returns to the singular "I." The narrative expresses a definite point of view:

This is not a comparison but a corollary,
not a likeness but a lineage
in the twentieth-century history of violent death—

Substituting a “corollary” for Eliot’s “continuous parallel,” Kinnell situates his references to the past in a causal relationship. A “lineage” is a sequence of related events, a narrative. Extending the “lineage” of violence geographically and temporally, Kinnell represents the destruction of the World Trade Center as an attack on a polyglot, multicultural, and unified New York City. The various figures in “When the Towers Fell” are bound together as victims of the same catastrophe.

Devoid of irony, Kinnell’s poem is an elegy. It mourns a communal loss. Kinnell sustains the sincere tone of immediate responses to the attacks, such as Roger Rosenblatt’s piece in *Time* on September 16, 2001 titled “The Age of Irony Comes to an End”:

When the white dust settles, and the bereaved are alone in their houses, there will be nothing but grief around them, and nothing is more real than that. In short, people may at last be ready to say what they wholeheartedly believe. The kindness of people toward others in distress is real. There is nothing to see through in that. Honor and fair play? Real. And the preciousness of ordinary living is real as well—all to be taken seriously, perhaps, in a new and chastened time. The greatness of the country: real. The anger: real. The pain: too real.

Kinnell evokes this pain by dwelling on the experience of victims. He imagines those who died, those who survived, and those who searched for relatives. He attempts to find meaning in these losses by connecting them to other deaths. The search for bodies “always goes on / somewhere, now in New York and Kabul.” He identifies causes and consequences: “Seeing the towers vomit these black omens, that the last century dumped into / this one, for us to dispose of, we know they are our futures” The poem ends with the elegiac affirmation that the dead survive in us:

As each tower goes down, it concentrates
into itself, transforms itself
infinitely slowly into a black hole

infinitesimally small: mass
without space, where each light,
each life, put out, lies down within us.

The black hole is not a void but a dense mass.

The secular century is over, and Kinnell speaks for a new community of belief. "When the Towers Fell" offers much more than the "stony rubbish" and "broken images" of a waste land. In contrast to Eliot's fragments, Kinnell creates a new global fusion from the ruins of the World Trade Center. The attacks on his city were too real for him to reproduce the indeterminacy of *The Waste Land*. But a decade has passed, and irony has returned. Fundamentalist certainty has replaced the fragilization of beliefs Taylor identified. No consensus is in sight. As factions clamor to define the meaning of terrorist acts, violence again seems unimaginable and unreal. The capacity of the mythical method to accommodate the indeterminacy of competing beliefs as well as the affirmation of sincere convictions makes it a credible strategy for representing violence in the twenty-first century.

Endnotes

¹ Chinitz concludes that "most of Eliot's readers in his lifetime" constructed "the portentous, the elitist, the mandarin Eliot," creating a target for more recent critics (189).

² Levenson describes the source of irony in Eliot's shorter poems: "The strong accents, the unlikely rhymes, the rapid movement of thought, the casual appropriation of a cultural past, these are devices well suited to the methods of irony, and if the quatrain form represents a "precise way of thinking and feeling" for Eliot, it is the way of irony—not the incidental ironies of "Prufrock," but irony as the structural principle of the whole. . . . These poems are built out of certain violent contrasts . . . and their development consists in the unfolding of stark antitheses" (161). These qualities also contribute to the irony of *The Waste Land*.

³ Nevertheless, in 1922 Yeats said that he intended to produce "a symbolical, a mythological coherence," and the range of sources in *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* seem to be the target of his objections to "international art": "I could not endure, however, an international art, picking stories and symbols where it pleased. Might I not, with health and good luck to aid me, create some new *Prometheus Unbound*; Patrick or Columcille, Oisín or Finn, in Prometheus' stead; and instead of Caucasus, Cro-Patrick or Ben Bulbin? Have not all races had their first unity from a mythology that marries them to rock and hill?" (166-167).

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Mashup, Hypertext, and the Future of *The Waste Land*

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When it came to terminology, Eliot always seemed to reach ahead of his era. *Objective correlative* and the *dissociation of sensibility* mark his penchant for the neologism, as do the near-ridiculous *polyphiloprogenitive* and the triumph of *bullshit*, two words out of several coined in his poetry. As he would later admit in his self-analytical lecture “To Criticize the Critic,” terms like these were usually more façade than insight: like cover fire, they opened a path for his own creative work and its pursuit of the new (19-20).

As technically progressive as *The Waste Land* may be, it is tempting to think it could be captured with terms like Eliot’s own. Taken in its entirety, however, the poem has outpaced anyone’s critical terminology, and especially any articulation of how it reuses existing material. As a whole, the poem is not a parody. Nor, in the language of more recent decades, is it a pastiche. It is not an homage, satire or mock epic, and it is not (strictly speaking) saturated with allusion. To be fair, each of these terms partially illuminates the poem’s reach into the literature of the past; but applied singly to the entire poem, each would distort its own meaning. No literary term is meant to be stretched beyond its proper use, and none of these labels has allowed enough breadth or enough space for Eliot’s poetic remix.

The poem’s notes have similarly lacked a broad concept, one that can facilitate a discussion of literary debt without restricting the kinds of connection the poem possesses. These notes are not simple bibliography, as B. C. Southam and others have clarified, for in that respect they would be woefully incomplete.¹ Neither are they mere glosses or commentary; in fact, some are misleading and others unnecessary. On the opposite end of the spectrum, intertextuality as a term is too slippery to suggest the way that Eliot relates to his sources. What is needed is a concept with the right focus and a useful scope.

Beyond Brooker and Bentley's hermeneutic loops and Barthes' textual networks, I now want to speak of his technique with more precision and more developed textual analogies.

To remix Eliot's own words, these limitations in scholarship prove that last year's words continue to belong to this year's language, but that there will always be concepts and expressions outrunning them, awaiting another label. This sense of momentum, *The Waste Land's* wriggling free from any critical pins of the past, has finally resonated with two concepts far in the poem's future: mashup and hypertext. These terms provide far more than anachronistic whimsy or just one more minority report on the masterpiece. They each present a conceptual framework that captures the poem's futurity and its relationship to the past. As distant as they seem from 1922, they reveal *The Waste Land* more for what it has always been, and they anticipate how the poem may read for generations to come.

The Audacity of Mashup

As many critics have noticed regarding the essay "Ulysses, Order and Myth," Eliot seems to praise Joyce's novel with a wink toward his own poetry. *Ulysses* epitomizes what he dubs the "mythical method," a way of treating existing literature as if it were "living material" (483, 482). Myth, from this stance, is a guide that can help the author "manipulat[e] a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" (483). According to the essay, Joyce's and Wyndham Lewis's use of this method has made their work immune to the literary labels of their era: "being 'in advance' of their time, [they] felt a conscious or probably unconscious dissatisfaction" with existing forms like the epic or the novel (483). By using a new creative concept of "order," they subverted the critic's attempt to "order" their work by literally coming to terms with it. So far, this "mythical method" sounds like *The Waste Land's* backward glance; to be fair, however, it fits only some of Eliot's passages, and few of his poem's larger movements. He pursues not one kind of archetypal literature but several. His context is not the accepted culture of myth but the binocular vision of Jessie Weston and Sir James Frazer. Many of Eliot's passages even revisit literature in ways that elude anything resembling symbolism.

What is needed for *The Waste Land* is a concept that can foreground the poem's collection of existing sources, but that can do

so without pigeonholing or limiting the range of Eliot's reuse. Though it is a young idea just coming into its own, with little to no scholarship and mainly popular exempla, mashup offers just this wholeness. According to most accounts, the term surfaced around 2005 and, as of this article's writing, it is still splintering into use. A cursory internet search will turn up definitions focused on music, video, or website creation, and even a bleeding-edge source like Wikipedia still contains no entry for the umbrella idea. In a sense then, the present article is as much an unfolding of the concept of mashup as it is an application to the poem. I will work from the broad, deceptively simple definition found in one online glossary:

A mashup is any type of media [sic]—such as a song or video—that combines material from multiple sources to create a new work. (“Copyright”)

At first glance, it seems nothing more than a new name for an old dog. How does mashup differ—if at all—from the element of remix that has characterized literature from the several Greek versions of Oedipus to the damning refusal of Wilfred Owen's “Dulce et Decorum Est”?

The difference lies in the essence of each approach: where these other literary examples (and many more) *include* pre-existent material, mashup *consists* of it. Allusion, as a literary occurrence, is too momentary to account for the whole of Eliot's technique. Similarly, parody, pastiche, satire, homage are all too narrow in their sense. Mashup (with *The Waste Land* as an excellent exemplar) describes any work of art where artistic control has been brought to the process of assembling existing material. Sources have not just entered Eliot's text: they have become the threads of his poem's fabric.

Far better than any of these other terms, mashup expresses Eliot's curated view of the world. With mashup as both technique and mindset, the artist gathers and exhibits a collection driven by personal vision; and though not all artists admit to it, Eliot claims that this practice of “borrowing” is what they have in common. In “Philip Massinger,” now a mantra of sorts for the open source community, he writes:

One of the surest of tests is the way in which a poet borrows. Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from

that from which it was torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion. ("Philip Massinger" 114)

Notice his portrait of the "good poet" as one who tears from existing sources and "welds his theft" into a new form that is either "something better, or at least something different" (114). A closer match to mashup would be difficult to find.²

You, *sympathique lecteur* (or *lecteuse*), may admit at this stage that *The Waste Land* resembles the fledgling concept of mashup, but the term may have no connotation for you. Worse, it may mean the depth of lowbrow culture. The truth is that, as a medium, it has great potential. Consider Jordan Roseman (aka DJ Earworm), who has quickly rocketed to internet attention for his acknowledged skill in mashup. His "United State of Pop," an annual, carefully-edited music video, creates a new product each January by mashing up the previous year's top 25 Billboard hits. Each mashup from his series has worked only from existing music and existing video, yet each has achieved success as a new product: the songs have enjoyed radio play as originals, and two have even entered the co-opted Billboard charts on their own. Roseman limits his source material in ways Eliot did not, but their approach tracks a similar pattern. As Roseman clarifies,

What interests me is the affinity of musical elements that present themselves when two or more tracks meet, and the window of dissonance that opens in their overlap. Irony is boring. I'm after a certain transporting feeling, a melancholy nostalgia or beautiful sadness that tells you you've created something completely new. (Marke)

Mashup is not just compilation, though: it is also convergence. *Yelp*, a web-based application, is one of the most popular mashups as of this article's writing. On your desktop or mobile device it connects the capabilities of Google Maps, business information, and user reviews to create a one-stop app for personalized recommendations. Its sources may have led a previous existence, but there is no denying that the new combination offers a unique and valuable result.

What DJ Earworm does with tunes and lyrics, Eliot does with texts of various kinds. What *Yelp* enables for its users through synergy, *The Waste Land* awakens in its readers through literary coalescence. The poem is made from existing material, even if Eliot adds his own embellishments, but it opens in a forward, new direction just as much as it unlocks the past. It was not a lack, but a different

kind of creativity that led Eliot to reuse material. It was also not laziness, as Lawrence Lessig explains:

It takes extraordinary knowledge about a culture to remix it well. The artist or student training to do it well learns far more about his past than one committed to this (in my [mind], hopelessly naive) view about “original creativity.” (93)

Given the progressive nature of mashup, it is perhaps no surprise to recall that the poem’s technique failed to register with many of its first readers. Critic Louis Untermeyer bashed it, calling the poem

a pompous parade of erudition . . . a kaleidoscopic movement in which the bright-coloured pieces fail to atone for the absence of an integrated design. (453)

Even as friendly a reader as Conrad Aiken suggested there were

many lines and passages and parodies and quotations which do not demonstrably, in any “logical” sense, carry forward the theme (294)

What these critics missed, due to the poem’s avant-gardism, was both Eliot’s motivation in tearing bits from these existing sources, and the nature of his final, welded product.

At heart, these (and other) readers assume that mashups like *The Waste Land* are derivative of their material, an attempt to ride artistic coattails, when in fact they are appropriative, exercising control over the existing components. Eliot’s sources may be erudite and kaleidoscopic, but his design is based on a new vision that supersedes their meaning instead of depending on it. Further, his selections may develop the poem’s theme in a sense other than logical, but they do develop it. In creating his poem, Eliot was more like a DJ mixing tracks than a musician performing a medley.³ These existing sources are at his mercy, and not vice versa, despite his insistence that the “dead writers” are the ones “assert[ing] their immortality” through the new work (“Tradition” 43). Mashup can include homage, but can never be reduced to it.

Compare two more recent examples of mashup and its posture toward sources: Kutiman and Eric Whitacre. The first is an Israeli artist; the second an American composer. What they share is a track record of wildly successful mashups that comprise only pre-existing

YouTube videos. Kutiman, in his online project ThruYOU, draws from the far reaches of the video hosting site to produce unlikely (and often surprising) musical ensembles from vocal and instrument solos, going so far as to create dialogue among the players. Whitacre, on the other hand, *commissioned* the hundreds of individual performances which he mashed up into a Virtual Choir for choral works like “Sleep” and “Lux Aurumque.” The point could be made with any mashup, Eliot’s included: art composed of existing sources subsumes the earlier work in itself, and not the other way around. Mashup is not a new version of the atelier method: instead of just learning from the master, the student deposes him.

The approach, to put it mildly, suggests that the past is not exactly dead; and for many mashups, anachronistic vision is as essential as the reuse itself. By incorporating lines from Dante, Shakespeare, and folk song into something other than a documentary, for instance, Eliot was refusing to see these as finished products confined to the past. Instead, he viewed them as futures in potential, as “living material” that could continue to survive in the work of others (“Ulysses” 482). Modernism as a movement had great sympathy with this notion: aside from Joyce’s mythologizing, there is Stravinsky’s primitivism and the range of artistic innovations that blurred the line between past and future, between artist and other (readymades, collage, Cubism, montage). E. M. Forster even proposed an extreme view of anachronistic literary history: he imagines all writers of all time, in one room, writing their works simultaneously (*Aspects* 9).

Consider the kinds of artistic relationship that are possible within the broader context of mashup. Existing works are, after all, not just brought into proximity as if they were separate devices plugged into the power strip of a new work. They assume integral, complex relationships with each other—Eliot’s analogy, after all, was welding. So though retrieved lines and scenes from the past may be allusions, they are not just allusions. The artist may discover unexpected agreement between sources, producing something like the analogy of Christ and Shackleton’s third. He may explore the sources’ disparity through irony, parody, or the bathos of Marvell’s lyric blurring into folk song. There may even be harmony, a thought progression, or multivocal perspective that combined sources can create, producing something like the Elizabethan melange of *King Lear*’s nothings, *The Tempest*’s pearls and the Shakespearean rag, or the dark convergence of the Chapel Perilous, *Hamlet*, and St Peter’s betrayal. Each of these

possibilities is a way *The Waste Land* reuses the past, but each is also a sub-genre within mashup. On their own they would mark only moments in the poem, but as part of a larger technique they signify a prolonged, nuanced treatment of existing material.

It is nearly a non-statement to claim that mashup is inherently audacious. To the detractor it seems to legalize stealing, and the current debate over digital rights management suggests that the criticism may have teeth in it. Even to the devotee or the perpetrator, however, mashup can seem a contest of personalities. Today's compositions reflect sass within their titles ("Radiohead vs. Dave Brubeck"), as if the interchange were a prize fight hosted by the artist. Eliot was no different: though he claims there may have been a "mild-mannered man" behind that typewriter, as he would later confess about his criticism, he was no less "arrogan[t], vehemen[t or] cocksure" because of it ("To Criticize" 14). Grandiosity is one of the poem's few weaknesses, but without that quality in Eliot, the poem may never have been written. Without the emergence of mashup, on the other hand, the technique may never have been fully appreciated.

The Tangled Web

It is difficult to think of *The Waste Land* without gravitating toward the fifty-two endnotes that follow the last "shantih." Even by the 1950s Eliot claimed that "anyone who bought my book of poems, and found that the notes to *The Waste Land* were not in it, would demand his money back" (*Frontiers* 10). Yet though they clearly form part of the same work, they also divide the poem into two distinct sections. Mashup may encapsulate the remix technique of the poetic body, but it could never comprehend the notes. The *modus operandi* is simply too different.

At the end of a first reading, the initial effect *The Waste Land's* notes produce is tension. Mashup as a technique works precisely because it reuses existing sources without calling attention to their pastness. The notes, however, exercise a sudden inverse function, identifying the pre-existent connections of the poem and even, in places, directing the reader to a bibliographic entry. Yet it would be an error to mistake these notes for mere bibliography. Eliot in these notes assumes and even creates a variety of relationships among his sources. Technically, he anticipates a concept that would go beyond bibliography or even glossary to enable an array of connections

between one document and another, or even within the document itself. That concept is hypertext.

Coined in 1965, the year of Eliot's death, hypertext is now commonplace in the Digital Age. Even octogenarians on Facebook have become familiar with the concept of text that functions as a link, allowing the reader to click away from his current place in a document to another place, even to another document. The term's inventor, Theodor Nelson, envisioned it as a kind of update to the Choose Your Own Adventure books or as an electronic garden of forking paths:

By hypertext, I mean non-sequential writing—text that branches and allows choices to the reader . . . a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways. (Nelson 2)

Though Eliot's pre-computer links are not clickable, his notes still fit the definition and the functionality. So do other texts, such as the *Divina Commedia*, *The Rape of the Lock*, and *Tristram Shandy*, and these have yet to be considered from the perspective of hypertext. They should be.

It is important to locate when Eliot first planned the notes. If he merely tacked them on afterwards, as he later suggested, in an attempt to fill a final signature, they should be read as one of the poem's first reviews, as an interview with the poet, or as a creative nervousness that wondered if *The Waste Land*'s erudition would intimidate more than impress. If, however, Eliot had them in mind while the poem was being compiled, as he mentions to a publisher eight months before its launch, they should be considered a feature as vital to the poem as its epigraph or section headings.⁴ It is this second approach I propose, as it is rooted in fact and not Eliot's legendary elusiveness. The notes, despite their differing format, explicate an approach inherent in the poem's body. By way of hypertext, they clarify that Eliot does not pretend the poem to be 100% new, but that in and through his work he is proposing a new way of relating to the past.

Hyperlinks, those individual connections within a hypertext, draw attention to the threads of the document, the novel, or the poem. Some links reference sources, while others offer further reading; but it is crucial to recognize that all of them *illuminate* existing connections rather than establish them. Robert Crawford anticipated the concept's potential for the poem in *The Modern Poet*:

[T]he cybernetically developed computer systems of postmodernity allow us to comprehend better the poetry of literary modernism. . . . The older, manuscript-based analogy of the “palimpsest” is too simple to express how a poem like *The Waste Land* works. (190)

Within this reality as well as the language of hypertext, most of *The Waste Land*'s notes are outbound links: that is, they link from something inside the document to something outside it. Hence the ease of mistaking them for bibliography. Many of the outbound links are documentary, supplying only a source name and the location of the reference; a contemporary equivalent appears at the foot of each Wikipedia page. While documentary links are usually designed to defend an author against charges of plagiarism, in Eliot's case they have seemed to highlight the accusation. Given the second kind of his outbound links—evasive—it is likely that he intended to be provocative. Evasive links take the reader nowhere, or at least nowhere helpful; as such they are the equivalents of dead links or directory spam. These moments are famous among readers of the poem, and include the cheeky identification of *Turdus aonalaschkae pallasii* and a confessed ignorance of both an Australian ballad's source and the “exact constitution of the Tarot pack” (CP 54, 52, 51). Unqualified as bibliographic entries, these links seem designed to frustrate the reader committed to a no-laughs view of scholarship. They are clearly what Eliot had in mind when he later called the notes a “remarkable exposition of bogus scholarship” (*Frontiers* 10).

In an artistic hypertext such as *The Waste Land*, outbound links may provide a false sense of full disclosure. The source debt, in many cases, may seem to be fully repaid by Eliot's hyperlink. However, in hyperlinking, the author decides how much of the other document to include in her own; the process is known as transclusion. Unsurprisingly, the actual borrowed content, or inline link, is almost always an excerpt. By selecting a term or—more often in Eliot's case—a passage from the source document, the artist is creating a textual shorthand: he is encouraging his audience to read that source document synecdochally, the extract standing for the whole. It is, realistically, the only way to incorporate work into a sophisticated mashup, but it does risk a condition we could call thumbnail distortion. Would even bookish readers, for instance, want *Tristan und Isolde* to be typified by the two textual transclusions Eliot includes in his first section? Would Marvell, similarly, approve of his seduction

lyric's reduction to the menacing presence of death?

This first kind of textual shorthand creates a second, since links to existing literature will nearly always practice what is called deep linking. That is, they will send the reader not to a title or to a document as a whole, but to some passage within a document. In the process, these links have rearranged the order in which a reader will experience the other text; they have introduced at least a sense of achronology. On the internet, it has become standard practice and the value of most outbound links; some companies, however, have found it a violation worthy of lawsuit. Since deep linking bypasses a website's strategic home page, those who bank the value of their site on such a monolithic entrance have sued and won for damages. In Eliot's case, writers long dead have no way to indict him, but their work is still profoundly affected by his deep links. The reader who has not yet approached *Hamlet* will find a crucial scene spoiler by the end of *The Waste Land*'s second section; she will, however, be more likely to read the play if she has not already. Those moving to Ovid from Eliot's poem will struggle with that earlier writer's version of Tiresias, suffering the clinamen that literature students normally experience as "I watched the film first" syndrome. Those attempting to read the Fisher King legend afterward will encounter similar problems. Yet, as the "wild goose chase" that followed in *The Waste Land*'s wake suggests, the poem's deep linking did steer readers toward new texts, its textual Pied Piper undeniably leading the young, but only into the unknown of their literary past ("To Criticize" 90).

A further reality of outbound links, true also in *The Waste Land*, is their bid for popularity. By flooding his poem with outbound links, Eliot is—among other things—finding a way to raise his own reputation. Imagine that a reader encounters Dante for the first time while reading Eliot; she proceeds to read the *Inferno* and finds that, in equal measures, she feels the need to read *The Waste Land* again but also finds her new positive Dantean experience reflected back on Eliot in the spirit of "Customers who bought *The Inferno* also bought *The Waste Land*." In the culture of internet, this phenomenon is known as reciprocal linking. Companies often attempt to enhance their website's search engine optimization (SEO) or "findability" by including outbound links to friendly sites. The strategy operates like back scratching, and hopes to "bait" inbound, reciprocal links by creating goodwill. These inbound links convince a search engine like Google of the site's value, leading to a higher listing in the search results and

more traffic. Eliot's method works similarly, at the very least enhancing the gravity of his own work by his hypertextual literary ties. His poem may not have enjoyed any reciprocal links (and no inbound links except in criticism on his work), yet his cited authors seemed to vouch for his poem by their presence.

As most readers are aware, *The Waste Land's* notes also include internal links (often called anchor links), that identify connections among parts of the poem itself. In the most famous instance, Eliot announces that what Tiresias sees as "the substance of the poem," but also implies that the character's function is part of that substance too:

Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a "character," is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly indistinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. (52)

Though the reader may have felt affinity among these moments in the poem, it was only when Eliot called attention to them as hypertext that they became functional. In this sense, the notes encourage not only analogical links, but also a different method of reading where the reader transcludes Eliot's textual data on the one-eyed merchant into the passage on the Phlebas, and vice versa.⁵ At the very least, by waiting until the notes to reveal these (and other) internal links, Eliot is demanding an additional reading. At the most, he may even be suggesting the reality of network beyond his poem where women are not indistinct but linked to each other, and where biological connection becomes as much archetypal as it is scientific.

As some readers of this article may be aware, *The Waste Land* does exist in internet-based hypertext—in two separate versions. In 1997, Christiane Paul released hers as a disc, and in 2002 Rickard Parker launched his as a free online site. Both offer a great service to readers by making the poem's links clickable, but the concept has its useful limits. Parker's version, for instance, includes functional anchor links for *any* repeated word in the poem, resulting in an overlinking, an overanalysis that distracts the typical reader. In addition, its commitment to including the poem's source texts in adjacent frames on the site blurs the line between what is physically inside and outside Eliot's text. Yet, as George Landow suggests, this risk has always been present in the poem:

the kind of pleasurable disorientation that one finds in . . . Eliot's *Wasteland* [sic] . . . has one important parallel to that encountered in some forms of hypertext: . . . [the] inexperienced reader finds unpleasantly confusing materials that more expert ones find a source of pleasure (Landow 146)

By writing in hypertext, in other words, Eliot has complicated as much for his readers as he has simplified. For some, the links have enhanced the reading; for others, it has transmuted the process into an almost unbearable task of hunter-gatherer curation.

Back towards the Future

There is a temporal dimension to *The Waste Land*, and not only in its re-creation of Forster's vision, bringing more than twenty-five centuries of words into the same poetic space. The poem's time sensitivity resides even more substantially in its techniques of mashup and hypertext. Mashup gives a future relevance to past sources, and from this perspective, *The Waste Land* is a poem with forward momentum, pulling Ezekiel, Dante, and Baudelaire into the future and creating a trajectory that continues beyond his own reuse of them. Readers decades beyond us will experience *The Waste Land* within new contexts; but equally, they will also enjoy the continued unfolding interpretation and connotation of each of Eliot's sources, a blossoming which can generate a near-limitless future for this particular collision (or is it collusion?) of texts. Hypertext, on the other hand, creates a future for the *new* text: the notes' internal links extend Eliot's poem by insisting that the first reading was incomplete. The poem's outbound links also prolong the act of reading by taking the reader away and into the potential of other texts.

The poem's futurity is no accident: Eliot always had an eye on the years to come. In a lecture only months after the poem's inception, he spoke of its future:

[W]hat the artist wants . . . is primarily that he shall continue to give enjoyment to a few scattered and exceptional and lonely people long after he is dead. ("Modern" 9)

He believed also that the future was the domain of the true critic and poet. The critic needs, dizzyingly, "a focus upon the immediate future" in order to bring the past to bear on the present ("Imperfect" 33). The poet's interest, similarly, is

centred in the present and the immediate future: he studies the literature of the past in order to learn how he should write in the present and the immediate future. (*Lectures* 44)

If Eliot succeeded in anticipating two conceptual domains of the twenty-first century, perhaps it was no accident after all.

Why was futurity such a passion in his early writing? Moreover, why would he choose these forward-looking techniques? Certainly, he was under the sway of Pound and his time-warping VORTEX; even more surely, as Chinitz, Hargrove, Korg and Tomlinson have demonstrated, he was aware of his own era's artistic experimentation. Yet no other artist of his time was so disguised behind the veil of others' work. An even keener explanation is that Eliot turned to the future because he felt abandoned by the present. There is, curiously, an aspect of expatriation to each of the modernists who practiced remix; Eliot, though, describes his cascade of identities as a vulnerability, not a strength:

Some day, I want to write an essay about the point of view of an American who wasn't an American, because he was born in the South and went to school in New England as a small boy with a nigger drawl, but who wasn't a southerner in the South because his people were northerners in a border state and looked down on all southerners and Virginians, and who so was never anything anywhere and who therefore felt himself to be more a Frenchman than an American and more an Englishman than a Frenchman and yet felt that the U.S.A. up to a hundred years ago was a family extension. (Read 15)

If Eliot saw himself as this much of an outsider, a *metoikos*, it is his poem's audacity that is surprising, its comfort in co-opting the work of others. By reaching into the past, and by speaking towards a future that might listen, this poem has performed an act of ventriloquism, allowing the metic Eliot to create a new, acceptable voice for himself out of the already-accepted voices of others.

Aside from this social vulnerability, there is another personal dimension to Eliot's futuristic techniques: sourcing the past in this way forwards his trademark, progressive theme of reconciliation. His idea of Tradition had championed it, implicitly, in its vision of literary history without underdogs. His post-conversion "Idea of European Unity" would promote it far more directly through its calls for socio-political dialogue. *The Waste Land*, standing between them, has not typically been seen as a document of reconciliation; yet it gathers a

multiplicity of voices into one space and allows them to speak their authors' minds, enabling a dialogue that could only happen in a future far beyond most of its authors. The poem suggests that any literary heteroglossia—whether mashup, hypertext, or momentary translucence—exercises a political dimension and reflects the politics of its author. An author can allow textual aggression between or among the voices, or can attempt a textual reconciliation. We find both types in *The Waste Land*, not only in the interweaving of Buddha and St. Augustine, but also in the dialogue of Weston and Frazer, the convergence of Stevenson, Sappho and Keats, and the final jagged confluence of voices. But beyond this implicit political statement, Eliot goes further. He had balked at the recent Great War, closely identifying with countries on both sides of the conflict. In *The Waste Land*, he embeds his stance by selecting texts from nearly every nation involved, and combines their voices toward a single poetic end. A profounder, more future-leaning call for international reconciliation would be hard to imagine.

Mashup and hypertext offer new theoretical perspectives for the poem, but they also bring practicality to *The Waste Land's* twenty-first century readers. Established scholars, for whom these may be unexplored concepts, should find in them greater accuracy and a more helpful context for discussing the poem's ingenuity. Younger readers will probably encounter the opposite perspective: with mashup and hypertext inherent in their consciousness, they come to *The Waste Land* with an unfamiliarity only to the content, not to the technique. Eliot's poem embodies the kind of organic thinking that has come to typify the mind of the Google generation, what Nicholas Carr bemoans in *The Shallows* and what Palfrey and Gasser celebrate in *Born Digital*. To a young community already known as the remix culture, *The Waste Land* offers intellectual sympathy as well as immediacy to some of literature's most challenging spaces (Vautour). The poem, given its reuse of existing literature, also offers the potential to open up an entire world of literature to younger readers.

As Stephen Marcus suggests, "Text simulates thought," and it is difficult to imagine a text with more classroom potential than *The Waste Land* (9). Through the concepts of mashup and / or hypertext, the poem can easily structure one period—or several—of dynamic, student-led discussions:

Consider the interconnection of writing with politics, or with

autobiography.

Contemplate the poem's commitment to showing over telling, not just in its difficulty but in its embodiment of literary community.

Deliberate the question of network as mimesis: is it a concept inherent to the world, or an artificial construction?

Anticipate Burroughs' cut-ups, ideas of plagiarism, and even the Intellectual Property (IP) debate.

Integrate a discussion of constructive postmodernism (such as Linda Hutcheon's) as a theoretical counterpart to the poem.

If you teach *The Waste Land* and "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in tandem, try pairing the "historical sense" with hypertext and "impersonality" with the outsider method of mashup ("Tradition" 43, 53).

Use an internet-based hypertext of the poem to perform a textual analysis or close reading (Barrett 7-8).

In a recent provocative article, Jonathan Lethem cites *West Side Story*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *The Waste Land*, claiming "If these are examples of plagiarism, then we want more plagiarism." In contemporary thought, notions like plagiarism are becoming more nuanced. Concepts like mashup and hypertext reflect our sense of the world, and they do it better than the strict, outmoded temporalities of parody or allusion. Perhaps we have even begun to accept reused work as an art form *because* it challenges the sovereignty of time. It opens up a broader reading of both literature and the world, where we relate to both our contemporaries and our ancestors as peers, and where the substance of art and ideas is always an entity beyond the ownership or grasp of any one artist. What *The Waste Land* continues to remind us is that we are members of a community across global or temporal barriers. What it continues to show us is that literature can say something new with something old, calling for reconciliation in both its message and its fabric. As Eliot would later claim, years after he had left these techniques behind, there may even be a place where

the impossible union
Of spheres of existence is actual,
[W]here the past and future
Are conquered, and reconciled. (CP 136)

Endnotes

- ¹ “It seems that when Eliot had to put the notes together as an afterthought, he went no further than the books on his shelves!” (Southam 28).
- ² Though it certainly nuances a discussion of art’s sources, this writer does not wish to suggest that all art is mashup. Even Eliot changed his mind.
- ³ From a similar perspective, Pound—and even Vivien—entered the poem more as producers in the contemporary sense than as editors in the traditional sense.
- ⁴ For evidence, see his letter “To Maurice Firuski,” *Letters* 638.
- ⁵ It could even be interesting to see what the framework of hypertext could bring to a discussion of anaphora or other kinds of meaningful repetition, which seem to transclude meaning from one part of a text into another.

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Essay Abstracts

Ben Bakhtiarynia, Queen's University at Kingston
"Thinking The Nothing: Nihilism in *The Waste Land*"

This essay revisits T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* from the perspective of nihilism, both as an epistemological and cultural crisis, which is often how the poem was experienced by its first readers. Bringing Eliot in contact with philosophical sources which he knew closely in his early phase, and by focusing on his Harvard dissertation, it juxtaposes Eliot's perspectival relativism to Nietzsche's and shows, despite their varying responses, their shared conviction that nihilism is the fundamental crisis of modernity. It then traces the epistemological debates in German idealism where nihilism first appears as a controversy, and examines its absorption by Eliot in his analysis of F. H. Bradley's neo-idealist work, *Knowledge and Experience*, which thence leads to his literary deployment of the concept as disintegrative of meaning in *The Waste Land*.

Aaron Bibb, University of Wisconsin-Madison
"Death by Water: A Reevaluation of Bradleian Philosophy in *The Waste Land*"

In this article, I examine the relationship between Eliot's doctoral study of F. H. Bradley and *The Waste Land*. The work of Jewel Spears Brooker (particularly in *Mastery and Escape* and *Reading The Waste Land*) has been both enlightening and influential on this subject, but her argument that the poem offers the possibility of Bradleian transcendent experience as an escape from worldly dualism is, I contend, based on a misreading of Eliot's dissertation. In contrast, I offer a reading of the poem that addresses many of the issues Brooker raises in terms of a crisis of individual agency in the face of cyclical experience and overwhelming interpersonal relationships. The poem is not, I argue, a model for how we should live in the world, with hope for a transcendent experience of reality; it is, rather, an expression of a desire to escape a world tiresomely defined by sex and desire.

Matthew J. Bolton, Loyola School
"Manchild in *The Waste Land*: The Narrator of Eliot's 1921 Manuscript"

T. S. Eliot's working title for *The Waste Land*, "He Do the Police in Different Voices," can only be understood fully in the context of the month in which the poet adopted it, May of 1921. The month began with Vivien Eliot decamping to the country and with Eliot receiving three manuscript chapters of Joyce's *Ulysses*. It would end with the arrival of Eliot's mother and siblings for a long-overdue family reunion. During this month alone with Joyce's manuscript, Eliot seems to have come

to a new realization about the mode of narration that was unfolding in his own work-in-process. Through his new title, Eliot adopts a performative role that enables him to respond to both Joyce's work and to his family's visit.

Justin Evans, University of Chicago
"*The Waste Land* and Critique"

This essay argues that the contemporary tendency to downplay the social and cultural aspects of *The Waste Land* are one-sided. *The Waste Land* ought to be read as social and cultural critique, as early readers believed. However, traditional interpretations of the poem as a narrative of regeneration are also insufficient. The poem can be read profitably on analogy with critical theory: it is utopian, but its most important task is the radical critique of existing social institutions, values, and ideals. This essay discusses critical theory briefly and then reads the poem's four critical moments, based on the final verse paragraph.

Adrianna E. Frick, Independent Scholar
"The Dugs of Tiresias: Female Sexuality and Modernist Nationalism in *The Waste Land* and *Les mamelles de Tirésias*"

This paper examines T. S. Eliot's use of Ovid's Tiresias in *The Waste Land* as an allusion to and contrast with Guillaume Apollinaire's treatment of the female body in *Les mamelles de Tirésias* and suggests that the complicated figure of Tiresias, particularly in view of Eliot's explicit allusion to Ovid, reveals an equally complicated view of Eliot's response to Modernist female sexuality. This interpretation problematizes the view of Eliot as a pure misogynist, and supports recent scholarship examining Eliot's more nuanced and intricate views of female characters. The paper suggests that a reading of gender relations in the typist and carbuncular young man's "seduction" scene is incomplete without noting Eliot's contrasting representation of women in the pub scene, and acknowledging the complicated signification of Eliot's allusion to Ovidian voluptas and Apollinaire's mechanical (and masculinized) baby production.

Will Gray, University of St Andrews
"Mashup, Hypertext, and the Future of *The Waste Land*"

As the most technically progressive poem of the modernist era, *The Waste Land* has outpaced anyone's critical terminology and especially any articulation of how it reuses existing material. The poem's notes have similarly lacked a broad concept, one that can facilitate a discussion of literary debt without restricting the kinds of connection the poem possesses. This deficit has resonated with two concepts far in the poem's future: mashup and hypertext. These terms provide more than anachronistic whimsy or one more minority report. They each present a conceptual framework that captures the poem's futurity and its relationship to the past. They reveal *The Waste Land* more for what it has always been, and they anticipate how the poem may read for generations to come.

Cameron MacKenzie, San Francisco Art Institute

“The Poem as Situation: Eliot’s Meaning and Pound’s Truth in *The Waste Land*”

The greatness of *The Waste Land* lies in its rigorous disavowal of its own resolution, and I suggest that in order to understand the place of this poem within what philosopher Alain Badiou terms the “modern dilemma,” we must look not only at what the poem is but what it could have been. Incorporating Badiou’s view of ethics, his concept of “forcing,” and his notion of truth, I read the production of *The Waste Land* as a twin conditioning of Eliot’s passion and Pound’s cold process, resulting in a work that poetically enunciates the truth of modern tragic finitude through its refusal to provide meaning.

Petar Penda, University of Banja Luka

“Cultural and Textual (Dis)unity: Poetics of Nothingness in *The Waste Land*”

In his theoretical writings, as well as in the subtext of *The Waste Land*, Eliot expresses the idea of the organic nature of culture and its unity despite its regional diversity. This harmony is represented by some formal features of *The Waste Land*, such as its rhythm and structure. However, cultural unity, at times also represented by the textual, is opposed to the ideaistic disorder, which is disruptive. This intricate relation of the cultural, textual, ideaistic, and formal, full of mutual inclusions, exclusions, compliances, and non-compliances, adds up to both the ideas of non-being and nothingness of life, as well as to the ideology of order and (dis)unity. This duality of nothingness of life on the one hand, and establishing order on the other, is reconciled by means of the aesthetic concurrence of the opposites.

Liliana Pop, Babeş-Bolyai University

“The Use of Poetry and the Use of Religion”

The controversial character of *The Waste Land* is largely a result of the peculiarity of its use of religion. It is the contention of this essay that the strength of *The Waste Land* as a poem of crisis is mostly due to its blending of poetics and religion. I analyze the less studied aspects of Eliot’s use of symbols and references, with an interest in the ways that spirituality, as described by W. Alston, functions. This reading foregrounds the ironic and paradoxical construction of the poem in which the appropriation of different religions serves as a means of multiplying and complicating the work according to the poet’s contention about the necessary difficulty of literature.

Yasmine Shamma, Oxford University

“The Room Enclosed”: Eliot’s Settings

Beyond all that has been written on the experience of the flâneur walking through the text of the city, this chapter focuses on the inward walk, looking at the way Eliot’s poems are marked by the parameters of the rooms which they describe. Within city poetry’s stanzas, rooms are explored, and the stanza takes on the literal etymology of its name, becoming a linguistic room or inner space for registering impressions of city life. Accordingly, they become riddled with the tensions of city life, as poets who have lived in cities, or in the idea of them, manipulate syntax, style, and form—

poetically rendering urban density. In Eliot's London and Paris based poetry, architectural space has been structurally informing. "Prufrock," *The Waste Land*, and *Four Quartets* all are informed by an evolving reaction to the built environment's central unit: the room. In *The Waste Land* as the walls of private life are brought down, so too are the strictures of form. A look at the editorial process of the poem, with a focus on the dissipation of poetic and domestic space markers, shows a poet turning toward opened forms of space.

Leon Surette, University of Western Ontario
"*The Waste Land*: A Personal Grouse"

After many decades of centrality in discussions of *The Waste Land*, Eliot scholarship has largely expunged consideration of the relevance of Weston and the Grail Quest. However, the prominence Eliot gave to Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* remains unexplained. F. L. Lucas' explanation of the relevance of Weston's theosophical speculations to the poem—that it was a "theosophical tract"—has been tacitly expunged from the record. And my contention that Eliot's readers were to understand the Weston reference ironically has been ignored. I return to the issue with a new reading—that Eliot took Weston's book seriously as tracing the history of divine revelation—however corrupted—in the remote European past.

Joyce Wexler, Loyola University Chicago
"Falling Towers: *The Waste Land* and September 11, 2001"

"When the Towers Fell," Galway Kinnell's poem commemorating the terrorist attacks of 9/11, is so closely based on *The Waste Land* that it justifies a reassessment of Eliot's poem. Like Eliot, Kinnell draws parallels between the unimaginable violence of the present and the past and cites texts from other times and places. Eliot called this strategy the "mythical method." Although many critics regard it as an attempt to impose beliefs of the past on the present, the mythical method, as Eliot defines it, is a structure, not a set of beliefs. The similarities between the two poems remind us that both poets faced the same aesthetic dilemma: how to represent violence in a secular age. The differences between them highlight the contrast between the ironic indeterminacy of *The Waste Land* and the elegiac affirmation of "When the Towers Fell."

Carol L. Yang, National Chengchi University
"*The Waste Land* and the Virtual City"

The Waste Land has been treated by many as the representative poem of the century, "a masterwork great enough to justify the whole 'modern experiment,'" a leviathan poem on the crises in Western culture and religion that is fraught with "hundreds of fragments of the Western present and of the Western past." However, *The Waste Land* achieved a style of its own. The whole poem is composed of a mix of scenes and fragments which are organized in a way that is reminiscent of cinematic montage, historical montage, or literary montage. *The Waste Land* turns away from the realism employed by other writers in their portrayals of London and instead offers an "Unreal city," more governed by the principle of the grotesque. Eliot's City is a city of

extremes: a melee of localism and cosmopolitanism, of reality and fantasy, of decentring of perspectives and sense of excess that gives rise to a mélange of texts and styles, as well as to a sense of anachronisms that constitute a recognizable wasteland of virtual reality. The poem is a grand city poem filled with traces of voices, histories, events, and experiences that unexpectedly interlace only to become undone before being recombined. *The Waste Land* can be considered one of the representatives of art in what Walter Benjamin might term the second age of mechanical reproduction with the development of information technology as the poem is inscribed with the potential character of textual dissemination, textual flânerie, and the archiving of cultures.

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