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This dissertation examines the way that twentieth-century Modernist poet T. S. Eliot stages the production and reproduction of human subjectivity in his work. It places him in context of other thinkers of the period (poets, novelists, social theorists) to better understand both their reflections on self-construction and his own. Specifically, this study examines how Eliot deconstructs the inner/outer binary that his contemporaries use when theorizing the self. In doing so, it positions itself against those critics who argue that Eliot exclusively emphasizes interiority (or the experience of inwardness) as such. Inverting these typical claims, this study argues that Eliot privileges exteriority (i.e., the externalized objectification of self), and it claims that from his earliest poetry, Eliot dramatizes individuals as opaque surfaces lacking depth. However, this dissertation also claims that Eliot portrays a process whereby individuals become aware of their own self-objectification, the realization of which proves ironically, dialectically generative of an experience of interiority, however tenuous or transitory. My hope in this work is to demonstrate Eliot's difference from his contemporaries as well as to suggest how his work parallels certain later theorizations of the self. I also hope to advance a view of Eliot as a dialectical thinker and to trace an alternative genealogy for one branch of Modernism.

“I WHO AM HERE DISSEMBLED”: EXTERIORITY
IN T.S. ELIOT AND HIS MODERNIST
CONTEMPORARIES

by

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To Amy, whose patience and
support made this dissertation possible.

APPROVAL PAGE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
A Poet of Interiority?	1
Eliot the Dialectician.....	10
II. CONSTRUCTING A POET: PHILOSOPHICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXTS.....	28
Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl, and the Anthropological Privileging of Exteriority	32
Frazer's Oppositional Ontology.....	40
Jane Harrison and the Inward Turn.....	47
Henri Bergson and the Primacy of Interiority.....	53
F.H. Bradley's Deconstruction of the Inner/Outer Binary.....	59
The Victorian Foregrounding of Inwardness	66
Robert Browning and George Eliot	69
Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater	74
III. A RADICAL SKEPTIC: ELIOT'S PHILOSOPHICAL ANTI-DUALISM	85
Eliot and Philosophy	90
Henri Bergson: An Early Infatuation.....	92
Eliot's Rejection of Bergson's Model of Subject/Object Relations.....	98
Beyond Bergson.....	103
Appropriating Bradley	107
Eliot and Social Theory	112
Fact or Interpretation?.....	115
Eliot's Critique of Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl.....	123
Eliot on the Nineteenth-Century Literary Tradition	132
IV. THE DISRUPTIVE GAZE: EXTERIORITY AND INTERIORITY FROM THE EARLY POEMS TO <i>THE WASTE LAND</i>	151
Eliot the Laforguian?	154

<i>Inventions of the March Hare: Eliot and the</i>	
Poetry of Exteriority	158
“Portrait of a Lady”: Another Marionette Poem?	170
The Emergence of the Interior	178
“Prufrock” and the Drama of Self-Emergence	182
Dialectical Relations in “Prufrock”	186
From “Prufrock” to <i>The Waste Land</i>	191
<i>The Waste Land</i> and Interiority.....	193
Voiding the Interior.....	196
Tiresias and the Self-Externalizing Gaze.....	201
 V. DISSOLUTION AND CONSTITUTION IN <i>SWEENEY AGONISTES</i> , “ASH WEDNESDAY,” AND <i>FOUR QUARTETS</i>	211
From “Prufrock” to <i>Sweeney Agonistes</i>	215
<i>Sweeney</i> and Oppositional Relations	219
<i>Sweeney</i> and Self-Dissolution.....	229
Affirmation and Dissociation in “Ash Wednesday”	233
The Dialectics of Self-Construction.....	236
Dismembering the Self	242
<i>Four Quartets</i> and the Dialectics of Transcendence.....	251
Heraclitean Purgations	254
Incarnation and Resolution	261
Conclusion: Eliot and Modernism	269
 VI. INTERIORITY AND EXTERIORITY IN ELIOT’S MODERNIST CONTEMPORARIES	282
Woolf and the Inviolable Inner Self.....	287
Lawrence and the Subterranean Self.....	299
Conrad and the Abyss of the Self	310
Prioritizing the External.....	320
Ezra Pound and Imagism	321
T.E. Hulme and the Poetics of Objectivity	325
Gertrude Stein and the Word as Object	329
Wyndham Lewis: “Good art must have no inside”	335
William Carlos Williams: The World as Ontological Given.....	340
Conclusion	346
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	353

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A Poet of Interiority?

In *Tracing T.S. Eliot's Spirit*, A. David Moody argues that Eliot's *The Waste Land* "essentially" dramatizes the poet's own personal "landscape of inward desolation" (116). By staging his emotional impressions and experiences through the poem's various images, scenes, and personages, Eliot is able to "work out a set of personal feelings" that would otherwise remain unexamined (115). Indeed, in expressing those feelings, Moody believes Eliot in fact attempts to transfigure them, "to recover feeling through lyrical expression of the 'dead' state of being" (115-16). For Moody, at least in *The Waste Land*, Eliot is a poet of interiority, a poet who seeks to express inner states in outward form.

In her biography of T.S. Eliot, Lyndall Gordon makes a similar point, writing that *The Waste Land* functions for Eliot as a "guarded mode of confession" (149). Like Moody, Gordon argues that one of Eliot's aims in writing *The Waste Land* was to effect a transformation in himself, as a "knight will traverse a waste in his quest for grace" (156). For Gordon though, almost all of Eliot's poetry can be seen in this way, as thinly disguised autobiography and emotional self-exploration. Eliot's poetry provides a creative, though "guarded," means of channeling outward inward experience. *Ash-Wednesday*, for instance, is *really* about the poet's complex, unresolved feelings for Emily Hale (237). Similarly, *Four Quartet's East Coker* *really* masks Eliot's "recoil"

from sexuality (347). Both of these thinkers, however, take as axiomatic an uncomplicated view both of the relation between poet and poem as well as of the nature of subjectivity itself. That is to say, in their discussion of Eliot, both Moody and Gordon assume an unambiguously transparent relation between speaker and text (i.e., the speaker experiences a feeling, then converts that feeling into text) as well as a stable notion of interiority as such. For these two critics, Eliot confesses himself in his work, expresses in concrete form the concrete contents of his inward experience of being, and in so doing dramatizes a structurally stable notion of subjectivity (i.e., that subjectivity as such can exist as a definitively defined object of representation).

Moody and Gordon are not alone in affirming Eliot as a poet who privileges inwardness. Indeed, a good number of critics have taken T.S. Eliot as a poet whose work emphasizes interiority. They have assumed that the experiences dramatized in his poetry, from “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” through *Four Quartets*, as well as in his plays, maps out an inner landscape of struggle, anxiety, or guilt. In *Poets of Reality*, for example, J. Hillis Miller argues that Eliot sees “authentic” poetry as “the expression of the artist’s personality” (149), that poets draw up from the depths emotive “psychic material” which they then linguistically “embody” in poems (152). This “psychic material” belongs to a subterranean version of the self which exists in tension with the “wakeful ego” of everyday life (152). “[A]uthentic poetry,” Miller goes on to say, gives voice to this “deep-buried self,” provides it with “an objective existence” in the surface content of language (152). Indeed, Miller sees this as Eliot’s root conceptualization of poetry: that poetry’s purpose is to provide vent for those “deeper, unnamed feelings

which form the substratum of our being” (152). Poetry draws forth what would otherwise remain unarticulated, “brings surface and depths together and gives a man possession of his true self” (152). Poetry thus helps provide individuals with a sense of psychic coherency, for in articulating their authentic being (i.e., suppressed, unarticulated emotive states), they also integrate it into their conscious awareness of self. In this, Miller maintains, Eliot shares much with Matthew Arnold. Both poets emphasize the “hidden self” or “buried life” (153). As Miller sees it, both poets affirm the existence of a core, authentic, though almost inexpressible inner self that exists in and for itself. Poetry becomes the means by which the poet attempts to render communicable the inner experience of authentic selfhood. Poetry, that is, serves as a means both for making sense of the self to oneself (i.e., articulating inwardness for the sake of a kind of redemptive clarification) and of making sense of oneself for others.

And yet, Miller argues, “Eliot’s individualistic theory of poetry does not in practice achieve the goals he sets for it” (155). What remains predominate, particularly in the early poetry, is the existential experience of disjunction, alienation, inner discord. The early poetry is a poetry of mental and emotional isolation. Individuals in the poems remained walled off within themselves, monads cut off from connection with others or from any mode of substantive self-understanding or psychological self-integration. For Miller, Eliot’s early poetry constructs a universe of solipsistically isolated individuals, even though, Miller confesses, the seeds of “escape” from such a state remain present (155). Though largely uninterested in biography, Miller, like Moody and Gordon, still sees Eliot’s poetry predominately as the subjective expression of the poet’s emotive

states, however disguised or displaced. Like Moody and Gordon, he also argues for an Eliot who affirms belief in substantive core self, no matter how solipsistically isolated it may appear to be.

Although Jewel Spears Brooker notes that Miller has perhaps more than anyone else “popularize[d]” the notion of Eliot as a solipsist (*Mastery* 193), Robert Langbaum has surely contributed significantly to this view as well. In *The Mysteries of Identity*, in a discussion of Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” Langbaum argues that “Prufrock’s sensuous apprehension reveals . . . a buried libidinal self that he cannot make operative in the social world, cannot reconcile with the constructed self seen by ‘The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase’” (86). Just as Miller suggests that Eliot affirms in his poetry a subterranean self that exists below the inauthentic social self, so, too, does Langbaum suggest that Prufrock possesses an inner self that remains hidden, “buried” beneath the crustations of the ordinary self. Consciousness is thus “bifurcated,” internally split between two modes of self, one of which (the inner) remains privileged over the other (87).

And again, like Miller, Langbaum draws a connection between Eliot and Arnold, in which he discusses the ways in which both poets map out the constitutive disjunctions and inner antagonisms characteristic of the post-romantic “bifurcated” self (87). Both poets, Langbaum holds, see a nearly unbridgeable gap between the conscious, social, quotidian self and the buried self which exists beyond the conscious self’s reach. But whereas for Arnold the hidden self remains a personally unique experience, for Eliot, the buried self proves “less individual” and more a product of a culturally pervading, shared

“unconscious racial memory” (88). Langbaum argues that the personages in Eliot’s poems “in spite of themselves . . . liv[e] their buried life; but they do this through racial as well as personal memory, through unconsciously making rituals even when they think they have abolished all rituals” (89). It is for this reason, Langbaum feels, that Eliot famously praises James Joyce’s “mythical method” in *Ulysses*, for Joyce’s novel illustrates individuals’ unconscious participation in socio-mythic forms which work at a fundamental level to structure those individuals’ lived experience (89). Like Miller, Langbaum marks a distinction between an outer (inauthentic) and inner (authentic) self. And although Langbaum’s inner self remains more impersonal (and thus less individual) than Miller’s, the presence of the binary remains nevertheless uncontested. Indeed, Langbaum further explores the disjunction between interiority and exteriority in his discussion of the *The Waste Land*, in which he argues that the poem dramatizes individuals who experience themselves as monadic interiorities wholly cut off from one another. Individuals, he argues, feel themselves locked within “prison-house[s] of self,” even as the poem otherwise suggests (through the “mythic method”) that these individuals “generate . . . an archetypal identity” which potentially “delivers them” from this state (113-14). At the level of the conscious self, individuals remain walled off, while at the same time, an unconscious self continues to participate in a transpersonal, ritualized reality.

Like Moody and Gordon, Miller and Langbaum provide touchstone instances of one rather commonplace way of viewing Eliot’s portrayal of self. At the heart of their critique lies the argument that Eliot posits and privileges a substantive, stable, core self

and that this self remains largely inaccessible. Kathleen O'Dwyer perhaps provides the clearest articulation of this position, arguing specifically that Eliot posits an "inner life" to his characters, a life that "remains hidden, not just from others, but also from [themselves]" (329). She claims that his poetry is characterized by "despair and disguise, alienation and anxiety," and in doing so she suggests the existence of an inner, authentic, core self who experiences an outer, objective, othered reality which the individual finds threatening and disorienting (333). O'Dwyer argues that the "self" in Eliot's poetry "has been buried beneath 'deliberate disguises'" (333). Indeed, she makes the rather standard claim that the "modernist self" possesses a "fractured variety" of "disparate personalities," and that in a poem like *The Waste Land*, these personalities "merge to express the multi-layered enigma of the modern consciousness" (330). And yet this fractured self, she argues, merely disguises the true "reality of the self" buried beneath surface discontinuities (333).

Significantly, each of these critics implicitly propounds a view of Eliot's poetry grounded in a set of binaries that provides the coordinates for their own analyses. In various ways, mind/body, depth/surface, self/society, self/other all function as orienting dualistic oppositions that inform their work. When Miller argues that Eliot advances a monadic view of individuals, or Langbaum emphasizes the "prisonhouse[s] of self" which Eliot constructs, or when Gordon argues that Eliot "tended to separate body and soul" (403), or, in *The Matrix of Modernism*, Sanford Schwartz argues that "the opposition between 'surfaces' and 'depths' is central" to Eliot's work (155), each critic relies on a set of assumptions which privileges inwardness or emphasizes a kind of cut

between surface and depth (e.g., body and soul) that constricts their analyses and misrepresents the complexities of Eliot's thought.

Admittedly, in a number of essays from both early and late in his career, Eliot himself seems to have emphasized inwardness as the root source of poetry, and stressed, too, a disjunction between a private, inviolable, core self and some superficial social persona. In "The Social Function of Poetry," for instance, he explicitly emphasizes poetry as a "vehicle of feeling," arguing that poetry "has primarily to do with the expression of feeling and emotion" (OPP 8). Although he made this observation in 1943, it echoes reflections he made in 1919's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," wherein he suggests that "emotions and feelings" serve as the "elements" which poets fuse into poems (SP 41). But in other essays, he goes further than this. In the late lecture "The Three Voices of Poetry" (from 1953), Eliot writes that in writing their poems, poets grapple with some "unknown, dark psychic material" within themselves, an "octopus or angel with which [they] struggle" (110). And in the closing lines of his 1933 Norton Lectures, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, he writes, poetry "may make us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper, unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate; for our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves, and an evasion of the visible and sensible world" (149). Taken together, passages such as these point to an Eliot who, at least in his critical writings, affirms the binary modes of thought attributed to him by critics such as Moody, Miller, or O'Dwyer. For Eliot here, poetry serves to articulate previously unarticulated (and perhaps unknown) emotive states of being. It functions as a means for organizing and expressing individuals' previously

unexpressed but nonetheless authentically felt emotional experience. And of course, Eliot seems implicitly here to suggest the existence of a gap between one's conscious experience of oneself and a deeper "substratum" that marks the individual's authentic kernel of being. Indeed, the fact that he implies such a gap suggests as well his belief that individuals indeed possess some authentic kernel of being (from which they can be alienated and to which they can be reintegrated via the articulating mediation of poetry).

And yet this view of Eliot omits much, flattening his thought and ignoring the complexities of his position. At the very least, critics who point to this version of Eliot should recall Eliot's stated commitment to a poetics of impersonality (articulated famously in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and less famously in other essays, such as 1920's "Modern Tendencies in Poetry"), in which the "I" is devalued in favor of an impersonalized rendering of the human subject's shifting emotional states. Eliot sought to distance himself from the romantic emphasis on the centralized ego-self, indeed, challenging the very existence of such a self, as in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" when he expresses his doubts about "metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul" (42). He goes on in that essay to explain "that the poet has, not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways [sic]" (SP 42). The poet, he suggests, views his feelings dispassionately as elements to be combined and recombined in the construction of a poem. As he writes in "Modern Tendencies," the poet "is not particularly interested in [his feelings] because they are his . . . it is only as he is

able to regard these feelings as existing apart from him . . . that he can work them into art” (214).

At first glance, such a view would seem to construct a binary between an observing, analytical consciousness and the feeling, inner creature of self that the mind then analyzes. Yet on closer inspection, Eliot’s view of impersonality also works to undercut the notion of an inward self: it renders that self mechanistic, suggests it exists only as some Lockean or Humean complex of feelings that arise by virtue of an encounter with an external stimulus (i.e., those “impression and experiences”). In other words, the self as suggested here is not some central, ethereal entity (a “substantial unity of the soul”), but rather a product of individuals’ engaged immersion within their physical and social worlds. The notion of impersonality can thus be seen as a means by which Eliot effaces the line between the inward self and its exteriorized expression, thereby blurring any disjunction between them. Thus, to simply state, as Schwartz does for instance, that “the opposition between ‘surfaces’ and ‘depths’ is central” for Eliot is to underestimate the nuances of Eliot’s position, for it is precisely the opposition between surface and depth that the notion of impersonality helps to dissolve.

In contrast with the critical positions examined above, this dissertation aims to challenge the notion of an opposition in Eliot’s work between surface and depth as well as the prioritization of interiority as such. Indeed, I intend in this project to reveal the ways in which Eliot is not at all a binary thinker, an argument made, too, by scholars such as Jewel Spears Brooker and Jeffrey Perl, although I want to make this argument in a way that acknowledges certain tensions in his critical, philosophical, and aesthetic

formulations. For Eliot indeed is preoccupied with the tension between surface and depth (or interiority and exteriority), but not in the way many of his critics conceptualize it. I want first to reverse the binary critics such as Schwartz and Gordon, O'Dwyer and Langbaum propose, and then ultimately to argue that Eliot, paradoxically, dissolves the binary by exposing the dialectical interplay between surface and depth that he feels in fact constitutes it. This in turn will lead to a different understanding of Eliot's view of human interiority (of its nature, construction, and perpetuation) than the one these critics propose, and will help, too, to complicate those models of modernism which overemphasize interiority as such, or even, as we will see, human exteriority.

Moreover, in contributing to a view of Eliot as a dialectical thinker, this study will suggest an alternative genealogy for one strand of modernism, one which grows out of German Idealist philosophy towards a kind of radical epistemological skepticism more suggestive of postmodern than modernist thought. As such, although this work's central focus lies only on a single author, it clearly has far-reaching implications for our understanding of modernism in general. Indeed, in keeping with the scope of this project, I intend not only to discuss Eliot, but to draw on his modernist contemporaries for context and contrast.

Eliot the Dialectician

In *The Life of the Mind*, Hannah Arendt proposes a "reversal of the metaphysical hierarchy" which privileges interiority over exteriority. She argues "that the relevant and the meaningful in this world . . . [are] located precisely on the surface," rather than in the

depths (27). She argues, too, that “soul experiences are body-bound,” and that the “soul” is in fact “anchored” in the body (33). In making her argument, she challenges the Cartesian perception that undergirds much modern Western intellectual thought. Eliot in part performs the same methodological procedure in his work. In both his early and late poetry as well as in his plays, Eliot repeatedly emphasizes the exteriority of the body and how individuals appear as opaque, self-enclosed surfaces to one another. Bodies function as boundary points, as markers of human finitude and isolation. Indeed, from his earliest to his latest work, Eliot collapses the gap between surface and depth, in fact renders depth as surface—externalizing the experience of inwardness such that interiority as such loses any positive content. Inwardness, one might say, exists only as written on the body itself.

In the “Unreal City” passage of part I of *The Waste Land*, for example, Eliot writes of a ghostlike “crowd” that “flow[s] over London Bridge.” Within this crowd, individuals remain wholly self-absorbed, their eyes “fixed . . . before [their] feet,” not on one another or the road ahead (62). Each individual seems flattened, emptied of life; indeed, with “short and infrequent” sighs, even breathing seems to come with difficulty, as if they lack even the substantive depth of bodily materiality (i.e., sheer lung capacity) (62). Such a description suggests constriction and an experience of overwhelming, consuming exhaustion; it also suggests self-enclosure and isolation. Most importantly, such an image renders inward experience palpable. The unit of figuration here remains the body itself. Its enclosed, bounded, externalized surface provides the template for conveying inward experience. Indeed, the poem makes no distinction between an

individual's inner state and the outward expression of that state: interiority and exteriority converge.

And yet there exists here a tension, for in his work Eliot does more than portray bodies as sealed, inaccessible surfaces whose various features align with what observers perceive as inner content. Rather, he also presents bodies as unstable, penetrable, subject to dismemberment and disintegration, particularly in his later poetry and plays. Inasmuch as surfaces cohere (or inasmuch as individuals perceive themselves as cohering), Eliot suggests they also tend towards fragmentation or incoherence. Interiority and exteriority may converge in a way that privileges the external, but what remains external proves tenuous. In short, while emphasizing the substantiality of surfaces, Eliot also emphasizes their insubstantiality. In *Ash Wednesday*, for instance, the speaker relates the experience of his own self-dismemberment. As the poem opens, he dispassionately recounts how he has been consumed by "three white leopards," who have "fed to satiety" upon him (91). Eliot presents a body here that lacks coherence, lacks the boundedness of form that transforms the "crowd" in *The Waste Land* into a group of isolate individuals. Rather, the body here proves permeable, broken, fragmented. It opens up into the formless abyss of its own incoherence.

Indeed, even as early as "Prufrock," Eliot stages this kind of experience. Consider the image of Prufrock as an insect pierced and "pinned" to a wall (14). Prufrock translates what he perceives as the judging social gaze of others into an image of both self-objectification and bodily violation. Their gaze penetrates his bodily integrity, shatters any sense of private inviolability. He experiences himself as subject to a kind of

dismemberment, experiences their piercing gaze as a marker of his own self-insubstantiality. The closed form of the body thus gives way to an image of the body's own incoherence. Although Eliot inverts the surface/depth binary, thus prioritizing the external over the internal, surfaces nonetheless remain prone to disintegration or rupture. For Eliot, then, built into his model of individuals as embodied surfaces lies an antagonism suggestive of some deeper dialectical movement. How might we understand this movement?

In "Parrot's Eye: A Portrait by Manet and Two by T.S. Eliot," Francis Dickey also sees Eliot as inverting the surface/depth binary, although for different reasons than those proposed and explored here. In an analysis of two of Eliot's early poems, "On a Portrait" and "Portrait of a Lady," Dickey argues that Eliot sees "the very idea of inwardness as itself an imitation or reflection" (114). Individuals possess no interiority of consequence; rather, they mimic (or "parrot") the persona expected of them given their particular cultural location and embeddedness. Individuals "mirror," Dickey argues, "what others have already said or done" (114). The male speaker in "Portrait of a Lady," for instance, sees himself by the end of the poem as merely enacting a performance. He models the reactions expected of him, and comes to the stark realization that he is nothing but the modeling of those reactions (135). Indeed, Dickey suggests that Eliot's emphasis on this mode of exteriority extends all the way to the end of his career, where, in plays such as *The Confidential Clerk* and *The Elder Statesman*, characters "lack interiority except to the extent that they are conscious of themselves as playing prescribed roles" (135). As she reads Eliot, then, individuals exist only insofar as they "parrot" some social

or cultural discourse. Their identities are inscribed on the surface. And she is certainly right insofar as she affirms Eliot's privileging of surfaces and suspicion of interiority, but Dickey refuses to take seriously individuals' own awareness of this process of exteriorization. She neglects to meaningfully consider the ways in which Eliot's characters sometimes (though of course not always) betray an active consciousness of the ways that they mirror others, and thus she overlooks the new inner space created in the act of such awareness. In so doing, she also overlooks the deeply dialectical process embedded in Eliot's dramatizations.

Significantly, Eliot often presents individuals whom he dramatizes as consciously experiencing their own self-exteriorization (e.g., the speaker in "Portrait of a Lady," Prufrock, the speaker in "Ash Wednesday"). That is to say, although he inverts the surface/depth binary so that individuals come to (seem to) lack any authentic inner space (since those inner spaces have been, as it were, emptied out onto the surface), he nonetheless suggests that individuals sometimes remain aware of the process or experience of exteriorization. This self-awareness sets in motion a certain dialectical movement between the "self" presented as a surface and the emergence of a mode of interiority rooted in the individual's awareness of her or his own sheer externality—i.e., interiority seems paradoxically rooted in the individual's reflection on their exteriority in a kind of Lacanian mirror-stage process. In essence, Eliot suggests that to encounter oneself as a surface externalizes individuals to themselves (renders them visible to themselves); individuals are created, as it were, in the very act of reflection.

But Eliot suggests that the dialectical process extends beyond this initial movement, for the sense of interiority ironically granted by becoming aware of one's exteriorization proves at best unstable and at worse illusory. Recall the susceptibility of Eliot's bodies to disintegration. In the reflection (of oneself) one coheres, gathers together into a surface, into a singular unified appearance. And to become aware of that reflection is to achieve a self-consciousness experienced as an inward reality. But to encounter oneself as sheer surface paradoxically ruptures the very experience of unified depth or interiority such an encounter reflexively works to produce. Individuals find themselves displaced from themselves; what they once experienced as inward they find now objectively externalized, an encounter experienced as a kind of self-rupturing. Still, this inner-dissolution, this self-fragmentation back into superficial, transitory surface-coherency itself serves as the first step towards reestablishing a (new) sense of interiority. Individuals experience themselves experiencing themselves, and in the process a new space of inwardness emerges, which in turn remains subject to further flattening objectification. Thus an endless play between surface and depth emerges, a continual dialectic between coherency and fragmentation, exteriority and interiority. For Eliot, "self" proves never stable or static, but an ongoing dialectical construction.

In short, then, this dissertation will argue that Eliot privileges surfaces, rendering them both coherent and prone to dissolution; that individuals at times become aware of their own exteriorization, see themselves reflected back as unified yet flattened surfaces; that through an awareness of this process of outward objectification, individuals paradoxically reconstitute a sense of interiority; but that this reconstituted sense of

interiority remains unstable, itself subject to disintegration in further experiences of self-objectification. Thus, for Eliot, self proves neither stable nor substantive, but rather a product of the dialectical friction generated by the interplay between surface and (a sense of) depth. Still, while this basic pattern persists throughout his body of work (both in his late and early poetry, in his plays, as well as in his criticism and philosophical theorizations), there nonetheless exist differences in emphasis and valuation over the course of his career.

His early work sees this process of exteriorization and dialectical cohesion and disintegration in predominately negative terms. He portrays individuals who experience themselves largely as flattened, wooden surfaces, opaque both to themselves and to others. The emotional resonance of such portrayals tends towards a kind of muted horror, as individuals find themselves cut off from one another as well as from any sense of authentic interiority within themselves. Consider again Eliot's portrayal of Prufrock, whose experience of isolation and self-denigration culminates in the image of his own drowning. At the same time, this feeling of muted horror is compounded by Eliot's portrayal of a countervailing tendency emphasizing individuals' abject vulnerability. The speakers in his early poetry sense a capacity for disintegration latent within themselves. They sense that the feeling of cohesive interiority which structures their sense of self proves tenuous and ungrounded. Yet as Eliot's career progresses, the dramatizations of these two centripetal and centrifugal processes accrue ever more complicated meaning, until in *Four Quartets*, Eliot provides a positive formulation of these constitutive tensions (i.e., through the image and formulation of incarnational embodiment).

Taken as a whole, then, Eliot's work reveals a pervasive preoccupation with the tension between the external and the internal. His work reveals an attempt to think through the contours of personhood through the scaffold of a binary that he both rejects and re-appropriates in a more complicated, nuanced form. However, Eliot's interests in this topic are not unique to him. As I will discuss in a later chapter, Eliot's literary contemporaries, from T.E. Hulme and Ezra Pound to Wyndham Lewis and William Carlos Williams, also emphasize concrete exteriority in much of their work. True art, for these writers, emphasizes only objects' surfaces; all else remains all too susceptible to the easy deceptions of (so-called) romantic sentimentality. Lewis' Frederick Tarr states it most explicitly when he argues that "good art must have no inside": the "armoured hide of the hippopotamus, the shell of the tortoise, feathers and machinery" all "approach nearer to art" than does the "naked pulsing and moving . . . soft inside of life" (*Tarr* 265).

Still, Eliot's project differs markedly from that of his fellow writers. Whereas exteriority for other writers often translates into an emphasis on stasis or on various essentialisms, for Eliot, externality suggests a generative dynamism that lies at the core of his conceptualization of subjectivity. Perhaps the chief difference between Eliot and his fellow artists lies in Eliot's familiarity with then contemporary philosophy and social theory. Like the artists of the period, late nineteenth and early twentieth-century social theorists and philosophers were also probing the tension between surface and depth, although their aims and methodologies differed widely. And like many artists, these social thinkers and philosophers turned away from (or at least challenged and complicated) early nineteenth-century romantic models of self—models of self which,

oftentimes following Rousseau, emphasized interiority as the authentic, knowable source of human subjectivity. From Henri Bergson to Emile Durkheim, social thinkers and philosophers asked questions regarding the source of the self, and for many thinkers, that source proved external to the individual. In order to better understand Eliot's project—both its difference and significance—I want to first contextualize it within the intellectual milieu that provides the coordinates of his thought. Without this understanding, it becomes difficult to determine the extent of Eliot's project and impossible to grasp his place in literary and intellectual history.

Chapter Two, then, will explore the philosophical matrix out of which Eliot's own conceptual categories concerning self or interiority emerge. In doing so, I'll also examine the ways in which Eliot's philosophical contemporaries rely on the interior/exterior binary. In addition to Durkheim, this chapter will feature concise studies of theorists such as Sir James Frazer and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, as well as speculative philosophers such as Henri Bergson and F.H. Bradley, whose use of the interior/exterior binary differs from that of cultural anthropologists such as Durkheim.

Also in this chapter, I will briefly sketch out some of the literary sources for Eliot's thought, again focusing on the way these sources speak to the tension between interiority and exteriority. I will argue that in contrast to the social theorists Eliot draws on (who largely privilege exteriority), the poets and novelists that populate Eliot's background almost invariably privilege inwardness. As a poet, Eliot works in a literary tradition whose concerns often include questions concerning the self, interiority, or authenticity. For instance, nineteenth-century figures such as Matthew Arnold, Robert

Browning, George Eliot, and Walter Pater each, in different ways, grapple directly with the question of inwardness or the nature and source of the self. For Arnold there is the hidden self, for Browning, the diseased self. George Eliot sees human interiority as a mappable, intelligible domain transparent to explanatory discourse, while Pater sees each individual separated by a “thick wall of personality” (119). Eliot both builds on and challenges writers such as these, as well as other influential figures (for him) such as Blake and Swinburne. Indeed, Eliot’s anti-romanticism is in part a resistance not only to romantic and late-romantic poetics (which he sees as overly verbal, abstract, sentimental, etc.) but to the mode of personhood romantic poetry, particularly in its mid and late Victorian instantiation, implicitly propounds, a notion which I will explore in the following chapter.

In Chapter Three, I will turn to Eliot’s prose writings in order to trace out how Eliot specifically responds to his philosophical and literary contemporaries and forebears. For instance, in Eliot’s Harvard and Oxford graduate essays, as well as in a number of book reviews from early in his career, Eliot directly engages with the philosophers and social theorists whose views proliferated during the early twentieth century. I will argue that Eliot affirms what many of these thinkers assert regarding the relation between individuals and their social matrices. Indeed, Eliot himself points to Durkheim as a crucial figure here. For instance, in a 1916 review of Durkheim’s *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life: A Study in Religious Sociology*, Eliot affirms Durkheim as the “leader of a school of thought” whose work has influenced social theorists such as “Lévy-Bruhl . . . Jane Harrison, [F.M.] Cornford, and Mr. A.B. Cook” (*Complete* 420). He goes

on to praise Durkheim's originality, and asserts that his study "is one of the most fascinating, of books on the subject of religion which have been published during the present century [sic]" (423). I will claim that Eliot understands Durkheim's project as one that deemphasizes the personal in favor of the interpersonal or even impersonal, and that this view permeates Eliot's own theories of self. Conversely, as noted above, I'll also claim that when Eliot grapples with his immediate poetic forebears (i.e., romantic and mid and late Victorian writers) he criticizes what he feels to be their overemphasis on individualism and subjective experience.

In this third chapter, I will go on to show how Eliot's prose writings (critical reflections, aesthetic formulations, philosophical speculations) inform and reflect on his project as a poet. Specifically, I will argue here that what remains implicit in Eliot's poetry regarding the relation between individuals and their socio-cultural contexts (i.e., between the inner self and the outer world) becomes explicit in his philosophy and criticism. Indeed, in his dissertation on Bradley, Eliot argues specifically that "the 'self . . . seems to depend upon a world which in turn depends upon it, and nowhere . . . can we find anything original or ultimate" (*Knowledge and Experience* 146), which is to say that individuals possess no core, hidden, authentic interiority, but rather only gain a sense of interiority through their constitutive dialectical encounters with exteriorized objects in the outer world. Brooker, too, notes the dialectical impulse underlying Eliot's thinking: "The movement of his mind," she suggests, "involving first surrender, then mastery, and finally transcendence," is a "pattern" rooted in "Hegelian and Marxist dialectic," which Eliot has appropriated and transformed (*Mastery* 3). This underlying dialectic inherited

from nineteenth-century continental philosophy not only informs Eliot's philosophical position, but his aesthetic theorizations as well. When, in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," for instance, Eliot famously argues that poets have no meaning except in relation to a larger, more comprehensive tradition, he essentially propounds a belief in the dialectical interplay between individuals and the social structures and forces within which they find themselves situated. Out of this view of poets emerges not only his well-known and well-discussed theory of impersonality but also a particular view of history or tradition, as Brooker, too, acknowledges (3).

I'll go on to argue in this section that Eliot's notions of the objective correlative and the unity of sensibility prove possible only within the horizon of a dialectical mode of thought. Both of these speculative concepts rely on the collapse between the distance between surface and depth. Objective correlatives demonstrate a constitutive link between inner emotional experience and external, empirical objects; while the concept of unified sensibility suggests the degree to which thought and feeling overlap, thought being grounded in the skin, so to speak, of language. In this section, I will discuss not only Eliot's dissertation and critical theories, but also his later social writings, as well as numerous, scattered prose pieces published in various journals of the time.

In Chapter Four, I'll turn to Eliot's poetry, focusing primarily on his early work up through *The Waste Land*. I'll begin my discussion at the beginning, so to speak, and examine Eliot's early poem "Convictions (Curtain Raiser)," written around 1910 but published only in 1996, in *Inventions of the March Hare*. In this poem, Eliot first introduces the notion of individuals as purely exteriorized surfaces through the image of

the “marionette,” which he develops through the course of the poem. Among other poems, I will also examine “Mandarins,” “Goldfish,” and “Suite Clownesque,” three more early poems, the second of which also employs the marionette trope, a metaphor which in fact figures in a number of Eliot’s early poems. Following Francis Dickey, I will also examine “On a Portrait” and “Portrait of a Lady.” Each of these six poems, in some way, reverses the surface/depth binary according to which surface is de-prioritized in favor of inwardness. Rather, in these poems, Eliot emphasizes exteriority. He flattens individuals into wooden, static surfaces, seeing them as, literally, wooden puppets—marionettes.

However, by the time we reach “Portrait of a Lady,” Eliot introduces a secondary movement. The speaker in that poem seems to become aware of the process of exteriorization, and in that realization, initiates a dialectical movement which introduces into Eliot’s model of self a notion of interiority, however tenuous or insubstantial. In the second half of this chapter, I will turn to “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and *The Waste Land* in order to explore further this emerging sense of dialectic that informs Eliot’s dramatization of his speakers and of the personages that populate his early poetry. Indeed, I will point to “Prufrock” as perhaps the paradigmatic text here in that Eliot stages in the poem not only Prufrock’s (self-aware) experience of self-objectification/exteriorization but also his sense of a tendency towards self-dissolution or disintegration. Prufrock feels himself relationally constituted in the gaze of others, objectified by the gaze, and yet torn apart or pierced by it as well. That is to say, he experiences his own self-objectification and instantiation as a unified, singular, bounded

form, which then produces an experience of interiority (i.e., he experiences himself experiencing, which proves generative of an experience of inwardness), yet which nevertheless is felt simultaneously as a self-splintering, an assault on Prufrock's sense of self-unity or coherency.

Chapter Five will continue this exploration into the modes of exteriorization functioning in Eliot's work, but will turn to his later poetry, from the late 1920s to the 1940s. In this chapter I will examine "Ash Wednesday," *Sweeney Agonistes*, and *Four Quartets*, and will argue that each emphasizes the experience of disintegration, dismemberment, and dissolution in contrast to surface coherency or unity. In other words, whereas Eliot emphasizes wooden exteriority in much of his early poetry, his later work stresses the fracturing of such exteriority, its splintering into incoherency. In this sense, Eliot's later work carries forward the work begun in "Prufrock" by amplifying and complicating it. Eliot renders individuals into highly vulnerable creatures, whose inwardness, as such, consists in the experience of themselves as surfaces subject to exposure and fragmentation.

However, in these later poems, Eliot connects the feeling of dissolution with a sense of self-overcoming. For the later Eliot, there is a sense that individuals need self-dissolution in order to advance to higher modes of self-integration, however tenuous or temporary. As such, the emotional valence of these later poems shifts from the negative to the positive. In part, one might link this procedural movement to Eliot's conversion to Christianity in 1927, a point that exactly parallels this slight shift in his poetics. While this point proves cogent, one might also point out that this constitutive antagonistic

tension (between the self and the self's own self-overcoming through dissolution) only reproduces the dialectical procedure apparent in his early pre-conversion work as well, albeit with a slightly different emphasis. The informing pattern here remains the same. This chapter will culminate in a discussion of *Four Quartets*, in which Eliot offers the image of incarnational embodiment, a way of conceiving bodies in flux that maintains the dialectical tension between the centripetal and centrifugal forces that work upon individuals.

Finally, in Chapter Six, I will place Eliot in context of his modernist contemporaries by moving into a discussion of the ways in which they varyingly construct the inner/outer binary in their own work. Indeed, I intend to suggest that concern with this binary extends far beyond Eliot, informing modernist representational strategies in general. Thus, turning away from Eliot, I will provide brief readings of novelists such as Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, and Wyndham Lewis, as well as poets such as William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein, and Ezra Pound. I will argue that many of these writers (ironically imitating their Victorian forebears) privilege interiority over exteriority, though in variant and often oppositional ways. I will place Conrad, for example, in opposition to novelists such as Woolf and D.H. Lawrence, for both of whom I will argue an inner self remains a varyingly complex though nonetheless substantive entity, the self existing in itself, as it were. Woolf, for instance, offers several ways of conceptualizing interiority over the course of her work, but each relies on a definitive notion of self as a category with positive content (i.e., self exists as such, however malleable it may be). In contrast, Conrad (I argue) denies self originary content, seeing

self only as an abstract conceptual category lacking substantiality in itself. Both privilege inwardness and subjective modes of consciousness, but Conrad sees interiority as a blank abyss onto which outer forms/identities are grafted.

Conversely, in this chapter I will also explore how many of Eliot's contemporaries prioritize exteriority over interiority, examining (among others) Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and William Carlos Williams. Although these authors differ from one another in various ways, each nonetheless emphasizes concrete material reality. Objects exist as ends in themselves, rather than as necessary analogues for inner moods or states of consciousness. They possess, too, a self-sufficiency that defines them as particularized objects located within an array of objects, rather than as objects mutually constituted in dialectical relations with one another. Moreover, each of these authors variously posits a transparent relation between the knower and the known (i.e., perceivers perceive objects in their supposed self-transparent, self-substantial, singular reality). As Williams Carlos Williams argues in *Spring and All*, "There is a constant barrier between the reader and his consciousness of immediate contact with the world," which (implicitly) poetry can bridge (88). He affirms that he "puts down" nothing in his work "which is not intended as of a piece with the 'nature' which Shakespeare mentions," and goes on to define nature as "the common thing which is anonymously about us" (101). Williams, that is, not only sees the external world of material objects as simply and transparently given, but implicitly separates the act of perception from that which it perceives (i.e., the knower from the known). In doing so, he erects a subject/object binary which privileges the external as self-substantial and self-sustaining, independent from any mediating gaze.

In short, in this chapter, in the same broad sense that Frank Kermode differentiates between what he terms paleo- and neo-modernisms in his essay “The Modern,” I, too, will differentiate broadly between those modernists who privilege interiority and those who privilege exteriority, all the while acknowledging the various nuances and inconsistencies their positions entail.

Ultimately, in this dissertation, I hope to offer a way of conceptualizing Eliot’s work that assumes continuities over the course of his career as well as variations in emphasis and practice. As noted above, I intend to challenge readings of Eliot that see him predominately as a poet of interiority, and I hope to expand on the work of those (such as Francis Dickey) who see Eliot as emphasizing exteriority. Also, given Eliot’s provocative epistemological skepticism and dialectical conceptualization of the nature of human selfhood, my hope is to advance Eliot as a poet and thinker whose views on human nature prove far more radical and indeed *postmodern* than many critics acknowledge, and I seek, too, to offer a way of more clearly differentiating him from his modernist contemporaries. Finally, I seek to place Eliot within a tradition of thought that broadens our understanding of his location within the modern intellectual landscape. I seek to show that Eliot is far more our contemporary than he may seem, though not for the reasons typically given (e.g., Eliot as a poet of modern malaise, existential angst, or the breakdown of communal values), but rather because Eliot’s thought arises out of the same Hegelian matrix that provides postmodernity with many of its own orienting conceptual categories. In this specific sense, Eliot is not at all a reactionary thinker: for in

fact his resistance to and deconstruction of binary modes of thought has proven markedly prescient, anticipating many of our current theoretical presuppositions

CHAPTER II

CONSTRUCTING A POET:

PHILOSOPHICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXTS

Donald Childs points out that ever since Eliot pointed to Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* and James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* in his notes to *The Waste Land* that critics have sought to trace the connections between Eliot's aesthetic project as a poet and the anthropological theories of his intellectual contemporaries (20).¹ Certainly, Eliot was an informed student of modern social science, as his work in Josiah Royce's 1913-14 graduate seminar and his later numerous reviews of anthropological studies reveal. Indeed, the fact that he continued to think and write on these issues, even after he formally abandoned philosophy in 1917 in favor of his career as a poet, demonstrates his ongoing interest in the field. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, Eliot's familiarity extended not only to Frazer and Weston, but also to social theorists such as Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and Émile Durkheim, as well as speculative philosophers like Henri Bergson and F.H. Bradley. Along with a few other figures (e.g., Weston, Jane Harrison, F.M. Cornford), these thinkers provided Eliot with the conceptual coordinates of his own

¹ Of course, years later, in "The Frontiers of Criticism" (1956), Eliot confesses that he fears his "notes stimulated the wrong kind of interest among the seekers of sources," that though "it was just . . . that I should pay my tribute to the work of Miss Jessie Weston . . . I regret having sent so many enquirers off on a wild goose chase after Tarot cards and the Holy Grail" (*On Poetry* 121-22). Still, in the very next passage of the essay, he goes on to argue that such explanations of his work (i.e., those that examine source material), though partial, "may be a necessary preparation for understanding" (122), a significant admission, given the depth of his own familiarity with anthropologists and other social theorists.

social/anthropological positions. Whether he situated himself alongside or against them, these thinkers equipped him with the terminological and theoretical apparatus that necessarily informed his own reflections on the formation of individuals and their relation to the social order. Eliot's musings on and dramatizations of the tensions between interiority and exteriority in his poetry and criticism in part respond to or extend these thinkers' own speculations, and thus it becomes crucial to review a sampling of their positions, however briefly, in order to better understand Eliot's own. Most importantly, consciously or not, each of these figures employs the surface/depth binary in their own thinking about the relationship between individuals and their social matrices. Consequently, to better understand Eliot's treatment of this binary requires an understanding their own.

Thus, this chapter will in part trace out the various ways in which Eliot's intellectual precursors deploy the inner/outer binary in their thinking. Each of these authors attempts to theorize or dramatize a particular understanding of human subjectivity and its relation to its social context. Each operates during a period when largely normative conceptualizations of this relation have come into question, as altered cultural, social, and economic conditions undermined previous certitudes. In a sense, the self as such has come into question. Is it an autonomous entity, complete in itself, or does its inner structure derive from social determinants? Is it objectively knowable, or does it defy conceptual delineation? What is the relation between the self and other selves or its cultural environment? How does the self develop or come to an awareness of itself as a self among others? These authors seek to resolve these questions by implicitly or

explicitly placing the self in oppositional relation to its social matrix, and privileging either the self in itself (i.e., as autonomously constituted) or its social determinants. In other words, they privilege either the internal (the self) or the external (the social). I want to map out their varying positions (as I read them,) so as to better demonstrate in Chapter Three how Eliot synthesizes and transcends their diverse formulations in his own work. For even as Eliot draws upon the same essential inner/outer distinction that characterizes their projects, he rejects their binary, oppositional logic in favor of a dialectical understanding of the relation between interiority and exteriority.

The first section of the chapter will follow how anthropologists grappled with this binary, moving generally from a discussion of those theorists who privileged exteriority to those who stressed interiority. Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl, for instance, uniformly emphasize exteriority in their theories of human and cultural development. Both emphasize the way individual consciousness reduces to its social determinants (i.e., the way the internal reduces to the external). Frazer, on the other hand, preserves both poles of the binary, emphasizing rather the tension between the two terms rather than privileging one over the other. In contrast to these three thinkers, Jane Harrison prioritizes interiority over exteriority, in a sense synthesizing the work of Durkheim and Bergson in order to formulate her own distinctive notions. Accordingly, following an exploration of Harrison's ideas, I will transition into a discussion of philosophers Bergson and Bradley, and argue that whereas Bergson emphatically stresses interiority, Bradley deconstructs the binary altogether.

Of course, as a poet, Eliot remains as interested in literary thought and practice as in anthropological and philosophical speculation. But just as social scientists and philosophers implicitly employ the inner/outer binary in their work, so, too, do novelists, poets, and critics. Consequently, following a discussion of social theorists and philosophers, I will move into a discussion of Eliot's Victorian precursors, demonstrating the nuances of their positions regarding this binary. For instance, I will show how Robert Browning dramatizes in his poetry a model of human subjectivity predicated on a radically interiorized notion of self. Browning, I argue, defines self as utterly enclosed within its own limited and limiting experience of itself, and that consequently individuals ultimately prove unintelligible to one another. Conversely, George Eliot offers a model of self that emphasizes transparency and external human relationality. She suggests that the self is a rational self, embedded in an external social context which provides the structuring matrix for self-experience and identity. In this, she aligns with later anthropological thought. Following a discussion of these two opposed writers, I will turn to an exploration of the ways in which Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater conceive the relation between the two terms of the binary, and will suggest that, like Browning, both largely privilege a radically inwardly-oriented notion of self. Arnold famously suggests a bifurcated model of subjectivity, for example, in which he privileges an inward, hidden self over an externally oriented superficial persona. Similarly, Pater stresses the extent to which individuals, trapped in the sphere of their own self-experience, remain barred from one another.

Each of these four culturally pivotal figures reveals a slightly different treatment of the inner/outer binary, though (with the exception of George Eliot) they each generally privilege interiority over exteriority, thus differentiating themselves as thinkers from influential anthropologists such as Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl, or even Frazer. Taken together, these various theorists, philosophers, and literary thinkers each help provide a sense of the ways the inner/outer binary manifests in nineteenth-century thought, and thus help demonstrate the mode of binary thinking out of which Eliot's own thought emerges and which he proceeds to challenge. For, as I will argue, Eliot reconceptualizes the relation between the poles of the binary, placing them in dialectical rather than oppositional relation to one another.

Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl, and the Anthropological Privileging of Exteriority

Many critics view Émile Durkheim as one of the most significant and influential social theorists of the early twentieth century. In *Theories of Primitive Religion*, for example, E.E. Evans-Pritchard argues that Durkheim is “perhaps the greatest figure in the history of modern sociology” (53). And Eliot himself argues in a 1916 review of Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* that it “is one of the most fascinating, of books on the subject of religion which have been published during the present century [sic]” (3).² However, although remembered today as the “founding father” of sociology and as one of the founders of modern anthropology (and ethnology) (Hinkle 336; Throop 367), Durkheim began his career as a philosopher, studying

² First published in 1912 as *Les forms élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (Evans-Pritchard 123).

alongside future luminaries such as Henri Bergson (Cladis x). Durkheim's background in philosophy granted him a broad perspective on which to draw while formulating his sociological theories. Even as late as *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (his last published book), he frames his argument by positioning it in opposition to Humean empiricist and Kantian a priori rationalist traditions, arguing the insufficiency of both for describing socio-cultural religious practices (15-16).

Durkheim's opposition to these two traditions is grounded in part in his particular view of the individual as well as the nature of the relationship between individuals and society. For Durkheim, both empiricists and rationalists ground reality in the individual's own mental being. For empiricists, individuals' conceptualization of reality arises out of the sense data they perceive as they move through their worlds. The "categories of understanding" by which they interpret their world take shape out of the "bits and pieces" of perception and experience that accrue over time (Durkheim 15). Individuals, that is, "forge [the] construction" of their own "categories of understanding," and in so doing, prove the authors of their own individual, separate realities, a view which "verges on irrationalism," Durkheim maintains (15, 16). In contrast, rationalists (like Kant) maintain that the "categories of understanding" remain "logically prior to" experience (15). Individuals are preconditioned to perceive their worlds in a particular way, according to a particular set of innate ideas, as Descartes would have put it. Experience is thus universalized, as is human subjectivity, resulting in a gap between the rationalist notion of human individuality and the great wealth of ethnographic variety which research into human societies reveals. As Mark Cladis notes in his introduction to *The Elementary*

Forms of Religious Life, “Apriorism [simply] cannot account for the variety of worlds” that individuals in different societies inhabit (xxv).

What is most significant here is that empiricists and rationalists both privilege the individual over society or culture as the source of meaning and coherency. Both locate meaning *inside* the individual. Empiricists argue that experience precedes any ordered understanding of the world, and that it is the individual who then orders that experience into a coherent reality via some innate mental synthesizing capacity. Similarly, for rationalists, individuals *as individuals* possess within themselves the conceptual categories that provide the coordinates for organizing experience. They encounter reality as already ordered according to a set of categories inherent to mental life as such. That is to say, both empiricists and rationalists prioritize interiority over exteriority, despite the differences in their emphasis, a view that in many ways has proved characteristic of the Western philosophical tradition since Descartes (arguably the first modern rationalist).

For Durkheim, however, individuals’ experience of reality is always mediated through “collective [cultural] representations” (330). Indeed, he argues that the external world individuals subjectively encounter is in fact “inside society” (and thus outside the individual) (337). Durkheim here suggests that individuals possess no unmediated, self-authenticating inner space. Rather, they experience their reality only as mediated through an exteriorized framework (i.e., society). Inwardness is thus the process of internalizing what is external to the individual, and consciousness is never singular, but always refracted through some “collective consciousness” (340). In this specific sense, for

Durkheim, what individuals experience as personally internal to them proves in fact objectively “impersonal” (342).

Even “logical thought” derives from social structures, he argues: “Solely because society exists, there also exists—outside of individual sensations and images—a whole system of representations. . . . Through them, men understand one another, intellects can intermingle” (331, 332). Individuals, he suggests, can only interact through a shared system of collective representations. Indeed, those shared representations provide the framework not only for communication between individuals but also for each individual’s particularized grasp of reality. Cladis summarizes Durkheim’s position here: “What might seem to be innate, universal [Kantian] categories of human thought such as time, space, class, number, cause, substance, and personhood are in fact culturally specific categories, whose medium is language” (xxv). In what seems a nearly Marxist insight, individuals for Durkheim remain thoroughly determined by their locations within a given social formation. In short, reality (whether social, physical, or metaphysical) is always a collective, socially constituted reality.

In making this argument, Durkheim turns from those models of self that would privilege internal states over external (i.e., away from rationalists like Kant or Descartes or empiricists like Hume or Locke) and towards a model that emphasizes the primacy of external socio-cultural contexts. Durkheim’s views here are not unique to him, but are reflective of a set of underlying assumptions common to many social theorists of the period. From Marx to Freud, social theorists strove to decenter the individual, either dissolving the very notion of an authentic kernel of self that preexists its social

instantiation (as in Marx) or displacing the self by locating its energies in agencies alien to or outside of its immediate self-perception (as in Freud's particular notion of the personal unconscious or Jung's notion of the collective unconscious).

Although less well known outside the history of thought than some of his contemporaries, Lucian Lévy-Bruhl, too, participates in this general project. Like Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl began his career as a philosopher, and indeed, as Evans-Pritchard notes, he always "remained more of the philosopher pure and simple" than an anthropologist (78). Accordingly, his interests remained rooted in the functioning of "primitive systems of thought rather than in primitive institutions" (79). Ideas interested him more so than behavior, particularly how they inform and determine social behavior and cultural practices. Reflecting on Lévy-Bruhl's methodology, Evans-Pritchard argues that "one might as legitimately begin a study of social life by analysis of ways of thought as of ways of behavior" (78). But this understates Lévy-Bruhl's position in that it creates a false equivalence between "ways of thought" and "ways of behavior," since for Lévy-Bruhl "ways of thought" prove more fundamental than "ways of behavior." As with Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl believes that collective cultural representations precede the behaviors that instantiate them. Ideas provide the structural matrix out of which social behavior emerges. As William Skaff argues, both Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl "postulate the existence of collective representations in order to explain how customs and beliefs in primitive societies endure beyond the lifetime of their individual members" (62-63). For both thinkers, societies remain permeated by a dense weave of self-perpetuating shared images, cultural references, categories of thought, and socio-symbolic structures which

direct behavior and action. A difference between the two theorists, though (as Skaff notes as well), is that whereas Durkheim often remains macroscopically focused at the level of a culture's social collective consciousness, Lévy-Bruhl focuses on the intersection between that collective consciousness and the individual mind informed by it (Skaff 63).

Indeed, Lévy-Bruhl's focus on the individual "primitive" mind and how it processes social and physical reality (in contradistinction, say, to the modern mind) marks a fundamental difference not only between his work and Durkheim's but between other anthropologists of the period as well, such as Frazer and E.B. Tylor, members of the so-called "English school of anthropology" (Segal 25). In fact, Lévy-Bruhl positions himself directly against this "English school," arguing that a fundamental gap exists between the modern mind and the pre-modern mind, despite the claims of theorists like Frazer or Tylor that "primitive" social groups "think like moderns, just less rigorously" (Segal 25).³ Not only do pre-modern societies structure themselves differently than modern ones, but the orienting conceptual categories that organize their perceptions of reality differ as well. "Primitive" individuals simply do not perceive the same horizon of meanings and significations that moderns do. Reality itself operates according to a different set of conceptual criteria. Accordingly, anthropologists err when they believe that they can understand the "primitive" mind (and the social practices and processes that it actuates) by assuming it to be merely a less sophisticated version of the modern mind, asking essentially the same questions about reality, perceiving it according to the same

³ Segal goes on to argue that "for Tylor and Frazer primitives perceive the same world as moderns but simply conceive of it differently" (26).

set of categories. For Lévy-Bruhl, the differences between primitive and modern structures of thought and meaning remain simply too pronounced to assume any reliable equivalence between them. As Evans-Pritchard notes, for Lévy-Bruhl, “The mentality of the individual is derived from the collective representations of his society, which are obligatory for him; and these representations are the functions of institutions. Consequently, certain types of representations, and therefore certain ways of thinking, belong to certain types of social structure” (79). Different societies, that is, will possess incommensurately different ways of perceiving and relating to their worlds.

In making this argument, Lévy-Bruhl draws a very clear distinction between primitive and modern modes of thinking, a distinction Eliot will take note of, as will be discussed in the following chapter. In *How Natives Think*,⁴ Lévy-Bruhl argues not only that the “collective representations of primitives . . . differ very profoundly from [modern] ideas or concepts,” but that primitive thought lacks the “logical character” of modern thought (37). It is “mystic,” he argues, in that the primitive mind interjects agency into perceived objects. The primitive individual, he claims, “has an image of [an] object in his mind, and thinks it real, but also has some hope or fear connected with it, that some definite influence emanates from it, or is exercised upon it” (37-38). This mystical “influence” remains a fundamental aspect of the cultural collective representations of primitive societies (38).

⁴ Originally published in 1910 as *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (Evans-Pritchard 126).

But more than this, Lévy-Bruhl argues that “the mentality of primitives may be called prelogical with as good reason as it may be termed mystic,” and that indeed “[t]hese are two aspects of the same fundamental quality, rather than two distinct characteristics” (78). Crucially, Lévy-Bruhl claims that by prelogical he does not mean a stage of thought preparatory to logical thought. Such thought is neither “antilogical” nor “alogical” (78). Rather, by prelogical he means merely that such thought “does not bind itself down, as [modern] thought does, to avoiding contradiction” (78). “In the collective representations of primitive mentality,” he argues, “objects, beings, phenomena can be, though in a way incomprehensible to us, both themselves and something other than themselves” (76). The modern mind perceives as an ontological contradiction or a category error, what for the primitive mind conceptually coheres. In making this argument, he seeks to protect primitive groups from the charge of “mental weakness” or “naïve application[s] of the principle of causality” (76). He urges his readers to “abandon the attempt to refer their mental activity to an inferior activity of our own” (76). Instead, he urges them to understand primitive thought as an expression of a view of reality in which individuals sympathetically participate in the objects of apprehension, what he calls the “law of participation” (76). And indeed this notion (of the participatory relation between individuals and perceived objects) constitutes the key feature of primitive cultural-social collective representations (76).

Just as Durkheim affirms social reality as the determinate matrix for individual subjective identity, so, too, does Lévy-Bruhl. Both identify the individual as the product of collective forces of cultural representation. Both thinkers, too, privilege the external

over the internal, indeed, root the internal in the external, and thus relieve the internal of any determinate content. Lévy-Bruhl's fundamental difference is that he makes a clear distinction between modern and pre-modern modes of social reality, a distinction perhaps suggested by Durkheim's argument, though not explicitly formulated. A cut or gap exists that divides the two cultural formations from one another, rendering them incommensurate.

Frazer's Oppositional Ontology

Against both Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl stands English anthropologist Sir James Frazer, who posits a constitutive opposition between normative, universal human needs and desires and a thoroughly externalized hostile natural world (i.e., that world which exists outside human control). Like Durkheim, Frazer was an immensely influential early anthropologist. His most important work, *The Golden Bough*, was first published in a two-volume edition in 1890, but subsequent editions featured the addition of further volumes, three by 1900, twelve by 1915 (including the index), with a final volume added in 1936 (Fraser xl). In 1922, Frazer published an abridged copy, intended to condense his arguments into a more accessible format (Fraser xl). Frazer's work thus spans a considerable number of years and versions, its first edition well preceding Durkheim's 1912 *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* or Lévy-Bruhl's 1910 *How Natives Think*, and stands as a high-water mark for a particular mode of anthropology that Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl would both implicitly and explicitly reject.

Frazer was a classical nineteenth-century anthropological evolutionist, who believed that all human societies possess at root the same conceptual logic and categories

of experience. Human beings and societies remain essentially, structurally identical to one another, differing only in their particular, individual location on a common, fixed scale of cultural and social development.⁵ For evolutionists like Frazer, human society proceeds through an “inevitable progression from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization” (Voget 944). As Fred Voget argues, using Darwinian evolutionary biological and geological analogies, anthropological evolutionists “arrang[ed] the institutions of mankind along a mental coordinate—from the least to the most reasoned.” In so doing, “a chronological chart of man’s intellectual history could be plotted and ‘index’ institutions could be assigned to natural stages, quite like the geological and life charts used by students of the earth and of life forms” (945). That is to say, as an evolutionist, Frazer universalizes human experience and modes of social organization, suggesting that the only difference between social groups and their cultural practices lies in their relative position upon a normative developmental axis.

Specifically, in *The Golden Bough*, Frazer argues that all human societies progress through three distinct though sometimes overlapping stages: the magical, the religious, and the scientific. In the 1915 third edition, Frazer writes, for instance, that the belief in magic that predominates in early societies “represents a ruder and earlier phase of the human mind, through which all the races of mankind have passed or are passing on their way to religion and science” (55). The “Age of Magic,” that is, precedes the “Age of Religion,” which in turn anticipates the fully enlightened Age of Science characteristic of

⁵ *The Golden Bough*, as Robert Ackerman explains, was “both the culmination and the swan song of old-style evolutionary anthropology” (46). Even as Frazer continued to produce new volumes of his study, new thinkers increasingly questioned his methodology and theoretical assumptions.

modernity, although some atavistic tendencies remain among “the ignorant and superstitious classes” (55). Magic, he maintains, is merely an ignorant, uninformed application of the same general assumptions regarding physical reality that science holds. Beneath both lies the same “faith, implicit but real and firm, in the order and uniformity of nature” (45). For both, physical reality consists of an intelligible weave of externalized impersonal forces which human beings can both comprehend and master. Both represent means by which individuals and societies attempt to control or manipulate their social and physical worlds. “The fatal flaw of magic,” however, “lies not in its general assumption of a sequence of events determined by law, but in its total misconception of the nature of the particular laws which govern that sequence” (45-46). Magic, thus, proves but the “bastard sister of science,” and remains “necessarily false and barren; for were it ever to become true and fruitful,” he argues, “it would no longer be magic but science” (46).

Only when a given society’s “shrewder intelligences” realize the ineffectiveness of magical incantations and ritual formulas do they move on to the religious phase, in which belief in an impersonal world of physical forces gives way to belief in a world constituted by and mediated through the intervention of powerful spiritual agencies (55). Instead of attempting to effect control of their environments through magic, societies now attempt to do so through propitiation. For Frazer, this represents a mode of progress in that it demonstrates a particular society’s attempt to find a “truer theory of nature and a more fruitful method of turning her resources to account” (55). In this sense, the move from magic to religion (from incantation to propitiation) illustrates Frazer’s belief in the

underlying cognitive uniformity of human societies. The very scientific methodology characteristic of Western, modern, enlightened thought (i.e., trial by hypothesis and experiment) characterizes, too, primitive thought. The logic of causality remains conceptually consistent throughout each of the stages. Human beings (their cognitive structures, categories of experience) remain the same no matter their stage of cultural development. For Frazer the evolutionist, in contradistinction to Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl, all that divides societies (or individuals) is time and experience, and more connects primitive and modern society than divides them, a notion Eliot dwells on as well. But this implies, too, an oppositional relation between individuals (and the social groups to which they belong) and the natural environment itself. That is, Frazer posits a hostile, external world against which individuals struggle in predictable and developmentally progressive patterns. Indeed, the struggle itself helps propel the evolution of cultural forms and human thought. As individuals discover ever more effective means for controlling their environments, so, too, do they advance up the scale of social organization and intellectual development.

For example, *The Golden Bough* is most known for its extended examination of the social and cultural function of the priest-king in archaic societies, as well as its treatment of the notion of “sympathetic magic” in relation to this figure (24). For Frazer, the priest-king provides the mechanism by which certain ancient societies (mistakenly, he feels) attempted to effect change in their physical worlds. In the very first chapter of the very first edition (1890) of *The Golden Bough* (and reproduced with variations in subsequent editions), Frazer lays forth his thesis, pointing to the fate of the priest-king of

Nemi (a lake near Rome) as his foundational example. This priest figure served in a grove dedicated to the goddess Diana, at the center of which stood a sacred tree, which he sought to protect. The priest, also referred to as a king, bore his title by virtue of having slain the previous priest-king, and in turn, would himself be slain by his eventual replacement. Frazer notes that this ritual drama seemed an anomalous barbarism in the otherwise “polished Italian society” of imperial Rome, and he sees it, ultimately, as an atavistic remnant of a less civilized period (12). *The Golden Bough* serves as Frazer’s attempt to explain this strange cultural remnant, and he turns to comparative cultural analysis in order to do so. “[I]f we can shew,” he asserts, “that a barbarous custom, like that of the priesthood of Nemi, has existed elsewhere,” then “we” can prove that certain universal motives work to produce culturally homologous social practices (12).

He argues, ultimately, that the ritual death of the priest-king served as the means by which primitive societies sought to exert control over their physical environments. After a long cultural evolutionary process, these societies came to equate their kings with the powers of nature and its fecundity, and they saw these kings as possessing a “controlling influence over the general course of nature” (216-17). “Naturally,” he writes, “the life and health of such a god-man are matters of anxious concern to the people whose welfare and even existence are bound up with his” (217). Since this king cannot be allowed to grow old or sick, because doing so would threaten the very course of nature, he must be slain and replaced while still healthy and virile. As Frazer puts it: “To guard against these catastrophes it is necessary to put the king to death while he is still in the full bloom of his divine manhood, in order that his sacred life, transmitted in unabated

force to his successor, may renew its youth, and thus by successive transmissions through a perpetual line of vigorous incarnations may remain eternally fresh and young” (679). Thus, relying on the notion of sympathetic magic, ancient peoples equated the physical power of the priest-king with the physical processes of the natural world. To slay the king before he grew old or weak was to preserve the king’s power and thus a society’s control over their physical worlds (e.g., the rain on their fields, the germination of their crops, and the strength of their harvests).

On the one hand, Frazer characterizes primitive societies as harmoniously integrated with their physical realities. These early cultures would seem to have understood themselves as participants in a natural order, which they could manipulate and master via magical ritual. But Frazer also argues that primitive peoples simply deluded themselves into perceiving a sympathetic integration between human social realities and brute physical nature. For the nineteenth-century Frazer, the world remains always external to the individual. It is an object of manipulation: magic, like science, at root functions only as an instrument of power over a world construed as other. Thus, Frazer pits human societies and individuals against an external, hostile world which must be subdued or modified. Like Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl, then, Frazer posits a binary that places the external (of nature) over the internal (of particular cultures or individuals). But unlike them, the binary he constructs remains stable, whereas they invert it so that the external itself functions as the privileged term: the external determining the internal. For Frazer, the two exist in hostile opposition. Indeed, as suggested above, the antagonism between the two terms serves as the engine that propels cultural evolution (i.e., the effort

to master the physical world leads societies to ever higher levels of cultural development, as they move through empirical observations to abandon magic for religion and religion for science). Moreover, unlike Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl, Frazer seems largely uninterested in the relation between society and the particular individuals that compose it (or whom it composes, as Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl would argue), focusing rather on the supposed purpose and structural function of ritual within societies from within a horizon of assumptions that sees the primitive as simply an uninformed modern.⁶

Later generations of anthropologists would reject Frazer's comparative methodology as well as many of his core assumptions. As Robert Ackerman points out, as Frazer continued work on *The Golden Bough*, a "theoretical reorientation" took place which began to render Frazer obsolete even as he reached the peak of his influence (45-46). Frazer, for instance, "lifted out of [their] physical and social contexts" cultural and social practices in a way that the social sciences increasingly discouraged (46). Also, his particular emphasis on comparative analysis privileged sameness at the expense of difference, masking the distinctions between cultures and thereby distorting social theorists' understanding of them. In his empirical quest to accumulate as many cultural anecdotes as possible in order to confirm his central hypothesis, he neglected to examine the particular emotional or psychological needs that varied social practices and cultural rituals served. Perhaps most importantly, younger anthropologists, especially those influenced by Durkheim, began to reject his particular evolutionary model of human

⁶ Indeed, as will be discussed below, one of Eliot's difficulties with Frazer lies precisely in Frazer's presumption to fathom the purposes of ancient ritual and religious practices.

social and cultural development, in which the “Age of Magic” leads always and inevitably through the “Age of Magic” to the “Age of Science” (46, 64).

Jane Harrison and the Inward Turn

Frazer’s influence remained pronounced, even if only as a figure against which others struggled. So-called Cambridge Ritualists such as Jane Harrison, F.M Cornford, and Gilbert Murray were among Frazer’s most notable inheritors, although they were also among those who rejected his static evolutionism. They introduced new theoretical notions to anthropology derived from the studies of speculative philosophers and psychologists such as Freud, Henri Bergson, and Jung, as well as Durkheim, Nietzsche, and William James (Ackerman 64; Phillips 465). Both Ackerman and K.J. Phillips note that Jane Harrison was the center of this deeply collaborative group, particularly since her particular views of the relation between myth, ritual, and society seemed to have solidified first, and her knowledge of Greek social and cultural practices exceeded that of her fellow Ritualists (Phillips 466).

Like Frazer, Harrison affirmed a form of social evolutionism, though with qualifications. Although she believed, as Camille Barnard-Cogno puts it, in the “existence of an evolutionary process in which a mythological way of thought changed progressively into a historical one” (668), she nonetheless rejected Frazer’s notion of some antecedent magical stage, in which individuals sought to control their worlds through a form of primitive science. Instead, in texts such as *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (1912) and *Ancient Art and Ritual* (1913), she argued that the original purpose of ritual (and its derivative, myth) was socio-psychological: it

provided societies with a formalized framework for integrating individuals into social institutions, and in doing so satisfied some universal emotional and psychological need in individuals for integration which manifests itself across cultures. Indeed, as Robert Segal notes, Harrison affirmed that rituals, at least at first, served a purely “initiator” function, while the notion of the divine emerged only out of the “euphoria produced by the ritual” (71). But this means, though, that the universal need for integration reflects a deeper, more essentialized level of human self-experience. That is to say, in suggesting that individuals require initiation into sociocultural structures, Harrison subtly affirms the existence of an interior psychological or emotive reality (i.e., some concrete inner essence) which preexists its socially determined instantiation.

Still, in her work, Harrison often emphasizes the stabilizing, communally shared exterior social forms that provide the structure, context, and significance for individual experiences. In *Themis*, for example, Harrison observes of certain tribal rites that they enable individuals to feel as if they “belong to something bigger, more potent, more lasting, than [their] own individual existence” (19). Through ritual, she claims, individuals can experience themselves as “part of the stream of the totemic life, one with the generations before and yet to come” (19).⁷ Of course, for Harrison, as socially initiator ritual practices continued over time, communities came to associate ritual experience with experience of the divine, eventually grafting onto ritual practices the fertility-rite function that Frazer explores in his work (71). They began to abstract from

⁷ In particular, she notes that the “ceremonies that accompany each successive stage of life” remain “one and all *Rites de Passage*, ceremonies of transition, of going out from the old and going in to the new” (20).

ceremonial rites other meanings, despite the origin of ritual in “social custom” rather than in some trans-historical “religious instinct” (28). In part following Durkheim (whose influence she admits in her introduction to *Themis* [ix]), Harrison ultimately claims that “Not only does [a] god reflect the thoughts, social conditions, morality and the like [of a given group], but in its origin his substance when analysed turns out to be . . . nothing but the representation, the utterance, the emphasis of these imaginations, these emotions, arising out of particular social conditions” (28). For Harrison, then, as for Durkheim, religion as such and its representative external forms arise out of particular collectively shared social and cultural practices. And yet, as noted above, these shared social forms themselves function only as a mechanism for satisfying autonomously experienced, innate, individual needs.

Harrison and her collaborators go on affirm the link between these ancient religious practices and the emergence of ritual drama. However, in the same way that she suggests an underlining inwardness in effect gives rise to and takes definitive shape within socio-religious structures, so, too, does she affirm that beneath ancient Greek drama an essential ritual pattern continues to exist, despite the gradual disappearance of any ostensibly religious or ceremonial associations. Indeed, in *Themis*, Harrison includes Gilbert Murray’s “Excursus on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Tragedy,” which identifies six stages of ritual submerged beneath Greek drama’s surface.⁸ As Harry C. Payne points out in his discussion of the Cambridge Ritualists, the persistence of this

⁸ In *From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation*, F.M. Cornford comments that he has “had the great advantage of going over all the main points [of *Themis*] with the author,” and has “adopted many of her conclusions” (ix). He notes, too, that he has “carri[ed] on the same principles of interpretation” that Harrison uses in *Themis* in his own study (ix).

ritual form into drama “implied that the ritual pattern spoke to continuing social and psychological emotions which remained even when the old agricultural magic had faded” (186). Inner realities persist despite shifting external forms.

In the same sense, that is, that socially embedded, collectivized ritual appealed to individuals prior to the emergence of any distinct set of mythological or religious narratives, so, too, does it continue to appeal to individuals once those narratives have lost the energy of their initial formulations. For Harrison, what ultimately underlies the appeal of ritual is its ability to channel inner human emotion into outward socially shared collective forms. In *Ancient Art and Ritual*, for example, she argues that at the root of both ritual and art lies the “desire . . . to utter, to give out a strongly felt emotion or desire by representing, by making or doing, or enriching the object or act desired” (26). Emotion underlies ritual form, provides its generative impulse, even though it requires social sanction through ritual form itself.⁹ It is not an individual’s “private and personal emotions that tend to become ritual,” Harrison affirms, “but those that are public, felt and expressed officially, that is, by the whole tribe or community” (49). Such a formulation also demonstrates her distance from Frazer, since for Harrison ritual serves an “emotional, not an altogether practical end” (44). (Recall that for Frazer, so-called primitives employed ritual magic pseudo-scientifically for the pragmatic purpose of achieving control over their environments.)

⁹ “A meal digested alone is certainly no rite,” Harrison argues, but a “meal eaten in common, under the influence of a common emotion, may, and often does, tend to become a rite” (*Ancient* 36).

In short, like Frazer, Durkheim, and Lévy-Bruhl, Harrison (and the other Cambridge Ritualists), worked to invert the standard, popular, nineteenth-century bourgeois understanding of the relation between individuals and their society (rooted partly in the empiricism of figures like Hume and the rationalism of figures like Kant, as noted above). Individuals, she claims, find meaning and coherence only within the context of their own social conditions. Ritual provides a means for integrating individuals into the social body, and does so in part by constructing a shared framework for channeling individual and group emotional experience. It renders such emotion culturally coherent in that it integrates it into a common social matrix. But there is a difference here between Harrison's project and that of her predecessors. Whereas Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl, for instance, seem to suggest that every facet of individuals' conscious being remains predetermined by a given culture's predominate collective representations, Harrison seems to suggest that individuals possess an authentic inner space that exists independently of the social order and which must be brought into some kind alignment with it. Ritual, recall, serves an initiatory purpose for Harrison. That is to say, beneath the crust of social forms exists a substratum of emotional life which persists outside of social determinates.

This logic of locating the truth of an external phenomenon by uncovering the truth of its inner structure runs throughout her work. The core assumption, for instance, of her *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, is that a "lower chthonic stratum" exists beneath "the main outlines of Greek religious thought" (31). And of course, as has been discussed above, one of the core arguments of *Themis* is that beneath the surface of

dramatic art lies a ritual pattern which stretches back into the prehistory of religious practice: ritual serves as the inward form of drama's outward expression. Harrison affirms the existence of an informing interiority—the notion that hidden structures determine outward forms. And yet, she agrees, too, with Durkheim (and Lévy-Bruhl), for whom individuals derive their own (inner) meanings out of the communally shared rituals and collective cultural representations that provide the fundamental conceptual coordinates of their worlds (i.e., the external remains primary; from it derives the internal). Thus a tension exists in Harrison's work in which the external and the internal interpenetrate one another in complex and productive ways. In her thinking, each informs the other, even though ultimately she appears to privilege the internal, in that externalities inevitably reduce to some hidden interiorized logic.

One source for Harrison's difference with Durkheim may be traced to her reliance on Henri Bergson, a figure who influenced not only Harrison, but an entire generation of philosophers and poets, including Eliot. Indeed, G. William Barnard notes that “no philosopher was more admired and respected in his own time than Bergson was at the turn of the twentieth century” (44). In *Themis*, Harrison is quite explicit about Bergson's influence on her. She confesses that she owes an “indirect but profound” debt to Bergson, and that reading Bergson led her to believe that “Dionysos, with every other mystery-god, was an instinctive attempt to express what Professor Bergson calls *durée* [or duration], that life which is one, indivisible and yet ceaselessly changing” (viii). In contrast to these mystery gods stand the Olympian deities, whom Harrison sees as late abstractions, the product of “analysis, of reflection and intelligence” (xii). They do not

represent the unmediated flux of consciousness (as does, say, Dionysus), but remain rather concretized, partitioned elements of experience abstracted from the instinctive apprehension of reality. After reading Bergson, she claims that she came to realize that “Primitive religion was not, as I had drifted into thinking, a tissue of errors leading to mistaken conduct [as Frazer had thought]; rather it was a web of practices emphasizing particular parts of life, issuing necessarily in representations and ultimately dying out into abstract conceptions” (viii). That is, Bergson led Harrison to believe that primitive ritual and religion were expressions of a fundamental substratum of human psychic life as embodied in various social forms.

Henri Bergson and the Primacy of Interiority

Bergson, of course, was a speculative philosopher rather than an anthropologist. Yet just as Durkheim, Frazer, or Harrison variously employ the inner/outer binary in their work, so, too, does Bergson. However, unlike these figures, Bergson unambiguously emphasizes interiority as the foundational element of human experience. Indeed, as Harry C. Payne notes, Bergson and Durkheim were seen as “intellectual enemies” in early twentieth-century Paris (188), an observation Harrison makes as well in *Themis* (xiii). Unlike Durkheim, for whom external social frameworks determine internal identities, Bergson preserves an autonomous space for authentic inner experience. In his “Introduction to Metaphysics” from *The Creative Mind*,¹⁰ Bergson affirms the existence

¹⁰ *The Creative Mind* was first published as *La Pensée et le mouvant* in 1934, but “Introduction to Metaphysics” first appeared as an article in the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* in 1903 (Bergson, *Creative* 222).

of a “self which endures” beneath and beyond its social instantiations (162). He sees the human person as a kind of sphere. The surface of the sphere consists of physical perceptions, associative memories, “tendencies, motor habits,” as well as “a crowd of virtual actions more or less solidly bound to those perceptions and . . . memories” (163). Beneath this crust, however, he locates a center, which constitutes “what is the most uniformly, the most constantly and durably myself” (163).

This self, abstracted from its social and cultural contexts, consists of a “succession of states,” a continual flux of moments of consciousness which shift gradually one into the other (163). As Barnard glosses it, for Bergson, “our consciousness is an inner life that is ceaselessly changing—an inner world in which one state of consciousness seamlessly flows into the next” (45). Bergson terms this perpetual state of flux, this self-sustaining, unbroken flow of consciousness “durée,” and it resists both division into discrete parts as well as conceptual abstraction or notational representation. He understands durée as a self-integrated/self-integrating whole, incapable of division into temporal segments (i.e., seconds, minutes, hours). It exists whole and in itself, an unending, unceasing, indivisible current of consciousness.¹¹ For Bergson, durée constitutes individuals’ experience of their unbroken, authentic, inner selves, but it remains an experience achievable only by bracketing that self from the social world which otherwise contextualizes it.

¹¹ Compare with William James’ notion of the “stream of consciousness,” first elaborated in Chapter XI of *Psychology* (1892).

Bergson goes on to emphasize the gap between “our superficial psychic life” (i.e., the socially inflected ego self) and this “deep-seated self which ponders and decides, which heats and blazes up” (*Time and Free Will* 125). For Bergson, as Barnard observes as well [49], when individuals over-identify with their social and cultural instantiations then “we live outside ourselves, hardly perceiving anything of ourselves but our own ghost . . . we live for the external world rather than for ourselves; we speak rather than think; we ‘are acted’ rather than act ourselves” (ibid 231). Even though, as Bergson admits, the “deeper self forms one and the same person with the superficial ego,” a qualitative gulf nonetheless stretches between the two existential states (ibid 125). They cannot overlap in that the surface social self necessarily relies upon categories and concepts in order to construct a navigable world, whereas the deep inner self exists beyond (or beneath) such categorizing states of consciousness. In *Time and Free Will*,¹² Bergson states quite explicitly that in the process of perceiving a world external to the individual, a “second self is formed which obscures the first, a self whose existence is made up of distinct moments, whose states are separated from one another and easily expressed in words” (138). This “second self” functions as an instrument through which the authentic self can negotiate with a world it encounters as deeply other, and yet it remains an incomplete expression of the individual’s totality. As Sanford Schwartz points out, Bergson sees the intellect as a tool for “serv[ing] our practical interests, but only at the expense of real duration” (28).

¹² First published in 1889 as *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (Bergson, *Time* v).

Thus, for Bergson, there exists an essential self, a buried self, which exists at a more fundamental, pre-social level of human experience, precisely the notion which influenced Jane Harrison in her study of Greek ritual and religion. In making his arguments, Bergson sought to protect a particular notion of human selfhood from the positivist materialism of his day, which held that individuals act only according to physical and social determinates. He sought to preserve the concepts of self-authenticity and free will from a mechanistic science he felt misrepresented human experience. Perhaps most of all, he resisted any “mechanical conception of the self,” as he phrases it in *Time and Free Will* (171). As Richard Lehan rightly argues, Bergson resisted the Enlightenment ideological tradition that “gave priority to a mechanical reality” which reduces life’s complexity to the measureable, the empirical, the conceptual (47). He resisted science’s tendency to divide and compartmentalize a reality which he viewed as incapable of such reductivist analysis. Psychology, for instance, “like the other sciences . . . resolves the self . . . into sensations, feelings, images, etc. which it studies separately” (169). It fragments the self into isolate, constituent parts which it subjects to analysis, “substitutes for the self a series of elements” abstracted from the individual’s composite self-experience (169). Even in philosophy, he argues, both empiricism and rationalism conflate the rich subjective texture characteristic of inner life with the concepts employed to analyze that inner life. Both, he argues, “take . . . partial notions for real parts” (“Introduction” 172). Both “remain . . . powerless to reach the personality” (ibid 173). Mechanistic science thus distorts the reality of human existential experience, and it does

so by confusing analytically derived concepts with the reality those concepts purportedly describe.

Indeed, for Bergson, mechanistic science not only distorts individuals' perception of their own authentic interior existence, but their perception of the external world as well. Objects do not in fact exist for us (as we subjectively perceive them) as fixed, unchanging objects. Rather, they accrue shades of difference over time, such that, like individuals, objects defy their own objectified, abstracted, static appearance. "Every day I perceive the same houses," Bergson explains, "and as I know that they are the same objects, I always call them the same name and I also fancy that they always look the same to me" (*Time* 129). But this feeling, Bergson claims, proves inexact. Over time, these houses experience an "inexpressible change": "It seems that these objects, continually perceived by me and constantly impressing themselves on my mind, have ended by borrowing from me something of my own conscious existence: like myself they have lived, and like myself they have grown old" (130). These objects (houses) have undergone an unending series of alterations. More often than not, however, individuals do not recognize the subtle transformation constitutive of objects in the world, nor the shift in impressions that those objects correspondingly make on us.

In fact, and here Bergson completes his reversal of the inner/outer binary, not only do objects undergo subtle objective material transformation, but they undergo constant subjective transformation as well. No object ever presents itself twice as the same object to any perceiver. As Schwartz glosses Bergson here, "A rose is a rose, but its scent is never the same" (24). For Bergson, objects remain bound by the shifting

memories and associations individuals attach to them each time they encounter them. One smells a rose, for instance, and, as Bergson puts it, “immediately confused recollections of childhood” come to mind (*Time* 161). But the rose does not exactly summon the memories. Rather, individuals “breathe them in with the very scent” (161). Memory proves coterminous with the experience of the rose. The two prove inseparable. Consequently, the rose has as many scents as it does smellers. “To others,” Bergson reflects, “it will smell differently” (161). A biologist, say, would isolate the rose from this subjective experience, would preserve “only the objective aspect,” but the subjective, “personal element” remains just as vital for the individual’s phenomenological perception of the rose (161). Thus, as Schwartz correctly notes, “in ‘real duration’ the consciousness of an object is suffused with the inner life of a particular individual” (25). At the level of the deepest self, the physical world remains experientially saturated with individuals’ (constantly shifting) emotions, memories, associations, values (all of which permeate one another as well) (22). Indeed, the phenomenological world remains inseparable from these subjective elements.

For Bergson, then, in the end, material reality itself is in fact marked through and through by the individual’s subjective experience of it. *Durée* does not limit itself to the dark recesses of inner life, but stretches out, too, over perceptible physical reality. The internal and external overlap for Bergson, and although he never denies the independent reality of the external world (as subjective idealists/radical empiricists like George Berkeley do), he clearly privileges interiority over exteriority, grounding individuals’ deepest existential experience of their realities in the self itself, rather than in physical or

social reality. In so doing, he positions himself against social theorists like Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl, placing himself instead in a tradition of thought that maintains the primacy of the individual's subjective self-experience.

F.H. Bradley's Deconstruction of the Inner/Outer Binary

Bergson's influence on early twentieth-century intellectual thought and literary practice was profound, although it began to wane after World War I. In fact, Richard Lehan goes so far as to argue that "it was Bergson who created a systematic, rigorous philosophy that became the foundation for modernism" (47). Even William James, under whom Eliot studied while an undergraduate at Harvard, wrote that had he not read Bergson, he would "probably still be blackening endless pages of paper privately, in the hope of making ends meet that were never to meet" (*Pluralistic Universe* 726). Bergson made him "bold," he claims, gave him a means for overcoming the conceptual logic and abstract reasoning that characterized nineteenth-century philosophy, particularly in its Kantian and Hegelian modes, and thus freed him to develop his pragmatist (anti-) philosophy. Without Bergson, he confesses, he would "never have ventured to urge [his] views" on what he felt to be an "ultra-critical audience" (214).

What James most admired about Bergson was in fact what he also admired about the English philosopher F.H. Bradley, on whom Eliot wrote his 1916 Harvard doctoral dissertation. Like Bergson, Bradley, too, launches an assault on the post-Enlightenment philosophical project, particularly its English utilitarian and positivist versions as developed by thinkers like John Stuart Mill (Sorenson 5). As James noted in a 1910 essay on the two figures, both Bradley and Bergson argue against the notion that "feelings,

aboriginally discontinuous, are woven into continuity by the various synthetic concepts which the intellect supplies” (“Bradley” 29). Both, that is, argue strenuously against conflating ideas with lived, human (emotional and experiential) realities. Individuals’ actual existential, phenomenological experience of themselves and their worlds resists any conceptual reduction whatsoever. Although a useful tool, conceptual thinking provides an always incomplete representation of reality, never corresponding with reality in itself. Both agree this far, and both point to a deeper level of phenomenal existence that persists beneath conceptual, categorized social, physical, and psychological reality (*durée* for Bergson, “immediate experience” for Bradley).¹³

But Bradley in fact goes further than Bergson here. James points out not only Bradley’s belief in the insufficiency of ideas, but that Bradley believes conceptual knowledge ultimately renders reality “less and less comprehensible” rather than more: “activity becomes inconstruable, relation contradictory, change inadmissible, personality unintelligible, time, space, and causation impossible—*nothing survives the Bradleyan wreck*” (30, emphasis added). What this means, though, is that Bradley no longer sees the conceptual distinction between subjects and objects as ontologically or epistemologically valid. All distinctions between the inner and outer remain merely contingent constructions. In this sense, Bradley distinguishes himself not only from Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl, but also from Jane Harrison and Bergson. Each of these figures privileges one side of the inner/outer binary. Bradley, on the other hand, dissolves it altogether.

¹³ Again, compare with James’ own notion of “stream of consciousness.”

Bradley offers his core argument in *Appearance and Reality*, the very text Eliot later focuses on in his dissertation. In it, Bradley embarks on a demolition of philosophy and science's attempts to abstract from reality stable concepts by which to render reality comprehensible. For Bradley, no entity or quality exists in itself, but only in relation with other entities or qualities. So to speak of isolate objects misrepresents the nature of phenomenal reality. As with Bergson, Bradley also argues that reality resists partitioning into discrete, non-relation units. But he goes much further, for this initial critique hardly threatens to undermine metaphysical certainty in the intelligibility of physical or mental objects. Bradley suggests that to claim that objects exist in relation simply presupposes the existence of stable, intelligible objects which can exist in relation to one another. Objects that supposedly exist only *in* relation thus exist, too, in themselves abstracted *from* relations, which for Bradley represents a clear logical contradiction. In other words, for Bradley, entities (or qualities) can never be extracted as entities from relations with other entities. Entities (as conceptualized as such) lack substantive meaning; they remain "convenient fictions," as Schwartz paraphrases it (33). But so, too, does the relation between them remain a convenient fiction, since no discrete object exists which can enter into or issue from a relation with another object. "The conclusion to which I am brought," Bradley confesses at the close of his discussion, "is that a relational way of thought—any one that moves by the machinery of terms and relations—must give appearance, and not truth" (33). Conceptual thinking, he argues, "is a makeshift, a device, a mere practical compromise, most necessary, but in the end most indefensible" (33).

For Bradley, then, conceptual thought permits only a provisional representation of reality. In itself reality resists knowing (i.e., analytical intelligibility). In making this argument, Bradley reveals his radical epistemological skepticism. He critiques any mode of knowledge that relies upon abstractions, and in the process undermines any scientific or philosophic claims to certainty (Skaff 31). William Skaff suggests that Bradley's "epistemological nihilism" was so thorough as "to sweep away the philosophical assumptions of the entire nineteenth century" (11). But Bradley was also a philosophical idealist, at least in a limited sense. In asserting the impossibility of knowledge, Bradley also asserts that what knowledge individuals do possess of the world remains only a particular construction of it. For individual observers, the world exists according to the conceptual schema applied to it. It remains a product of the mind, aligning itself to the mind's categories of experience and conceptual abstractions. As Skaff glosses it, for Bradley, "'Appearance,' the world as we know it, is 'Reality' decomposed, separated by the mind into objects and persons, space and time; because the world is thus created by the mind, Reality is said to consist of ideas" (12). All entities, no matter how material (objects, individuals) or experiential (space, time), remain conceptual fictions, constructions extrapolated by the mind from the undifferentiated influx of sensations and perceptions. As concepts, interiority and exteriority (or subject and object) thus lose definitive meaning, each term proving merely an artificial mental construction.

However, beneath this conceptual screen lies what Bradley terms "immediate experience," a concept that on the surface bears resemblances with both Bergson's inwardly-oriented notion of *durée* as well as with James' idea of the "stream of

consciousness.” For Bradley, “immediate experience” constitutes the individual’s most fundamental encounter with the phenomenal world, an encounter that by definition precedes any subsequent intellectual analysis of either the world itself or the perceiver. But the notion of immediate experience presupposes the unity of perceived and perceiver (world and mind/object and subject), and as such reveals Bradley’s inherent resistance to the dualism characteristic of most Western philosophical positions since at least Descartes. As Bradley notes in *Essays on Truth and Reality*, “We . . . have experience in which there is no distinction between my awareness and that of which it is aware. There is an immediate feeling, a knowing and being in one, with which knowledge begins” (159-160). The world, that is, presents its essential truth only when encountered immediately—i.e., only when left un-interpreted by the mind’s mediating faculties. And even when the mind erects its interpretive frameworks in order to render the encounter intelligible, the memory of the pre-conceptual experience “nevertheless remains throughout as the present foundation of my known world” (159-160). As Jewel Spears Brooker glosses it, immediate experience “is a knowing and feeling and being in one prior to the development of logical or temporal or spatial categories” (*Mastery* 184). For Bradley, it marks the original and primary experience of an undifferentiated, all-encompassing totality, however transient (*Mastery* 185). This totality Bradley terms the Absolute, and in so doing reveals his debt to Hegel.¹⁴

¹⁴ Bradley’s notion of totality derives from Hegel’s, although they differ widely in the particulars. For Bradley the Absolute remains undifferentiated, unified, unchanging; it lacks any inner contradictions. For Hegel, however, the Absolute in fact evolves over time due to latent tensions whose antagonistic friction provides the engine of its development.

While Bradley does not deny the realm of appearances, he claims that the tensions, antagonisms, and contradictions inherent to appearance resolve themselves in the encompassing totality of the Absolute. But Bradley's Absolute does not exactly transcend appearance. Rather the totality of appearances in themselves proves constitutive of the Absolute. As Frederick Copleston puts it, the Absolute "is not an additional entity lying behind" appearances, but rather their cumulative, "harmonized" unity (207). Indeed, Bradley goes on to identify the Absolute with experience itself, since the perception of appearance, he argues, arises only out of experiential encounters: "I can myself conceive of nothing else than the experienced. Anything, in no sense felt or perceived, becomes to me quite unmeaning" (*Appearance* 145). Because appearances, then, remain linked to experiential perceivers, Bradley goes on to argue that "[b]eing and reality are, in brief, one thing with sentience; they can neither be opposed to, nor even in the end, distinguished from it" (146). In essence, then, experience *is* reality, and the totality of experience equivalent to that totality termed the Absolute: for the "Absolute is one system, and . . . its contents are nothing but sentient experience" (146-47).

In short, in making this argument, Bradley identifies the objective, external world with the perceiving mind itself. He identifies the external with the internal. The world of appearances exists only so far as does the sentient awareness of it. Consequently, Bradley does not so much prioritize inwardness at the expense of appearance as he does dissolve the binary altogether. Appearance and the experience of it coexist in the Absolute. Both presuppose the other, and resist isolation as discrete notions existent only in themselves. Bradley reveals himself here as an idealist in the traditional Hegelian sense, i.e., as an

Absolute Idealist, who synthesizes manifest multiplicity into a “higher unity” (*Appearance* 499). Like Hegel, Bradley also conceives the Absolute as spirit, though unlike Hegel, he does not necessarily attribute independent subjective awareness to it. Rather, for Bradley, “[s]pirit is a unity of the manifold in which the externality of the manifold has utterly ceased” (498). It is the synthesis of experience and appearance, the place in which they find experiential, phenomenological unity. Still, at root, Bradley’s metaphysical model of reality posits the primacy of sentience. And to privilege sentience is ultimately to privilege a sensing, feeling, perceiving self, though crucially, this “self” consists neither of an inside nor an outside, but rather precedes both.

Bradley’s intellectual preoccupations mirror those of many of his contemporaries, even though their conclusions varied. Despite the complexities of their positions or the subtle (and sometimes profound) differences between them, Bradley, Bergson, and Harrison each more or less deemphasize the primacy of external realities. The self (or the experience of self) emerges for these figures as the foundational element of their philosophical and anthropological speculations. We might dwell on other figures here, but these three serve to illustrate a certain theoretical orientation of the period that stands in relative contrast to that of thinkers such as Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl, or Frazer. For whereas the former group broadly privilege some notion of self (whether as monadic entity or as the Absolute itself), the latter prioritize social forms and cultural practices. Together, these six figures provide a generalized but nonetheless useful map for distinguishing some of the intellectual fault lines characteristic of the period. And, as noted earlier, each of these figures deeply influenced Eliot’s thought and poetics. Their

reflections on the tension between internal and external realities necessarily directed Eliot's own reflections. And their respective views of the self necessarily informed the development of his own ideas on the self. But of course, Eliot was primarily a poet, despite his forays into social theory and speculative philosophy. As such, it would be useful to supplement this digression into Eliot's influences with a brief reconstruction of the ways in which Eliot's immediate English poetic precursors also treated this subject, particularly since Eliot, at least in his early critical essays, vehemently distanced himself from them.

The Victorian Foregrounding of Inwardness

Eliot and his modernist contemporaries quite famously disparaged their Victorian forebears. Pound, for instance, notably criticized the supposed "emotional slither" of Victorian and late Romantic verse ("A Retrospect" 262). And Eliot, writing of Swinburne, in whom the Victorian poetic tradition arguably "culminates" (Christ 143), suggests that for Swinburne, "emotion is never particular, never in direct line of vision, never focused" ("Swinburne" 283). Indeed, he goes on to argue that for Swinburne "the object has ceased to exist, because the meaning is merely the hallucination of meaning, because language, uprooted, has adapted itself to an independent life of atmospheric nourishment" (285). In contrast, modernists such as Eliot and Pound argued in their writings for a poetics of exactitude, concreteness, specificity of emotion and of the object intended to suggest that emotion. As is well known, they sought a kind of scientific precision regarding the production of poems, the poet serving only as a kind of "catalyst," as Eliot famously puts it in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (41).

But Eliot also responded to a particular notion and portrayal of the self in Victorian thought and art, for just as social theorists and speculative philosophers were reimagining the self, so, too, were the poets and novelists of the period. The general assumption of the Enlightenment, at least in its Cartesian version, was that the self in itself remained the one indubitable element of experiential reality. Thus, Enlightenment thought privileged interiority as such, but in doing so came, too, to affirm a gap between a knowing, perceiving, feeling inwardness and an externalized, concrete, objective outer world of material entities and quantified relations (Hall 20; Lavine 99). As Robert Solomon argues, for Descartes to privilege a singular, solitary, thinking mind clearly marks “a move towards subjectivity and the self” (5). And despite the empiricists’ opposition to his rationalist arguments, their “emphases on experience and introspective reflection, on the nature of the identity of the self, and on the importance of the first-person standpoint” merely reinforced Descartes’ own assumptions regarding the self and prioritization of interiority (5). A universalized self emerges out of both rationalist and empiricist philosophies, perhaps culminating in Kant’s transcendental idealism, where universal categories of experience (i.e., shared notions of space, time, causality, etc.) provide an a priori template for human cognition and perception of the material world, no matter cultural or social contexts (Solomon 11).

The so-called Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment itself only reinforced its presuppositions, in that the Romantic elevation of the inner self and of the self’s experiences became a predominant cultural mode for producing and circulating this

particular notion of the self.¹⁵ Nancy Armstrong ties this process to the emergence of the English novel, and argues that where “Enlightenment philosophy left off . . . fiction took over” (4). Armstrong argues, too, that “the history of the modern subject” and the “history of the novel” coincide; each grows out of the other, as the novel provides a means by which this notion of the self can reproduce and disseminate itself (3). But the same also holds for the poetry and the literary criticism of the period. Each of these three genres (fiction, poetry, and criticism) reproduces certain core assumptions and values intrinsic to romantic or post- Enlightenment thought. Each ultimately emphasizes interiority over exteriority, i.e., each emphasizes the individuals’ inner phenomenological experience of the self as experienced in itself as well as the world as experienced by that self. Despite the many differences between them, Robert Browning, George Eliot, Matthew Arnold, and Walter Pater each serve as exemplar figures for demonstrating the ways in which nineteenth-century poets, novelists, and critics approached the inner/outer binary. Each emphasizes the individual, and with the qualified exception of George Eliot, each sets up a binary that unambiguously privileges the inward over the outward. In this, of course, these paradigmatic nineteenth-century authors align much more readily with Bergson and his treatment of the inner/outer binary than with Durkheim or Lévy-Bruhl.¹⁶

¹⁵ Solomon argues that “[s]o far as the transcendental pretense was concerned, Enlightenment and romanticism turned out to be more alike than opposed” (12).

¹⁶ It makes sense, then, that Eliot would reject both Victorian subjectivism as well as Bergson’s notion of *durée*. Chapter Three will discuss Eliot’s views here more explicitly.

Robert Browning and George Eliot

One of the leading poetic innovations of the Victorian period was the dramatic monologue. As a poetic form (one which Eliot himself famously adopted¹⁷), the dramatic monologue lends itself to an explicit exploration of interiority, since it dramatizes particular kinds of self and of self-understanding. As Robert Langbaum emphasizes, as a form, the dramatic monologue foregrounds the significance of individuals' unique inner experience of self (*Poetry* 78). It foregrounds and draws readers' attention to interiority as such, and in the process affirms or reiterates interiority as the primary category of human experience (i.e., that this notion of self comes to mediate how individuals relate to themselves and to others). In this, it merely reproduces the Enlightenment and Romantic elevation and celebration of interiority. But what begins to emerge in late Romantic and Victorian poetry is less a celebration of the Enlightenment and Romantic notion of the universalized self than a lament for or even caricature of it. In Robert Browning's dramatic monologues, for instance, Browning often presents eccentric, manipulative, or even tortured individuals trapped in the circuitous logic of their own singular, isolate identities. The self that emerges in Browning's monologues seems rather more diseased than the rational, lucid, enlightened self posited by Kantian or Cartesian metaphysics.

Indeed, the utterly inwardly-oriented self Browning constructs challenges even the reliably intelligible and rational self of, say, Austen, Gaskell, or even Dickens. But his

¹⁷ Robert Langbaum argues that the "dramatic monologue is proportionately as important in Eliot's work as in Browning's, Eliot having contributed more to the development of the form than any poet since Browning. Certainly *Prufrock*, *Portrait of a Lady*, *Gerontion*, *Journey of the Magi*, *A Song for Simeon*, and *Marina* do as much credit to the dramatic monologue as anything of Browning's; while in *The Waste Land* Eliot has opened new possibilities for the form by constructing a kind of *collage* of dramatic monologues as perceived by Tiresias, whose dramatic monologue the poem is" ("Dramatic" 24-25).

representation of interiority especially contrasts with his late contemporary George Eliot, for whom a study of individuals' "habits," "ideas," and "motives" can reveal "real knowledge" of them ("Natural" 112). For George Eliot, individuals remain essentially transparent to one another, wholly knowable in the fullness of their humanity. This intelligibility, rendered through a study of individuals' (outer) actions and (inner) beliefs, constitutes the grounds of that sympathy for the other which Eliot feels art at its best elicits in readers. "Art is the nearest thing to life," she argues in "The Natural History of German Life," "it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow men beyond the bounds of our personal lot" (110). Art, then, should create sympathetic bonds between individuals, and consequently it should create bonds within communities as a whole. In making this argument, Eliot perpetuates the Enlightenment assumptions regarding universalized subjectivity. Individuals are knowable because they share knowable frames of reference (i.e., shared values, metaphysical intuitions, belief structures). They are knowable, that is, because at root (as James Frazer will argue decades later), they are the same. The inner structures that constitute their subjective self-experience possess a uniformity which universalizes a particular notion of self grounded in a particular notion of interiority.

Browning, however, challenges many of these presuppositions. In his dramatic monologues he often presents idiosyncratic, semi-deranged (and occasionally totally deranged), fragmented ego-selves.¹⁸ In doing so, he also suggests the degree to which

¹⁸ Langbaum notes that Browning and Tennyson "probably" "conceived [the dramatic monologue] as a reaction against the romantic confessional mode" ("Dramatic" 26).

communities themselves remain fractured, splintered by consciousnesses who remain opaque to one another, either due to deliberate deceitfulness or unfathomable irrationalities (the latter of which is a more problematic concern for any notion of universalized subjectivity). J. Hillis Miller speaks of the “psychological oddness” of Browning’s characters, but surely this is an understatement (“Browning” 392). The speaker, for instance, in “Porphyria’s Lover” utterly resists comprehension. The unnerving, incongruous combination of tenderness and madness that dictates his murderous actions reveals a persona with whom no sympathy is possible. The speaker shocks readers out of sympathy, alienates them (and himself) in the act of revealing himself to them. Langbaum argues that despite himself, the speaker in this poem reveals “what still remains a rationally understandable motive” (“Dramatic” 34). But this holds only if one accepts the illogical premises that underlie the speaker’s conflation of love with possession and murder. Browning undercuts the bond of sympathetic understanding that would link individuals together in order to reveal some radical, monstrous otherness that defies intelligibility.

In “Soliloquy in a Spanish Cloister,” Browning dramatizes a similar (though less disturbing and more comical) scenario. The speaker’s irrational attitude in the poem towards Brother Lawrence isolates him, and thus isolates him from the larger community, indeed, suggests a lack of community, since the speaker’s own hypocrisy undercuts the trust in the other necessary for community. It suggests, too, the degree to which the speaker remains confined to the seclusion of his own hostile thoughts and impulses, prisoner of his own self-isolating narcissism. For Browning here, the self reduces to a

singular, insular sphere, connected to the external world of others only through the antagonistic friction of bewildered encounters. Similar arguments might be made about the characters presented in “My Last Duchess,” “Caliban upon Setebos,” or even “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came.” In a sense, each of the characters in these poems serve as critiques of the celebration of the stable, lucid, universalized self characteristic of the high Enlightenment.¹⁹ Indeed, Miller makes the point that Browning himself “suffered much from a sense of the inaccessibility of other persons” (403). For Browning, Miller claims, the other remains always “unreachable,” an unfathomable blank whose motives and ideas (to appropriate George Eliot’s terms) remain inescapably obscure (403). For Browning, inwardness predominates to such an extent that the self closes in on itself as if it were a kind of black hole.

Thus, fundamental differences exist between Browning and George Eliot’s presentations of the inner/outer binary. For Browning, experience reduces to the small sphere of the individual’s narcissistically enclosed self. The self’s primary experience is of the self itself, rather than of others. Indeed, when individuals encounter others, they do so antagonistically and absent any true knowledge of the other’s inner experience. For George Eliot, however, the individual remains sympathetically connected to others, and thus turned outwards, however much she, too, emphasizes (the importance of) individual experience. In a sense, then, George Eliot’s view of the self aligns more closely with that

¹⁹ Ironically, Langbaum calls the dramatic monologue an expression of “empiricism in literature”: “the dramatic monologue takes toward its material the literary equivalent of the scientific attitude—the equivalent being, where men and women are the subject of investigation, the historicizing and psychologizing of judgement” (“Dramatic” 34). While certainly an empirical, investigatory quality exists in the dramatic monologue, Langbaum overlooks the way in which Browning turns the form against the rationalizing, categorizing, empirical mind through the dramatization of characters who defy intelligibility.

of later thinkers such as Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl (in contrast to, say, Bergson or Harrison, for whom an essential, inner self proves primary). She privileges community as a source of meaning in the individual's life. She argues that "local conditions" matter just as much for understanding individuals as do "their maxims and habits," and as such she acknowledges that inwardness depends upon the external inasmuch as (for her) it depends upon preexistent internal tendencies and energies ("Natural" 112). As George Levine rightly argues, for Eliot, external details given through a nuanced account of the novel's social environment "reverberate with significance" for the characters, in fact constituting their sense of themselves and position in the world (9).²⁰ In making these arguments, Eliot far more endorses Enlightenment assumptions regarding the intelligibility of the self (and consequently society) than does Browning, indeed, grounds the very possibility of community in those assumptions. As Terry Eagleton suggests, for Eliot, "lack of sympathy springs from lack of knowledge" and to "understand all is to forgive all" (165). Intelligibility proves thus a precondition for sympathy, and sympathy the precondition for harmonious social intercourse. Thus, whereas Browning emphasizes the ultimate unintelligibility of the inwardly-oriented self, George Eliot suggests the exact opposite, a self open to knowing and to sympathetic communion with others. However, despite these fundamental differences, both nonetheless focus on the self *as* a self and on the experiences of particular individuals, and in doing so implicitly emphasize the centrality of interiority, however differently construed.

²⁰ Levine goes on to argue that "George Eliot's realism extends from the external world to the world of individual consciousness—like [Henry] James and the psychological novelists who followed, she threw the action inside; the question of consciousness, of who is perceiving the external fact and under what conditions, becomes for her an indispensable aspect of the realist project" (9).

Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater

In contrast to both these figures stands Matthew Arnold, whose particular conception of inwardness (characterized by an emphasis on a “buried” self) would prove in certain ways more influential on the early T.S. Eliot than either Browning or George Eliot, neither of whom Eliot directly grapples with in his critical work. In their exploration and dramatization of interiority, both Browning and George Eliot posit a notion of the self in which the self remains essentially internally unified. For Browning that unity derives from his presentation of the self as an undivided, incomprehensible blank. Individuals in his monologues may appear deceitful and duplicitous, but they remain uniformly (and irrationally) so. The same largely holds for George Eliot’s characters as well. They may experience conflict, self-doubt, and regret (as with Gwendolyn Harleth, say, in *Daniel Deronda*), but they possess an internal consistency as stable, epistemologically transparent characters. They may undergo development as the novel progresses, but they move only from one state of preliminary self-consistency into another, final, more mature state of wholeness and (often, though certainly not always) communal integration (consider, for instance, figures such as Silas Marner or Daniel Deronda). The inward remains constitutively uniform and structurally cohesive.

Arnold, on the other hand, introduces the notion of a split internal to the experience of interiority, and thus internal to the experience of self. He divides the self into two conflicted and conflicting halves. He splinters the self, introduces a gap between what he posits as a public, social self and a suppressed, yet more authentic, inner self. That is to say, he introduces a gap between the self as it experiences itself encountering

the external material and social world (and abstracting an identity for itself from that encounter) and the self as it phenomenologically encounters itself in its own supposed essence. In “The Scholar-Gipsy” for example, he famously erects a contrast between the “strange disease of modern life, / With its sick hurry, its divided aims, / Its heads o’ertaxed, [and] its palsied hearts” with the Scholar-Gipsy’s pure, “clear aims” and “undiverted” sense of self (303). The Scholar-Gipsy avoids the “sick fatigue” and “languid doubt” characteristic of contemporary social life, and lives more closely aligned with the authentic impulses of his own inner being. In so doing, he experiences, as well, a closer connection with the natural world, a harmony of inner and outer realities which contrasts with the speaker’s own sense of alienation (from himself, his world, from others). And of course, the difference that the speaker in the poem draws between himself and the Scholar-Gipsy ultimately serves to dramatize an internal split that the speaker feels characterizes his own disillusioned, post-Romantic self-experience.

Arnold’s “The Buried Life” also draws out these same themes, but does so much more directly, as the title itself indicates. As in “The Scholar-Gipsy,” in “The Buried Life,” too, Arnold laments the “distractions” which press in on individuals, and diverts them from some originary self-experience (“well-nigh chang[ing] [their] own identity,” he writes [297]). Yet Arnold speaks as well of how these “distractions” paradoxically, dialectically give rise to a counter impulse in individuals, in which they experience nostalgic desire for that primordial self from which they now feel alienated. “But often,” he writes, “in the world’s most crowded streets” and “in the din of strife, / There rises an unspeakable desire, / After the knowledge of our buried life; / A thirst to spend our fire

and restless force / In tracking out our true, original course” (297). Two selves emerge, he suggests, one outwardly-oriented (social, constructed, and contingent), the other inwardly-oriented (essential, prior, and primary). Modernity splits the subject, introduces an inner division which comes to prove constitutive of the individual’s own sense of inwardness. The modern self is thus the self-alienated self, i.e., individuals’ experience of inwardness remains characterized by a sense of lack and loss. John Farrell speaks of Arnold’s “bleak estrangement from the external world (278), but Arnold suggests a bleak estrangement from the internal world as well. Indeed, Arnold complains that the “mass of men conceal / Their thoughts” and “live and move / Trick’d in disguises, alien to the rest / Of men, *and* alien to themselves” (296, emphasis added). Though as always, against this artificiality, Arnold affirms that, however inaccessible, a “genuine self,” a “river of our life,” flows like a “buried stream” beneath individuals’ mask-encrusted surfaces, a rather Bergsonian formulation that anticipates Bergson by nearly half a century (297).²¹

Moreover, like Browning in his dramatic monologues, Arnold also affirms a notion of interiority in which individuals remains essentially, constitutively estranged from other selves. Individuals remain enclosed within the self-delimiting confines of their own internal self-experience. The gap individuals experience internal to themselves is mirrored by the gaps that divide individuals from one another. In “To Marguerite—

²¹ Like Tennyson in *In Memoriam*, Arnold responds in his poetry and prose to mid-Victorian intellectual developments in disciplines such as geology, pre-Darwinian biology, and Biblical criticism, and thus his work functions as a kind of reactive intervention into then-contemporary social, scientific, and religious thought (implicitly in the case of his poetry, explicitly in his prose). In poems like “The Scholar-Gypsy” and “The Buried Life,” Arnold deliberately grapples with the effects of modernity on individuals’ existential, inner self-experience. His “Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse” also explores the effects of contemporary thought on the modern self. In it, he laments, “Wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born, / With nowhere yet to rest my head” (308).

Continued,” for instance, he expresses dismay over the “echoing straits” that divide individuals from one another, and laments that “We mortal millions live *alone*” (267, emphasis in original). But like George Eliot, Arnold also affirms the way in which individuals internalize the external conditions of social life. That is to say, paradoxically, the social produces the estrangement characteristic of the Arnoldian self. In a sense, Arnold preemptively appropriates Marx and Engels’ famous dictum in *The German Ideology* that consciousness derives from material conditions (42). Arnoldian interiority (alienated, isolated, and monadic) is a product of the material conditions that encompass it. The external gives rise to a particular instantiation of the internal, one in which, paradoxically, the internal experiences itself as alienated from the external. And yet, Arnold’s continued affirmation of some non-contingent, non-conditioned buried self produces a tension in this formulation which remains absent from the materialist view of the self.

Arnold, Browning, and George Eliot each serve as exemplary figures for demonstrating a particular conception of the self and of the relation of the internal to the external in the nineteenth-century English literary/cultural imagination. Each models slightly different yet nonetheless influential notions of the self, and each, too, ultimately privileges the internal over the external, although with variations on emphasis. For Browning and Arnold the experience of interiority remains problematized by opacity, isolation, and alienation, each particularly *modern* concerns; whereas for George Eliot, the inner self remains essentially the intelligible, universalized self of Enlightenment philosophy. Walter Pater bridges both positions, developing a distinct notion of

interiority in his criticism that would come to influence a number of later writers (e.g., Oscar Wilde, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, W.B. Yeats, and even T.S. Eliot, however ambiguously).

Drawing on a number of speculative traditions (from the pre-Socratics to more contemporary philosophers such as Hume and Kant),²² Pater posits a notion of interiority as radically conditioned by a perpetual experiential flux. In the (in)famous Conclusion to his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), for example, Pater constructs a self who remains both constitutively permeable as well as almost solipsistically self-enclosed; a self wholly determined by externalized forces (and the influx of external sensations and perceptions), as well as a self walled off within its own phenomenological self-experience. Pater argues that the self remains a product of the material forces and elements that constitute the ontological fabric of the universe. In a sense, individuals are literally woven from these forces and materials; they exist as flame-like nodes, dynamic vortices that draw into themselves the elements of their own self-continuance. “What is the whole physical life,” he asks, “but a combination of natural elements to which science gives their names?” (118). “Our physical life is a perpetual motion” of these forces, he continues, a “design in a web” (118). And he concludes: “This at least of flame-like our life has, that it is but the concurrence, renewed from moment to moment of forces parting sooner or later on their ways” (118). Pater posits here a self radically material (and

²² For a full discussion of Pater’s philosophical influences, see Billie Andrew Inman’s “The Intellectual Context of Walter Pater’s Conclusion” (1981) and F.C. McGrath’s *The Sensible Spirit: Walter Pater and the Modernist Paradigm* (1986).

externally-oriented) in its essence, a view which he admits is not unique to him, but has become the general “tendency of modern thought” (118).²³

Echoing Hume, Pater goes on to suggest that the perceiving self of inner experience also remains constitutively determined by material conditions. Not only the body but the mind, too, exists in part as a product of the weave of interrelated, though transitory forces. The mind consists of those elements that press upon it and which it registers, and the reality it perceives only exists for the mind in the passing moment in which it perceives it. In a *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume famously declares that “when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade . . . I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception” (300).²⁴ And Pater, too, makes a similar claim (although with a slight shift in emphasis from the self itself to the impression the self receives), when he affirms how “impressions unstable, flickering, inconsistent . . . burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them” (119). That is to say, the world manifests itself to human consciousness only as impressions on that consciousness. But as the world itself is an evanescent maelstrom, so, too, consciousness remains unstable. As Pater puts it, the “inward world of thought and

²³ Indeed, in the epigraph of the Conclusion, he quotes a passage from Plato’s *Cratylus* on the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who represents perhaps the oldest intellectual influence that Pater integrates into his thinking: “Heraclitus says ‘All things are in motion and nothing at rest’” (118).

²⁴ Compare, too, with John Locke, for whom not only does all knowledge derives from sensory experience, but that the self (or “soul”) itself only comes to exist when furnished with such experience. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke writes, “No ideas but from sensation or reflection, evident, if we observe children I see no reason therefore to believe, that the soul thinks before the senses have furnished it with ideas to think on” (38).

feeling” depends for its substance upon the “drift of momentary acts of sight and passion and thought” (118).²⁵

But here Pater parts from the Humean model. For whereas Hume suggests that selves lack an essential core or discernable boundary point that would demarcate the inner from the outer, Pater suggests that in fact the self remains isolated in itself in the very act of perception; it remains constitutively oriented towards its own inward experience. Supposedly stable, concrete objects in fact dissolve into a series of insubstantial, transient impressions, impressions which only register in the mind of a singular perceiving subject and which constitute that subject’s complete experience of reality. The “whole scope of observation,” Pater affirms, “is dwarfed to the narrow chamber of the individual mind” (119). In a radically epistemologically skeptical assertion, Pater argues not only that the mind knows nothing but the impressions it receives, but that it distorts those impressions as it receives them so that the object in itself remains essentially inaccessible: “Experience, already reduced to a swarm of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without” (119). In a near Kantian formulation, Pater here asserts that individuals remain bounded by their own perceptual apparatus, and can neither

²⁵ Compare this and other of Pater’s statements here with Woolf’s well-known passage in “Modern Fiction” (1919, revised in 1925 for *The Common Reader*). Woolf writes: “Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being ‘like this’. Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls different from of old . . . Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end” (9).

receive impressions from objects (or other persons) as they exist in themselves or communicate to others the authentic essence of their own phenomenological, existential self-reality. “Every one of those impressions,” he argues, “is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world” (119).

Indeed, Pater goes even further, and argues that in their utter brevity these impressions lose what little objective reality they still possess, thus abandoning the mind to the depths of its own completely self-relating, absolute negativity. The self thins into its own subjectively aware, self-persisting absence. It vanishes into its own blank interiority. For Pater, “what is *real* in our life fines itself down,” “experience dwindles down,” and all that remains is the “single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it” (119). Note that the “we” remains, even as the moment vanishes. He concludes: “It is with the movement, the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis leaves off,—that continual vanishing away, that strange perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves” (119). At first affirming a purely material, atomistic conception of the self, Pater here not only introduces a gap between the perceiving self and the perceived world (since the world exists for the individual only as mediated through that individual’s perceptual apparatus), but dissolves both into substanceless flux, leaving only the waiting, subjective void of pure interiority to register the accumulating moments.

Thus, like Arnold, Browning, and George Eliot, Pater, too, privileges interiority. But he offers a model far more radical than any they provide. Like Arnold and Browning, he maintains that individuals remain essentially cut off from one another, severed “by

that thick wall of personality” which distorts not only perception but human relations. Yet like George Eliot, he admits, too, the extent to which consciousness remains determined by its encounter with the external world. However distorted, the objects of an externalized reality provide the content for subjective experience.²⁶ Significantly, Pater would seem to offer a vision of a universalized self consonant with George Eliot’s own, in that he suggests that subjectivity itself possess a formally stable (and thus intelligible) structure, no matter the particular individuals’ cultural, social, or historical contextual position. They differ in that Eliot assumes individuals remain transparently present to one another. Individuals present themselves to one another as potentially knowable, self-coherent, objects of knowledge. For Pater the epistemological skeptic, however, selves remain ringed round by that deep opacity of subjective perception which blinds them from adequately grasping the other’s supposed essence. Only the individual’s own experiential impressions remain, the task then becoming, as Pater puts it in the Preface, “to know one’s impression as it really is” (3). In employing this phrasing, Pater also places distance between himself and Arnold, for whom the task of the critic was to “see the object as in itself it really is,” to quote Pater’s paraphrase of Arnold (3).

Taken together, these four representative figures (Arnold, Browning, George Eliot, Pater) help provide a rough map of the different ways in which the nineteenth-century literary/cultural mind conceptualized the self.²⁷ But crucially, in developing their various notion of the self, each of these figures, too, relies upon an inner/outer binary to

²⁶ Again, compare with Hume or Locke’s formulations here.

²⁷ Other writers might be added to this list: Tennyson, Swinburne, Ruskin, Barrett Browning, Dickens, the Brontës: each of these writers also implicitly offers a theory of the self, but the four discussed here remain particularly representative of the period.

construct a conceptually stable model of human interiority, just as do the social and philosophical thinkers of the period. Indeed, between these writers and theorists a number of parallels exist. Arnold's notion of the buried self, for instance, bears some relation to Bergson's notion of *durée*. Pater's epistemological skepticism and Browning's questioning of the applicability of Enlightenment rationality for adequately grasping human subjectivity both resonate with aspects of Bradley's own skeptical philosophical position. And George Eliot offers a notion of the universalized self that Frazer, too, would embrace. All of these figures, then, seem to participate in a shared cultural dialogue over the relation between interiority and exteriority (or between the self and its external environment), which in turn reflects the degree to which the self in itself had become a contested category during the period (as a result, one might add, of intellectual and technological developments, as well as urbanization and shifting modes of economic production—i.e., industrialization). It reflects, too, the anxiety unleashed by such indeterminacy.

Of course, these questions had not been resolved by the time T.S. Eliot came to poetry, social theory, and philosophy. Directly or indirectly, Eliot grapples with each of these figures (or the views that they represent), challenging their assumptions and conclusions, synthesizing and sometimes distorting their positions, and occasionally appropriating their language for his own use. Although he often distances himself from these figures, he just as often reveals parallels between their thought and his own. Most importantly (for this project), Eliot integrates the same structural binary involving the tension between interiority and exteriority that each of these figures draws on in their

work. But in deploying this same binary, Eliot also transforms it, reveals its limitations, and attempts to dialectically transcend the conceptual deadlock this binary ultimately produces. In order to lay the foundation for a discussion of Eliot's use of this binary in his poetry, Chapter Three will explore the ways in which Eliot directly responds in his critical and philosophical writings to these antecedent writers and theorists or to the ideas they embody. For in order to adequately understand Eliot's own view of the relation of the individual to internal and external determinate conditionings, it proves necessary first to understand Eliot's own particularized reading of this binary in the work of his immediate intellectual contemporaries and predecessors.

CHAPTER III

A RADICAL SKEPTIC: ELIOT'S PHILOSOPHICAL ANTI-DUALISM

In the Conclusion to his 1916 dissertation on F.H. Bradley, Eliot makes a number of summary statements that encapsulate his intellectual views at the time, but which also become the foundational premises of his later critical thought.²⁸ In a statement that affirms his radical epistemological skepticism, for example, he claims that “Any assertion about the world . . . will inevitably be an interpretation” of the world, rather than a reflection of some fundamental, incontestable Truth (165). Every attempt to “define an experience,” he continues, only substitutes the definition itself for the experience (167). In other words, for Eliot, the “world is a construction,” an arrangement of definitional propositions intended (falsely) to represent the “world” as it is in itself. Yet Truth, as such, resists articulation, because the objects of experience (from which knowledge of Truth supposedly derives) always dissolve upon extended analysis into the background of a seemingly infinite series of relations and irreconcilable perspectives.²⁹ Indeed, on the last page of his dissertation, Eliot argues that “‘objective’ truth is a relative truth: all that we [ultimately] care about is how it works; it makes no difference whether a thing really is green or blue, so long as everyone behaves toward it on the belief that it is green or

²⁸ Jane Mallinson argues, for example, that Eliot’s “work as a poet and critic can be seen as a protracted exploration of his engagement with [Bradley’s] work” (1).

²⁹ Jewel Spears Brooker rightly notes that “the ghost of Hegel hovers here” over Eliot’s formulations (189).

blue” (169). As Jane Mallinson puts it in her study of Eliot’s work on Bradley, “point[s] of view can only offer a relative truth which is [merely] an interpretation of reality” (19).

What ultimately underlies each of these radical propositions, I claim, is a particular view of the relation between subject and object, the knower and the known, the *inner* and the *outer*. As Eliot explains in the Conclusion, the “more closely one scrutinizes the ‘external world’, and the more eagerly and positively one plucks at it, the less there is to see and touch” (153-54). The external world collapses under the weight of its own conceptual edifice. The “world” as analyzed in itself remains only a construction, he suggests. But for Eliot the dialectician, such a collapse does not necessitate endorsing some version of Berkeleyan subjective idealism or existential solipsism.³⁰ Rather, for Eliot, the external and internal remain inextricably intertwined; each entails and implies the other in a complex constitutive dialectical process. As Mallinson rightly observes, for Eliot, “the existence of the subject is dependent upon its experiencing an object,” even as “the existence of the object is equally dependent upon its unity in feeling . . . with the subject” (12).³¹

³⁰ Later on in the Chapter, Eliot claims that “It is not true that we deny the existence of an external world, for anyone who pursues this path of inquiry will come to the conclusion that this question is ultimately meaningless” (157).

³¹ Immediately after claiming the apparent insubstantiality of the external, objective world, Eliot goes on to argue that the “mental resolves into a curious and intricate [material, objectified] mechanism, and the physical reveals itself as a mental construct. If you will find the mechanical anywhere, you will find it in the workings of mind; and to inspect living mind, you must look nowhere but in the world outside” (154).³¹ In a kind of Hegelian coincidence of opposites, the (supposedly immaterial) mind manifests as a material organ of determinate functionality, whereas the (supposedly concrete, material, objectified) world manifests only as an idealized construction of the mind. The mind, it seems, constructs a world out of a world that already contains the mind. Thus the internal and the external paradoxically interpenetrate one another, blur together. Simplistic subject/object dualities dissolve.

Indeed, Eliot goes on to argue in the Conclusion that the self itself remains only an object-construction, just as external and externalized as any other (phenomenologically) intended object. As William Skaiff puts it, for Eliot and Bradley, “distinctions [such] as ‘self’ or ‘soul’ in contrast to ‘the world’ are ideas merely, intellectual constructions of the mind, and thus not real” (12). And as Eliot himself puts it, “There is a relation between the object [or world] and the self: a relation which is theoretical and not merely actual, in the sense that the self as a term capable of relation with other terms is a construction” (155). The self, he suggests, is not “merely actual,” but a contingent proposition, embedded within a particular relational framework. In other words, when understood within the context of subject/object relations, the self finds itself already implicitly objectified through its conceptualized relation as a subject to an object. Objects, that is, imply objectified (and objectifying) observers. Thus, Eliot argues in his Conclusion that a theory of objects necessarily implies a theory of self (i.e., particular epistemologies imply particular notions of subjectivity).

In *Mastery and Escape*, Brooker rightly affirms that Eliot’s dissertation essentially “centers on an inquiry into the self” and the self’s relation to that which it perceives “outside itself” (192). And certainly, as an examination of the “Experience and the Objects of Knowledge in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley,”³² the dissertation as a whole remains concerned fundamentally with the relation between perceiving individuals and the perceived external world. Interiority and exteriority, surface and depth, subject

³² This was the dissertation’s original title. On publication in 1964, Eliot simplified the title to *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley*.

and object: these thus remain the orienting conceptual categories that structure Eliot's reflections in the dissertation. And significantly, as this project argues, this underlying conceptual framework informs nearly all of his work, both early and late, both poetry and prose. Of course, as suggested in the previous chapter, Eliot comes to these conclusions only after grappling with the ideas of his intellectual and literary precursors and contemporaries. Indeed, his ideas emerge out of theirs, his conceptual terminology derives from their own, a point he readily acknowledges in regards to Bradley in the Conclusion of his dissertation (153).

But Eliot builds on his precursors. And his conclusions in his dissertation offer an important statement of his intuitions regarding the relation between interiority and exteriority, and thus provide as well, an important early statement of his views that can help make sense of the ways he responds to the philosophers, social theorists, novelists and poets who together provide the intellectual and literary context out of which his ideas emerge. However, more immediately, the conclusions he draws in the dissertation help make sense of the particular way he responds to and interprets his philosophical contemporaries and forebears, especially since he grapples in it with them in their own language. And since Eliot's philosophical views conceptually underpin his later work (as this project contends), to understand his reading of certain contemporary philosophical questions is to provide the foundation for understanding his critical reflections on other (non-philosophical) thinkers and writers as well.

In short, this chapter will explore Eliot's response to his intellectual and literary precursors and will argue that he rejects their reliance on inner/outer distinctions as

overly simplistic (i.e., as insufficiently representative of reality). I argue that rather than endorsing the view of those who privilege one term of the binary over the other, Eliot (in part following Bradley) offers a view of the relationship between interiority and exteriority that sees the two terms as thoroughly mutually constitutive. Interiority and exteriority dialectically interpenetrate one another, such that neither term obtains priority over the other. Each constitutes the other, relies upon the other for conceptual coherence. In essence, he seeks to reconceptualize the relationship between self and other, subject and object, inner and outer. This view contrasts starkly with that of critics such as A. David Moody, J. Hillis Miller, or Robert Langbaum, who argue that Eliot privileges interiority in his work. It also contrasts with those critics (such as Francis Dickey) who affirm that Eliot prioritizes exteriority. Rather, focusing in the first sections of this chapter on Eliot's philosophical and anthropological work (specifically his emphasis on subject/object relations) and in the last section on his literary criticism, I hope to show how Eliot seeks to transcend both poles of the binary.

Ultimately, my intention in this chapter is to marshal evidence to demonstrate how Eliot's early work reveals a remarkably sustained argument in favor of a dialectical relation between interiority and exteriority. I want to note that this chapter draws upon a number of Eliot's graduate papers that until recently have proven difficult to access. Consequently, very little work has yet been done on these early documents. In light of this newly available material (now published in *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot*), this dissertation hopes to offer a more comprehensive and nuanced account of Eliot's

philosophical work, and therefore of the relation between his philosophical thought and his poetry.

Eliot and Philosophy

While an undergraduate at Harvard, Eliot expressed little interest in formal philosophical study, focusing predominately, as James Miller points out, on language and literature courses. In his first year, for instance, he took classes in Greek Literature, German Grammar and Prose, and English Literature, a varied pattern of course work that would continue throughout his three years of undergraduate studies (from 1906 to 1909) (79-80). Although in his second year as an undergraduate, he did take George Santayana's Modern Philosophy course (along with one other philosophy class), Eliot's true introduction to philosophy and social thought came only during his first year of graduate work (1909-1910), in courses such as Santayana's Philosophy of History and, perhaps more importantly, Irving Babbitt's Literary Criticism in France, with Special Reference to the Nineteenth Century (Miller 80).³³ As Herbert Howarth points out, "of all the courses of the year," Babbitt's proved the "most powerfully formative" for Eliot (127). Indeed, Babbitt's course in French criticism covered much more than the title suggests. Eliot himself remarks that Babbitt's lectures "had a great deal to do with Aristotle, Longinus and Dionysius of Halicarnassus; they touched frequently upon Buddhism, Confucius, Rousseau, and contemporary political and religious movements"

³³ Eliot reports in an August 4, 1920 letter to Sydney Schiff that he "never liked Santayana," and felt that "his philosophy was a dressing up of himself rather than an interest in things" (*Letters Vol. I* 395). Manju Jain, too, makes the point that Eliot always felt "ambivalent" towards Santayana, "to say the least" (41).

(Manchester 102). Significantly, Eliot's exposure to Babbitt's particular critique of modernity, as well as his criticisms of Rousseau and the mode of romanticism he inspired, influenced Eliot's own views on these subjects, a point Eliot admits as late as 1929, when he confesses that he first began his career "as a disciple of Mr. Babbitt" ("Second Thoughts" 393).³⁴ Even Eliot's decision to study Indian philosophy and languages while pursuing his doctorate in contemporary Western philosophy probably stems from Babbitt's influence and suggestions (Jain 39).

Still, Eliot's 1909-1910 coursework in philosophy remained a peripheral interest, which would only gain intellectual priority for him following his 1910-1911 year abroad in France.³⁵ For it was in Paris, while Eliot was attending classes at the Sorbonne and contemplating "giving up English and trying to settle down and scrape along in Paris and gradually write French" (qtd in Jain 51), that he also attended Henri Bergson's weekly lectures, which would effect that short-lived conversion in him of which he speaks much later in 1948's *Sermon Preached in Magdalene College Chapel*.³⁶ Manju Jain notes that from the beginning of his career, Eliot's "creative and philosophical interests" always "reinforced each other," and he rightly points to an early 1905 poem Eliot wrote for the *Smith Academy Record* as evidence (61).³⁷ But by 1911, when he returned to Harvard

³⁴ Although Eliot also reveals the degree to which his thought has now come to diverge from Babbitt's ("Second Thoughts" 401). See, too, Eliot's critique of Babbitt in "The Humanism of Irving Babbitt."

³⁵ Jain notes "that Babbitt's influence was one of the forces that sent him to France" (51), a point James Miller makes as well (117).

³⁶ "My only conversion," he confesses in the *Sermon*, "by the deliberate influence of any individual, was a temporary conversion to Bergsonism" (qtd in Miller 141).

³⁷ In 1905's "A Lyric," Eliot writes, "If time and space, as Sages say, / Are things which cannot be, / The sun which does not feel decay / No greater is than we" (61). Other early poems, too, speak to this convergence of interests, notably "Spleen" (a poem which clearly anticipates "Prufrock"), which concludes, "And Life, a little bald and gray, / Languid fastidious, and bland, / Waits, hat and gloves in hand . . . On the doorstep of the Absolute" (*Complete Poems* 603).

from France, Eliot had decided to pursue philosophy (almost) exclusively, intending to prepare himself for a career as an academic philosopher (61). And it was at Harvard, while attending courses such as Josiah Royce's seminar on "Scientific Methods" that Eliot began formally grappling with late nineteenth and early twentieth-century French and English social theorists such as Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl, and Jane Harrison, an engagement that would continue well beyond his graduate work (Smith v).

It was also at Harvard that Eliot would first discover F.H. Bradley, on whom he would go on to write his doctoral dissertation. And it was here, too, that he grappled at length in multiple seminar papers with Immanuel Kant, an intellectual encounter that helps inform and further contextualize his (Bradleyan) epistemological skepticism. Indeed, after Harvard, as is well-known, Eliot would continue on briefly to Marburg and then to Oxford in 1914 in order to continue his philosophy work, where he would go on to study Aristotle with "Bradley's closest disciple," Harold Joachim, while writing his dissertation (Shusterman 32). Each of these varied figures (i.e., Bergson, Durkheim, Bradley, etc.) influenced Eliot's own aesthetic, critical, and philosophical positions, and shaped as well Eliot's notion of the formative relations between individuals and their social and ideological environments. But it was Eliot's encounter with Henri Bergson in Paris that I would suggest first stimulated him to reflect on the relation between internality and externality through the lens and language of philosophical analysis.

Henri Bergson: An Early Infatuation

When Eliot arrived in Paris in 1910, Bergson was at the height of his fame. In 1896, Bergson had published *Matter and Memory*, which William James compared in

importance with Berkeley's 1710 *Principles of Human Knowledge* and Kant's 1781 *Critique of Pure Reason* (Pearson 15). Indeed, for James, Bergson's book inaugurated a second epistemological Copernican Revolution, comparable in significance with the epistemological revolution Kant himself inaugurated more than a century earlier (15). In 1907, Bergson would go on to publish *Creative Evolution* (translated into English in 1911), which Keith Pearson calls "one of the first great books on systems (open and closed, natural and artificial)" (26). And in 1928, in confirmation of his standing, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature. During his tenure in Paris, Eliot attended Bergson's series of weekly lectures delivered at the Collège de France, and, according to his own admission, was deeply impressed. In his intense "enthusiasm," he even convinced his mother to attend a course of lectures on Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, a point she made later in a January 18, 1916 letter to Bertrand Russell (Childs 51; Eliot, *Letters Vol. I* 130). Indeed, for Christmas in 1912, Eliot presented her with Bergson's *The Introduction to a New Philosophy*, which Childs notes was the "first English translation of the article later translated by Hulme and popularized as *An Introduction to Metaphysics*" (51). Philip Le Brun makes the point that Eliot was so impressed by Bergson that all his subsequent thought and work bear Bergson's mark (even despite Eliot's later protestations against him). Without this initial exposure to Bergson, Le Brun argues, "Eliot's major formulations about poetry—about tradition, the associated sensibility of the artist, and the work of art as objective correlative—would have been quite different from what they are" (10). In fact, the effect was almost immediate. As John Mayer notes, "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," written in March of 1911 while Eliot

was still attending Bergson's lectures, clearly reflects traces of Eliot's encounter with Bergson, as, too, does the sonnet, "He said: The universe is very clear," written in the same month (76-80).³⁸

Still, despite Eliot's initial enthusiasm for Bergson, he began quickly to distance himself from the philosopher, and by December of 1913 delivered a critique of Bergson to the Harvard Philosophy Club referred to as "Inconsistencies in Bergson's Idealism," a paper that will be discussed in more detail below. Between Eliot's embrace of Bergsonism and his repudiation of it, however, stands Babbitt's November 1912 critique of Bergson in *The Nation* as well as Bertrand Russell's July 1912 critique in *The Monist*. As discussed above, Babbitt's influence on the early Eliot was pronounced, affecting certain of his social and political views, the direction of his studies, even his decision to study in France. So for Babbitt to criticize Bergson's views would certainly have had some effect on Eliot, however difficult to trace. In his essay on Bergson, Babbitt makes the point that Bergson's resistance to conceptual thought merely recapitulates the romantic emphasis on inner feeling and intuition common throughout the nineteenth century. Like Carlyle, for instance, who struggled against those who would "convert the world 'into a huge, dead, immeasurable steam-engine,'" Bergson, too, struggles against utilitarian, conceptual intellectualism, instead positing the truth of intuitional *durée* (453). German romantic figures such as Goethe also anticipate Bergson, Babbitt notes, in that they "warn against the over-intellectualizing of science," stressing instead the importance of intuitional perceptual faculties (453).

³⁸ Donald Childs also calls "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" a "thoroughly Bergsonian poem" (62).

Most significantly, though, Babbitt links Bergson directly to Rousseau (whom he fiercely opposed), arguing that Bergson “is plainly a Rousseauistic primitivist” for whom our “vision of reality” comes from “looking downward and backward instead of forward and up” (453). “The opposition he establishes,” Babbitt argues, “between concepts and percepts, between intellect and intuition, is nothing but Rousseau’s old opposition between thought and feeling, the head and the heart” (453). That is to say, for Babbitt, Bergson (like Rousseau) places too much emphasis on *inwardness*; indeed, constructs a notion of self predicated on the gap between a conceptually fabricated (and thus inauthentic and false) exteriority and an inward, ultimately self-absorbed “general emotional expansiveness” (455). In *The Early T.S. Eliot and Western Philosophy*, M. A. R. Habib argues that “Babbitt’s main objection to romanticism is its fostering of ‘anarchic individualism’ and evasion of moral responsibility” (17). To turn inwards is to turn away from the outward-oriented contemplation of one’s moral obligations to others. Indeed, against Bergson, Babbitt argues that the intellect in fact helps to generate significant and useful “sharp distinctions” which individuals may then put “into the service of the character and will” (453). For Babbitt, then, intellectual abstraction and analysis serves as a tool for directing the individual outward and into the field of social action.³⁹

³⁹ Although Babbitt was politically conservative, some of his critiques against Bergson bear a leftist orientation. For instance, he critiques Bergson of offering a palliative philosophy that masks social and economic relations: “[For Bergson, a] man, we are to believe, may devote all his mental energy to the stock market, and yet be numbered with the sages, if only he succeeds in his odd moments in immersing himself in *la durée réelle* and listening, in M. Bergson’s phrase, to the ‘continuous melody of his inner life’” (455).

Russell's influence over Eliot was also pronounced, although perhaps less lasting, as Richard Shusterman notes ("Eliot" 38). Eliot was familiar with Russell's work, having studied *Principia Mathematica* at least by the fall of 1913, when he took Josiah Royce's seminar in scientific methodology.⁴⁰ And indeed, the following semester, in the spring of 1914, Eliot took Russell's course in symbolic logic, and worked, too, as an Assistant Lecturer for Russell's advanced logic class (Smith 5). So Eliot was certainly familiar with Russell and his thought by this point in time. Still, it proves difficult to determine how familiar Eliot may have been with Russell's 1912 critique, despite Donald Child's conclusion in *From Philosophy to Poetry* that Eliot "received his anti-Bergsonian impulse from" him (51).⁴¹ In his essay on Bergson, Russell argues that Bergson "as a rule does not give reasons for his opinions, but relies on their inherent attractiveness, and on the charm of an excellent style" (332). For Russell, Bergson's claims remain largely unsubstantiated (and thus unintellectual) and depend for their force on Bergson's skillful use of language. Russell goes on to argue that true philosophers (as Russell defines them) concern themselves with "calm and careful thought," and that, in contrast, Bergson's arguments involve the "passion and noise of violent motion" (333). When real philosophers look beneath Bergson's "restless view of the world," they find "no reason whatever for accepting" his purely "imaginative epic" (333, 334).

⁴⁰ Russell co-authored the *Principia* with Alfred North Whitehead, and its three volumes were published in 1910, 1912, and 1913, respectively. See Costello's notebooks for passing mention of the *Principia* in Royce's course.

⁴¹ Eliot makes no mention, for instance, of Russell or Babbitt's views on Bergson in his letters from this period.

Shusterman points out that Russell, as a logical atomist, was concerned primarily with analytically exposing “logical confusions and conceptual unclarities,” a project he extends to his treatment of Bergson (*Philosophy* 22). For Russell, Bergson’s philosophy rests upon confused and peculiarly defined notions of space, motion, and time (334, 338, 342).⁴² More importantly, Russell condemns Bergson for misunderstanding and misrepresenting subject/object relations—indeed, he concludes his essay with a vigorous discussion of Bergson’s (mis)use of these terms. He argues that Bergson, wrongly following certain schools of idealist philosophy, blurs together these two notions (subject and object), in order to offer a non-dualist model of mind on which his entire theoretical edifice rests (345). But for Russell, subject and object remain ontologically distinct and self-coherent concepts that utterly resist conflation, which means that for Russell, to reject Bergson’s “identification” of subject and object is also to reject the philosophy which emerges out of it (346). Significantly, then, Russell’s core critique relies upon affirming the distinction between inwardness and outwardness, depth and surface, subject and object. He resists Bergson’s attempts to reduce the external to the internal (as Russell reads him). For Russell the mathematician and abstract logician, as with Babbitt, Bergson remains a philosopher entranced with interiority at the expense of concrete, objective materiality.⁴³

⁴² “Bergson’s whole condemnation of the intellect rests,” Russell argues, “upon a personal idiosyncrasy mistaken for a necessity of thought, I mean the idiosyncrasy of visualizing successions as spread out on a line” (337).

⁴³ Some months later, in January 1914, Karin Costelloe responded in *The Monist* to Russell’s critique of Bergson, defending Bergson against Russell’s “caricature” of him (145).

Eliot's Rejection of Bergson's Model of Subject/Object Relations

In the spring of 1914, Eliot delivered a paper to the Harvard Philosophy Club provisionally entitled, "The Relationship between Politics and Metaphysics." In that paper, which largely involves an extended analysis of Walter Lippmann's *A Preface to Politics*, Eliot examines and compares Bergsonism with Pragmatism. In this discussion of Bergson, Eliot echoes Russell in arguing that the force of Bergson's philosophy derives more from its delivery than its content. "By the seduction of his style," Eliot asserts, "we come to believe that the Bergsonian world is the only world, and that we have been living among shadows. [But] [i]t is not so. Bergson is the sweet Siren of adventurous philosophes" (99). For Eliot, Bergson is a belated romantic, promulgating a "'personal' view of life" rooted merely in private feeling and individual vision, as M.A.R. Habib puts it (55).⁴⁴ As Eliot reads him (echoing both Russell and Babbitt), Bergson overstresses emotion and feeling at the expense of rigorous and systematic thought; overstresses, too, the phenomenological experience of interiority over the action-oriented demands of concrete, external social existence. Bergson, Eliot argues, "emphasises the reality of a fluid psychological world of aspect and nuance, where purposes and intentions are replaced by pure feeling" (99). Such a world, he continues, contrasts starkly with the "world of social values" individuals pragmatically encounter and negotiate (99). Thus, by invariably subordinating the external to the internal, Bergson's philosophy represents an

⁴⁴ Habib goes on to argue that "Eliot's reaction against Bergson was in turn part of his own broader rejection of romanticism, especially of the notion of personality" (55).

“escape from reality as we know it in ordinary experience,” rather than any meaningful clarification of it (100).

While this critique does not explicitly focus on Bergson’s conceptualization of subjectivity, it nonetheless relies on the distinction between the internal and the external characteristic of that conceptualization. It orients his reading of Bergson and provides the basis for rejecting him, a rejection more clearly and systematically demonstrated in an even earlier paper, also delivered to the Harvard Philosophy Club, entitled “A Draft of a Paper on Bergson.”⁴⁵ This slightly earlier paper, delivered in December of 1913, marks Eliot’s first sustained critique of Bergson (*Complete* 67).⁴⁶ And as with the later paper, Eliot’s criticisms of Bergson here, too, center on what Eliot feels to be Bergson’s overemphasis on interiority and consequent neglect of certain metaphysical problems which such an overemphasis generates. In essence, Eliot engages in this paper in what Habib calls an “assault on Bergson’s dualism,” specifically focusing on the “question of whether relations are internal or external” (47).

Indeed, from the beginning of his discussion, Eliot demonstrates his concern with this binary, arguing that the inconsistencies in Bergson’s philosophy stems from Bergson’s subject-oriented philosophical idealism, the same idealism, in fact, for which Russell, too, criticizes Bergson (67). As Eliot reads him, Bergson argues that all external relations and divisions remain a product of the analytically oriented intellect. Glossing

⁴⁵ The *Complete Prose* has subsequently titled this paper “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism.”

⁴⁶ M.A.R. Habib treats this essay at length in *The Early T.S. Eliot and Western Philosophy*. See Chapter Three of Habib’s study, entitled “Bergson Resartus and T.S. Eliot’s Manuscript” (39-60). See, too, Paul Douglass’ *Bergson, Eliot, and American Literature* for further (although less elaborate) treatment of this early paper (59-64).

Bergson, Eliot notes that the mind (for Bergson) “abstracts from the physical world particular characters, and thus constitutes external relations” (70). That is to say, the mind actively imposes on the undifferentiated flux of object impressions order, relation, and spatial multiplicity.

Space itself, for example, as a property of reality, remains merely a provisional construct posited by the mind as a conceptual “substratum for [conceiving] extrinsic relations” (70). The mind projects space in order to help itself conceptualize objects as well as the interactions between them. As Habib puts it in his discussion of this paper, for Bergson, the “externality of relation represented by space occurs *within* an overall framework of internal relations” (49, emphasis in original). But this means that the mind is primary, and space secondary; the external quite literally reduces to the internal (the mind). But in making this claim, Bergson implies certain parallels between his own thought and Berkeley’s, particularly in relation to their respective conceptions of space and spatiality, as Eliot notes (70). Bergson, though, attempts to distance himself from Berkeleynan subjective idealism by affirming the existence of an objective order beyond the mind’s mental constructs of that order. For instance, he tries to argue, as Eliot points out, that space is not an “illusion” but rather an “appearance” (70). But such distinctions remain too fine for Eliot, who continues to affirm that Bergson remains, at root, a Berkeleynan idealist, for whom “any extrinsic relation given by analysis, will be simply the reflection of intellect; and the result of analysis of such relations is to give only the indications of the possible activities of intelligence” (71).

Still, Eliot acknowledges that Bergson senses a tension within his own formulations, and that he seeks a definitive means by which to distinguish internal from external realities. His solution, Eliot argues, is to offer a model of the “genesis of consciousness” predicated on a notion of perpetual inner movement which itself mirrors the perpetual outer movement of the objective, material order (72). That is, as Eliot reads him, Bergson ultimately attempts to reduce all of phenomenal reality to motion and maintains that this incessant flux in some deep sense mirrors the flow of consciousness of *durée*, although both (material reality and consciousness) remain distinct (75, 76). Bergson seeks to affirm that exact parallels exist between the external world and the internal, and that these parallels effect a shared resonance between the two poles of the binary. In this way, via a kind of modified dualism, Bergson again attempts to escape the trap of Berkeleyan idealism.

But Eliot sees Bergson’s notion of motion as problematic. Firstly, in arguing his theory of motion, Bergson employs the instruments of scientific logic and demonstration, yet in doing so, inadvertently undermines his own claims. For on the one hand Bergson rejects as insufficiently accurate the conceptual language and methodological apparatus of science, while on the other, he relies upon these instruments to make his argument about the relationship between physical and mental realities (i.e., that both at root remain grounded in a structurally homologous undifferentiated flux). “[I]n making this appeal to science,” Eliot argues, “he seems to me to throw up his case against science. Return to the immediate, he says; science gives only abstractions. But when science gives motion, he accepts it” (76-77). In other words, Bergson’s theory of matter remains rooted in the

mind's conceptualizing, idealizing activity; a deep irony, given that, for Bergson, conceptual, analytical thought only provides insufficient, incomplete, distorted representations of (physical or metaphysical) reality.

Secondly, when Bergson elsewhere claims that to perceive an object is to “be identical with that object” (thus implying a more nuanced view of subject/object relations in that the reality of both subject and object remain preserved even as they experientially overlap), Eliot asks, but “how can our perception be identical with the object, which, in itself, is pure motion? Where again, is the reality—in the consciousness or in that which is perceived? Where is the one reality to subsume both of these, and can we or can we not know it?” (77). That is, if objects as such (static, substantive, self-persisting) dissolve into pure substance-less motion, and if consciousness, too, consists of pure, uninterrupted flux, then how can these two realities ever coincide? What substantively exists that can coincide? Instead, contra Bergson, Eliot argues that change must be “relative to a consciousness which distinguishes within the stream elements which it can—if only to the slightest extent—contrast; and contrast seems to me to that extent externalisation” (79-80).

For Eliot, then, just as for Russell, Bergson's error lies in his faulty view of subject/object relations. In constructing this binary, Bergson deemphasizes the reality of external objects, and in so doing provides a distorted understanding of the relation between interiority and externality. The external disappears into the internal, rather than existing in generative tension with it. In short, as I read him, Eliot suggests Bergson focuses too much on the inward, consequently collapsing the subject in on itself, severing

it from its externalizing contexts and conditions, and thus misrepresenting its dialectical, relational essence.

Beyond Bergson

Eliot's concern with subject/object relations extends far beyond his work on Bergson. Indeed, as I will demonstrate, Eliot's interest in this binary permeates his philosophical work, from his earliest graduate essays to his dissertation on Bradley. In spring of 1913, for instance (and thus nearly a year before his "Inconsistencies in Bergson's Idealism"), Eliot wrote several essays on Kant for his course in Kantian philosophy.⁴⁷ In the first of this series of papers, "Report on the Kantian Categories," Eliot is already thinking through the subject/object binary as it manifests in Kant's work, observing (with Kant) that "we can know neither an object nor our own ideas, nor the world, except as phenomena; and our knowledge is itself a phenomenon—as known" (35). For Eliot, Kant's value lies in the way his methodology lends itself to pragmatic knowledge of the world (its "methodological . . . not literal, value") (35). Observers know the world only as it *appears* to them (via innate categories of experience), and yet despite this skeptical presupposition, the knowledge gained nonetheless retains its value for its "practical use and practical validity" (37).

In the second of his essays on Kant, "Report on the Relation of Kant's Criticism to Agnosticism" (from the same term), Eliot makes the point that "in order to know, we must begin with faith, that is to say, the conception of an external relation, a real which is

⁴⁷ Eliot wrote this paper, along with two others, for Philosophy 15: The Kantian Philosophy, taught by Professor Charles Montague Bakewell (*Complete* 29).

‘outside of ourselves,’ and just that which possesses this externality to the highest degree is the world of [objects]” (44). In other words, for Eliot (building on Kant’s distinction between noumenal and phenomenal realities), the relation between subject and object is defined by the subject’s faith in the object’s existence (or in a world of “external relations” in which such objects may have existence). Individuals presuppose an objective world, and in the act of perception (ordered by cognitive categories of experience), find the objects they have already presupposed as possible. But this means, too, that what individuals perceive remains rooted in their internal presuppositions. Thus, in this sense, the external world of material objects remains in part the product of an internal phenomenon. As Eliot puts it, knowledge “is only knowledge at all when ‘taken internally’” (44). Objects and objectivity exists, but only (tautologically) insofar as individuals presuppose them to exist.

In the third of these three Kantian essays, “Report on the Ethics of Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*,” Eliot continues to emphasize this subject/object distinction, arguing here that how subjects perceive objects remains dependent upon contextual, pragmatic considerations. The “distinction between one type of object of attention and another,” he argues, “though real, is only practical, and . . . there is, in fact, an infinite gradation of objects, from the best known object of direct perception, to the least known object in untried theories” (50). That is to say, the reality of particular objects depends upon the particular set of purposes that coordinate the act of perception. But Eliot goes further, and claims that objects, “considered from an external point of view” remain “simply part of an organic complex, and you cannot say, except from a

practical point of view . . . whether it [the object] ‘exists’ or not” (50). Objects exist as such only within certain sets of relations, but for Eliot these relations remain ultimately indeterminable, shifting—even the act of investigation itself “changes the relation” (50). Seen from the outside (“an external point of view”), objects withdraw or dissolve into their relations with other phenomenon. Perception itself draws them out, but only within certain contextualized, purpose-oriented parameters. As Jeffrey Perl puts it in his discussion of these early essays, for Eliot, “‘existence’ or ‘reality’ is a quality attributed to certain terms within a shared context of discourse, and that, in relation to this context, ‘knowledge’ is also and only a term” (70).

Other papers from this period reiterate and extend Eliot’s views on the relation between subject and object, perceiver and perceived, internal and external. Most significantly, in “Degrees of Reality,” also written in the spring of 1913, Eliot again revisits this binary, here denying “any absolute distinction between perception, image and judgment, between real and unreal, between real and ideal, or between true and false, or between truth and fact” (57). He affirms, however, that objects “as such are real” and do exist, but that, again, they possess only “degrees of reality” for individual observers (57). Crucially, what grants objects their objecthood (and degree of reality), Eliot argues, is their ability to function as a “point of attention” for a perceiving consciousness (58).⁴⁸ In

⁴⁸ As Eliot puts it in the Conclusion to his dissertation, “The objecthood of an object . . . is the fact that we intend it as an object: it is the attending that makes the object” (158). But for Eliot, individuals remain in relation to and in tension with the objects they intend, for the “objects are constantly shifting, and new transpositions of objectivity and feeling constantly developing” (155). And of course, as Eliot freely admits, “if there were no object[s] we could not attend” to them as objects (158). The mind draws into focus the objects of its perception, but these objects remain unstable, their “reality” (as objects) ever subject to alternative perceptions of and feelings towards them.

making this argument, Eliot explicitly links objectivity to intentionality. But this means, he continues, that “*the subjective is also objective*,” for it, too, “is capable of being the intended object of attention” (58, emphasis added). Thus, for Eliot (as early as 1913), the internal as such remains subject to externalization, since the internal may also serve as an object of attention. When individuals turn the intending gaze onto themselves (or others), there, too, they find a distinct, delineable, and isolate object. Thus the internal gives way to the external, itself proves subject to externalization, insofar as it remains subject to an intending gaze.

Eliot wrote each of these essays while in the midst of his reversal on Bergson, who also, as seen above, remained deeply concerned with the relation between subject and object, interiority and exteriority. For Eliot, the relation between the internal and external as detailed in these early essays proves incompatible with his reading of Bergson’s views on this relation. Whereas Bergson dissolved the external into the internal (by suggesting that the internal constructs the external reality it perceives), Eliot understands the relation between these terms as mediated through acts of attention. More than a year later, in the fall of 1914, Eliot again makes this point, arguing in “Objects: Content, Objectivity, and Existence” that an object “is anything upon which attention may be directed” (165). And that when an object “pass[es] out of consciousness, it ceases to be [an] object,” and “resumes the place in the whole from which it [was] isolated” (166). In making these claims, Eliot reveals a deep consonance between his views and Kant’s (whom he had studied in the spring of 1913, as noted above), in that he, too, develops a skeptical view of empirically experienced objective reality. Objects exist as

objects so long as individuals continue to perceive them as such. Knowledge of objects remains limited to knowledge of them in context of their appearances to an observer. As Eliot notes in “On Objects,” “the object is identical with the point of view” (167).

Individuals, he contends, do not perceive objects in themselves; rather, when the point of view alters, the object itself alters (167). Thus, already by 1913, Eliot argues explicitly for a model of reality in which inner and outer realities remain deeply intertwined, each dialectically dependent upon the other, yet neither reducible to the other.

Appropriating Bradley

Eliot’s almost unrelenting focus on the subject/object binary, I claim, reaches its most philosophically developed articulation in his dissertation on Bradley, whose very title, *Experience and Objects of Knowledge in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley*, indicates Eliot’s continued interest in this topic. As Eliot notes in the dissertation’s first chapter, his goal is not to “cover the whole field of epistemology,” but rather to examine the very particular relationship between perceivers and the perceived, or between “mental activity” and external objects, as he puts it in the conclusion (15, 153). Indeed, Bradley offered Eliot a concisely formulated view of the relation between the internal and external that Eliot came largely to endorse, even noting in the dissertation that his conclusions “are in substantial agreement with [Bradley’s] *Appearance and Reality*” (153).⁴⁹ In contrast to Bergson, who deprioritized the external in favor of an emphasis on undifferentiated internal states of consciousness, Bradley stresses the ultimate dialectical

⁴⁹ He also notes, however, that he “reject[s] certain theories, logical and psychological, which appear in [Bradley’s] *Principles* and elsewhere” (153).

identity of the inner and the outer, a position Eliot fully affirms, and goes on to examine in the very first chapter of his dissertation, “On Our Knowledge of Immediate Experience”.

For Eliot, I argue, Bradley’s notion of immediate experience proved particularly useful in helping him to articulate his own developing views regarding the relation between interiority and exteriority. Indeed, as he notes at the beginning of this first chapter, the “doctrine of ‘immediate experience’ [is] the starting point of knowledge,” since it provides the framework for understanding the mutually constitutive dialectical relation between subjects and objects (15). Following Bradley, for Eliot, immediate experience (or “feeling,” which Eliot notes functions as a synonymous term) refers to that state in which subject and object remain undifferentiated from one another, in which the oppositional binary that traditionally characterizes their relation to one another has yet to appear (15). Quoting Bradley, Eliot affirms that immediate experience “means for me, first, the general condition before distinctions and relations have been developed, and where as yet neither any subject nor object exists” (16). Both remain fused within a single experiential moment, neither existing apart from the other, but combined in a fundamental, pre-conceptual unity. Consequently, for Eliot, as for Bradley, neither subjects nor objects reduce to their opposing poles in the binary. Neither term achieves priority over the other. Rather, each arises simultaneously out of the other. Indeed, Eliot makes a related point in 1914’s “Objects: Real, Unreal, Ideal, and Imaginary,” in which he argues that “in becoming aware that [an object] is an object, I become aware that I am

a subject, and its objectivity is relative to a subject” (169).⁵⁰ Each term (subject and object) implies the other, each finds its meaning only in context of the other, and at the moment of immediate experience, each exists only in simultaneous union with the other.

For Eliot, Bradley’s model of immediate experience remains distinct from all other contemporary models of the subject/object relation (16). In contrast to Bergson (for example), Bradley does not oppose the internal to the external, or privilege the internal as the authentic site of knowledge, nor does he posit the existence of a reality in which distinct, static objects exist as entities in and for themselves. As Eliot reads him, Bradley resists the notion of a concrete, external reality which individuals passively perceive (as a camera might). Immediate experience is not an experience of the objective world in itself, nor the experience of an inner self understood as some authentic self-contained, self-authorizing essence. Immediate experience “is not ‘sense-data’ or sensations,” Eliot claims, nor is it a “stream of feeling which, as merely felt, is an attribute of the subject side only and must in some way be ‘related’ to the external world” (16). Yet at the same time, Eliot goes on to argue that immediate experience and “ideal construction” (i.e., the conceptual world of meanings and relations that the mind constructs out of its experiences) remain essentially intertwined (18). Although immediate experience certainly precedes conceptual abstraction, no knowledge of the experience remains available unless it undergoes analytical conceptualization. As Eliot puts it, “no actual experience could be merely immediate, for if it were we should certainly know nothing

⁵⁰ Written after he discovered Bradley, but before he began work on his dissertation.

about it,” but this means, too, that “the line between the experience, or the given, and the constructed can nowhere be clearly drawn” (18).

Still, for Eliot, intellectual abstractions falsify the impressions of immediate experience, and the notion of subject and object (of self and other, inner and outer) remains always a distortion (i.e., a theory) of a more fundamental reality. “We have no right,” Eliot concludes, “except in the most provisional way, to speak of *my* experience, since the I is a construction out of experience, an abstraction from it; and the *thats*, the browns and hards and flats, are equally ideal constructions from experience, as ideal as atoms” (19). For of course, beneath the constructions lies pure experience, which in itself remains indivisible. Brooker rightly argues that for both Bradley and Eliot, “the world is one . . . reality is one, [and] that dualism always leads to self-contradiction” (*Mastery* 178). Thus, experience itself proves primary, subsuming both subjects and objects. Consequently, Eliot (again following Bradley), affirms a model of subject/object relations which denies precedence to either subject or object. Not only does he dissolve the two terms into one another, but he argues that even when the terms gain conceptual distinctness they remain deeply intertwined, each dialectically dependent on the other for meaning. Rather than placing the terms in metaphysical opposition to one another, Eliot argues that each term achieves conceptual coherence only when seen in relation to the other. As emphasized above, the external implies the internal just as much as the internal implies the external.⁵¹

⁵¹ Brooker goes on to note that Eliot’s dissertation only “springs to life when it is understood in the context of the revolt against dualism” (*Mastery* 178).

What I am ultimately arguing here is that Eliot's fascination with Bergson, his graduate papers, as well as his work on Bradley not only point to a sustained interest in the relation between the internal and the external, but to a particular view of this relation which remained fairly consistent over the course of a number of years. His rejection of Bergson, grounded partly in Kant and partly in Bradley, stems from his particular view of the internal/external binary which he ultimately felt to be incompatible with Bergson's own. Of course, Eliot's reliance on other philosophers' articulations should not mark him as a derivative thinker. As others note, his views also developed out of his own dispositional epistemological skepticism. Robert Langbaum, for instance, claims that "Bradley confirmed for Eliot a view of the self he had [probably] already arrived at on his own" (108). William Skaiff makes a similar point when he argues, too, that Eliot found in Bradley's work "philosophical confirmation of his suspicion that not only religious doctrines but also scientific theories must depend simply upon faith for endorsement when they make ultimate assertions about the nature of reality"—assertions that imply a certain understanding of the relation between subjects and objects as well as a certain view about the objective validity of truth propositions (16). Eliot, then, was already inclined towards the Bradleyan view prior to his exposure to Bradley, although his absorption in Bradley (and others, such as Kant) no doubt helped clarify his thinking. Of course, as I will argue below, this view of the relation between interiority and exteriority informs not only his philosophical speculations but his intellectual endeavors as a poet, a critic, and a social theorist as well. Indeed, Eliot's reading of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century anthropology and early social theory also reflects this theme in his

work, particularly in that his views on the social sciences develops in part out of his philosophical positions.⁵²

Eliot and Social Theory

During a nearly ten year period between 1916 (while still working on his dissertation) and 1924, Eliot wrote a large number of reviews of various social science works, ranging from Stanley Cook's *The Study of Religions* in 1917, to Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* in 1916, to W.O.E. Oesterley's *The Sacred Dance: A Study in Comparative Folklore* in 1923, and to W.J. Perry's *The Growth of a Civilization* in 1924. These articles appeared in a variety of journals, such as *The International Journal of Ethics*, *The Monist*, and *The New Statesman*, among others, and reveal not only Eliot's competence as a reviewer (i.e., his grasp of the material under review, as well as an understanding of the wider critical conversation within which these writers work), but a particular viewpoint which orients his responses and sharpens his commentary.

In his 1917 review of Cook's *The Study of Religions*, for example, Eliot praises Cook's interpretive restraint, his disinclination to engage in over-speculative totalizing theorizations regarding the nature, purpose, and socio-cultural evolution of religion. "Mr. Cook warns very wisely," Eliot remarks, "against arguing from the part to the whole, against constructing a hypothetical system into which every [persisting religious practice

⁵² Brooker correctly argues that "Eliot's PhD dissertation on Bradley's epistemology helps to clarify the intellectual framework for most of his other writings, even those completed before he began his dissertation" (*Mastery* 17).

and form] must fit” (562). In contrast, in 1916, in his review of Wilhelm Wundt’s *Elements of Folk Psychology: Outlines of a Psychological History of the Development of Mankind*,⁵³ Eliot critiques Wundt’s subordination of fact to interpretation, his tendency to arrange data to fit a preconceived interpretive model. “For Wundt,” Eliot suggests, “the conception of humanity appears to be in reality only a way of rounding up the various societies which he discusses”—that is, only a means for arranging his data (508). As Eliot reads him, Wundt focuses only on the “external features of development” and ignores social and cultural experience as felt from the *inside* (508). In so doing, Eliot argues, Wundt incompletely represents the very phenomena he seeks to explicate.

In both of these examples, Eliot reveals a distrust for theory and systems. Indeed, in his 1916 *Monist* review of Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms*, Eliot comments that Durkheim’s anthropological theory, in contrast with his contemporaries, “is the best because it is the nearest thing to being no theory at all” (670). For Eliot, even at its best, theory misrepresents or in some sense always distorts what it purports to explain.⁵³ Even eight years later, in a 1924 review of W.J. Perry’s *The Growth of a Civilization*, Eliot remains sensitive to the way in which Perry orders his “material into a single edifice” (536).⁵⁴ What Eliot rejects is the notion of system-building itself, as if intellectual constructs could transparently correspond to an ontologically grounded, self-sustaining, self-contained external reality (i.e., disconnected from any observer).

⁵³ As Perl notes, for Eliot, the “philosopher’s vice is linguistic: the typical theorist is ‘deceived by his own metaphors.’ He treats verbal abstractions . . . and figures of speech . . . as though they referred to objective phenomena” (71).

⁵⁴ Admittedly, in this article, Eliot seems less critical of Perry’s system-building than in the early articles. In fact, he seems intrigued by Perry’s hypothesis that all world civilizations stemmed from Egypt.

This sensitivity to and suspicion of schemas in part stems from Eliot's graduate work in philosophy. His critique of over-simplistic renderings of subject/object relations (as discussed above) implies a general critique of the project of objectification itself, and suggests the need for "epistemological humility," as Donald Childs puts it in his reflections on Eliot's dissertation (85). What are the objects of study if those objects remain relationally contingent and thus subjectively unstable? How does one isolate objects *as* objects and then arrange them into a sequence of ordered facts when their status as objects remains provisional and when the act of observation itself alters or distorts the objects so observed? As Eliot remarks in 1914's graduate essay "Objects: Real, Unreal, Ideal, and Imaginary," "the element in the experience which we shall credit to the side of the subject, and that which we may accredit to the object, remains undetermined and subject to indefinite revision at the hands of circumstance" (172). That is to say, objects retain an indeterminacy which renders systems constructed out of them (either via deductive or inductive means) ultimately indefinite and unstable.

But Eliot's suspicion of schemas stems not only from his particular epistemological position, but also from his extended engagement with then-contemporary competing anthropological systems. For in addition to his philosophical coursework of the period, Eliot also enrolled in Josiah Royce's 1913/1914 seminar in "Scientific Methods" (or "Comparative Methodology") at Harvard (Costello v, 189). It is in Royce's seminar that Eliot first (formally) engages with late nineteenth and early twentieth century social theorists and anthropologists. In his most important paper from this seminar, "The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual," Eliot explores the differences between

“definition” and “interpretation,” and the implication for this distinction for understanding anthropological and sociological theories regarding the origin, development, purpose, and nature of religion, ritual, and myth.⁵⁵ Drawing heavily on this paper, I want to argue that Eliot utterly rejects the subject/object (or inner/outer) binary that anthropologists implicitly erect when constructing their (often opposed) systems. Indeed, I want to suggest that Eliot’s critique of the social theories he encounters centers precisely on what he feels to be their faulty reliance on this defunct binary. If his critique of Bergson, say, dwells on Bergson’s overemphasis on interiority, then his critique of social theorists centers on their epistemological certitude, their unquestioned faith in their own supposedly subjective neutral positions, and their zealous pursuit of overly simplistic attempts to objectify sociocultural forms and practices. Ultimately, Eliot’s work on social theory reveals the same pervasive concern with the relation between interiority and exteriority that he exhibits in his philosophical work.

Fact or Interpretation?

In his notes for Royce’s course (taken in 1913, but only published in 1963), Harry Costello summarizes Eliot’s core concerns as presented in his seminar paper, “The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual”: “In comparative religion . . . how far is it description and . . . how far interpretation? Can you treat religion as a form of social behavior, and what is behavior? Primitive mind’s interpretation of its behavior is part of its behavior

⁵⁵ A number of critics have written on Eliot’s anthropological views, with particular reference to his work Josiah Royce’s seminar. See, for instance, Piers Gray’s *T.S. Eliot’s Intellectual and Poetic Development 1909-1922* (108-142); William Harmon’s “T.S. Eliot, Anthropologist and Primitive”; William Skaff’s *The Philosophy of T.S. Eliot* (59-72), and Manju Jain’s *T.S. Eliot and American Philosophy* (112-158). See also Harry Costello’s *Josiah Royce’s Seminar, 1913-1914* (edited by Grover Smith).

and interpretation of an early behavior” (72-73). The problem for Eliot, Costello’s comments suggest, lies in the dialectical deadlock generated by the very act of objectification. “The question to be kept in mind,” Eliot reflects in his paper, “is: what part is fact and what part interpretation” (107). To what extent is the act of accounting for a set of phenomenon an objective description of the “facts,” to what extent is it an interpretation of those “facts,” and to what extent are the “facts” themselves a product of interpretation? That is to say, to what degree does the internal (i.e., point of view, perspective) interpose itself on the external?

In his 1916 dissertation, Eliot argues that a fact “is a point of attention which has only one aspect, or which can be treated under one aspect. A fact, then, is an ideal construction, and has its existence within a more or less variable sphere of practical or scientific interest” (60). It is an idea, and ideas, as George Whiteside puts it in his discussion of Eliot’s dissertation, remain merely “aspects of objects” and “aspects of selves” (407). Similarly, in “The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual,” Eliot defines “fact” as “a point of attention which has only one aspect or [can be treated] under a certain definite aspect which places it in a system” (108). For Eliot, facts themselves remain contingent, constructed, relational intellectual artifacts, as dependent upon the perceiving mind and its concerns as upon the phenomena under consideration. Piers Gray notes that for Eliot, anthropological “facts” reflect “particular definitions of religion, and such definitions are never more than historical interpretations” grounded in individual perspectives (109). But this slightly overstates Eliot’s position, for he is not an idealist. For Eliot, objectivity and subjectivity converge; indeed, each remains rooted in the other.

Facts arise out of particular points of view (“attention”), grounded in a particular perspectival context, and yet nonetheless retain their objective status as perceived elements of a given reality. As he notes in his dissertation, facts “contain an internal judging and an external recognizing of the validity of the judgment” (60).

Yet Eliot’s concerns in “The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual” extend beyond this digression on the truth-status of facts. In the paper, he enters into a discussion of the claims of contemporary social theorists, analyzing those claims through the lens of his own Bradleyan-informed epistemological skepticism. He aligns himself against earlier theorists such as Max Müller (1823-1900), in whose work “scientific definition is confused with philosophic interpretation” (106). He also rejects the views of those such as E.B. Tylor (1832-1917), who argues that “religion is a practical, though imperfect or mistaken, adaptation to environment, [a] more or less consciously rational inventing of theories to account for experience” (107). Tylor’s position reflects a view of ancient peoples that sees no essential difference between their categories of experience and modes of world-organization and that of Western, urbanized moderns. Earlier peoples sought rational explanations of the world just as do modern thinkers. Religion, ritual, animist spirituality, and myth each function as proto-scientific accounts of a supposedly purely objective, manifestly external, physical reality. Perhaps more important for Eliot’s immediate purposes, Tylor ascribes to pre-modern sociocultural formations certain motives and valuations which he infers from the “facts.” But Eliot dismisses Tylor’s project, and comments that Tylor merely “give[s] an hypothesis which owes its *vraisemblance* to the fact that we feel that this is what we should do were we in the

savage's place" (107). It is of Tylor's work that Eliot asks, "what part is fact and what part interpretation?" (107). What part objectively describes patently present phenomena and what part distorts that phenomena? Indeed, for Eliot, the line between these two positions blurs; subject and object converge. In a sense, there is only the distortion.

Eliot points, too, in this paper to Jane Harrison's work on ritual, and while admiring her erudition, complains that for her "'fact' melts into interpretation, and interpretation into metaphysics" (113).⁵⁶ While there certainly exists, he admits, "an external order in ritual and creed and in artistic and literary expression" (which Harrison traces), and while the "process" of development of this order remains intelligible, the "purpose" remains elusive (113). For Eliot, "'purpose in process is simply an interpretation, not a description" (118). And as Eliot reads her, Harrison intends not only to describe process, but to impute purpose, which for Eliot remains epistemologically problematic. He accuses James Frazer, too, of the same intellectual error. Although he refers to Frazer as comparative anthropology's "greatest master," and although he believes that Frazer has "done more to make manifest the similarities and identities underlying the customs of races very remote in every way from each other," he feels nonetheless that Frazer confuses description with interpretation. Reflecting on Frazer's notion of sympathetic magic (i.e., that early peoples engaged in certain ritual activities in order to generate certain correlative physical effects), Eliot argues that "[n]o method, historical or comparative, will give results such as this. No comparison of custom will

⁵⁶ William Skaff goes on to argue that "Eliot overlooked the theoretical impurities" in Harrison's work, in order "to discover how relevant Harrison's work was to his own preoccupations" (80).

give us any hint as to purpose, and purposes we cannot compare” (114). For Eliot, both Harrison and Frazer overextend themselves, and present a collection of “facts” distorted by their assumptions regarding purpose. To state it more baldly, the facts as Harrison and Frazer understand them exist only within the interpretive framework that Harrison and Frazer themselves erect. They introduce an “extraneous point of view,” as Skaff puts it, which imposes a constructed, artificial order on perceived cultural events (85).⁵⁷ Again, the objective and subjective (the external and the internal) overlap, but here in a way that almost exclusively privileges the subjective.

However, Eliot goes on to complicate his own position here. Significantly, for Eliot, objective truth (i.e., individuals’ perception of externalized social or physical reality as it supposedly exists in itself) does in a sense exist, but not in the way Frazer, Harrison, Tylor or Müller would affirm. That is, despite questioning the truth-status of facts, despite asking to what extent “facts” can exist apart from individuals’ interpretations (or constructions) of them,⁵⁸ Eliot nonetheless affirms that interpretations themselves possess the capacity to reveal certain kinds of truth. Again reflecting on Tylor and Müller, Eliot comments that he would “not . . . go so far as to say crassly that they are wrong” (108). Within the contexts of their formulations and assumptions, they indeed convey a particular version of truth—a perspective. But for Eliot, developments in social

⁵⁷ As Eliot argues in 1914’s “The Validity of Artificial Distinction,” “when a philosopher pretends to emerge with some ‘positive result’ which can be formulated, which declares triumphantly that reality is this or that . . . then the philosopher is *simply pulling out of his pocket what he put there himself*” (191, emphasis added).

⁵⁸ In “The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual,” Eliot asks, “when have I a fact, or rather a type of fact, which can be sufficiently abstracted from (1) my individual (or irrelevant) interpretation of it and from (2) other types into which it may melt and elude me” (108).

theory are not “simply [movements] from error to truth,” but rather “a progress in the statement of the problem” (i.e., a shift in perspective) (109). “What seemed to one generation fact,” Eliot maintains, “is from the point of view of the next a rejected interpretation” (109). If others now see Tylor and Müller as “wrong,” it is not, as Gray points out, “because they are internally inconsistent, but because they follow from assumptions that can no longer be shared” (119-120). Facts depend upon subjective assumptions, and proof, as Eliot puts it, “can only be proof in relation to [those] assumptions” (109). As he puts it his paper “Description and Explanation” (also written for Royce’s seminar), “[a]ny stage of explanation, I believe, depends upon the maintenance of a particular point of view” (123). Thus, no interpretive explanation is “wholly true,” but neither is it “wholly wrong” (123). Explanations of the external world, while dependent upon internal idiosyncratic perspectives, assumptions, and frameworks, nonetheless do provide some sense of the reality of that external world. While the objective world remains in some sense a construct, it also retains its externality. As argued above, for Eliot, the external never fully reduces to the internal, nor the internal to the external. Rather, the two continue to exist in mutual, generative, dialectical tension.

Thus, in rejecting the positions and methodologies of early sociologists like Müller and Tylor, as well as contemporary theorists such as Frazer and Harrison, Eliot (I argue) rejects a particular way of viewing the relationship between subjects and objects, the internal and the external. In his dissertation, Eliot remarks that “[t]heories of knowledge usually assume that there is one consistent real world, in which everything is real and equally real, and that it is our business to find it” (136). Such theories posit a

subject over against an object, pits the knower against the known. But, as Eliot puts it in his April, 1913 essay, "Report on the Relation of Kant's Criticism to Agnosticism," "If you contemplate knower and known from the outside, what you find is not simply knower and known, but a peculiar complex of existents, and knowledge fades into ontology" (44). The anthropologist's error, like the overconfident epistemologist's, involves the inability to perceive to what degree objective knowledge remains intertwined with particular subjective points of view. Seen "from the outside" (i.e., outside the knowledge framework in question), the knower and the known converge. Conceptual distinctions, objects of knowledge, causal relations arise only within the context of a particular perspective delineated within the suppositional constraints of a particular theoretical proposal.

Eliot's problem, then, with thinkers such as Harrison and Frazer (and the Tylorian cultural evolutionary school from which they ultimately descend), lies both in their methodology and in their conclusions. These thinkers (for Eliot) assume the existence of a set of sociocultural "facts," which they can arrange into a sensible order which will then reveal the "truth" of a given social practice. As in Frazer, they assume a notion of universal cognition, where the same motivations and categories of experience guide both modern and pre-modern peoples, the difference between the two groups lying in the fact that moderns have attained their degree of apparent sophistication by improving on the "errors" of their predecessors. Eliot discounts such claims to knowledge, discounts any claim to know the intended originary inner purpose of an ancient ritual or religious practice.

Indeed, for Eliot, a theory cannot rest on an imputation of purpose, because purposes themselves *as* purposes (i.e., as the psychological motivation underlying a particular action) are already interpretations of the action they supposedly determine. That is to say, an individual's purpose when engaging in an activity is itself already an interpretation of that activity. As Skaff puts it, "no interpretation of a ritual can ever account for its origin, because even the meaning that the participants may ascribe to their actions is in itself an interpretation" (85). Rather than psychological explanations of a given action, purposes prove to be historically contingent interpretations of those actions by the actors themselves. Eliot quotes Irving King here to clarify his point: "the interpretations by the people themselves are not of direct psychological value. They are facts, *also*, as we said above, that need explanation" (111, emphasis in original).⁵⁹ So to explain an *external* action by an *internal* purpose explains nothing at all, for the internal purpose itself remains already an interpretation of the external action. As late as 1926, in a review of Charlotte Eliot's "Savonarola," Eliot reiterates this point, and argues that "the meaning of [a] series of acts is to the performers themselves an interpretation; the same ritual remaining practically unchanged may assume different meanings for different generations of performers; and the rite may even have originated before 'meaning' meant anything at all" (771-72). Thus, for anthropologists to attempt to affix some definitive

⁵⁹ Years later, in 1923's "The Beating of a Drum," Eliot makes a similar point: "It is equally possible to assert that primitive man acted in a certain way and then found a reason for it. An unoccupied person, finding a drum, may be seized with a desire to beat it; but unless he is an imbecile he will be unable to continue beating it, and thereby satisfying a need . . . without finding a reason for so doing. The reason may be the long continued drought. The next generation or the next civilization will find a more plausible reason for beating a drum" (474).

explanation to a set of religious practices remains at best reductive and at worst delusive. It is to falsely subordinate the objective to the subjective, or the external to the internal.

Eliot's Critique of Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl

In the "The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual," Eliot clearly rejects the epistemological reductionism of the cultural evolutionists. However, not all anthropologists of the period were evolutionists. Some, such as Lévy-Bruhl and Durkheim rely on an alternate set of methodological strategies and theoretical presuppositions, which privilege the external (e.g., concrete social forms, cultural rituals) far more than the internal (e.g., projected or inferred inner purposes), and which accordingly require from Eliot a different mode of critique. Indeed, Eliot's treatment of both these theorists remains more sympathetic than his treatment of the evolutionists, largely because of their increased focus on the external, and thus on "description" rather than "interpretation." That is to say, as Eliot reads them, both Lévy-Bruhl and Durkheim refuse to reduce the (cultural, existential, social, metaphysical) gap between the present and the past or between one group of individuals and another. Consequently, they limit themselves more to describing social formations and practices rather than (strictly speaking) interpreting them.

For example, although Eliot admits that he feels Lévy-Bruhl "draw[s] the distinction between primitive and civilised mental processes altogether too clearly" and that Lévy-Bruhl does not "make a long enough excursion into the theory of knowledge to question the ultimate adequacy of explanation altogether," he nonetheless affirms Lévy-Bruhl's essential claim that some substantive gap separates the "primitive" from the

modern mind (110). Following Lévy-Bruhl, Eliot discounts any attempt to point to the modern mind (and its valuations and motivations) as a model by which to understand pre-modern social and religious practices (110). Such attempts “involve a quite crude notion of causality and a very defective theory of knowledge,” Eliot claims, since (as Lévy-Bruhl argues) no “uniformity of mind” exists by which to make this comparison (108). Modern and pre-modern peoples remain differently situated, their perspectives fundamentally incommensurate with one another. The difference remains “one not of degree but of kind,” as Manju Jain argues in his discussion of Royce’s seminar (122). The explanation one group may offer for a set of behaviors will not necessarily correspond with the explanation another group provides. As Eliot notes in his 1916 *New Statesman* review of Clement Webb’s *Group Theories of Religion and the Individual*, for Lévy-Bruhl, the “mind of the savage is not a different type; it is merely a mind . . . ‘differently oriented’” (417). Indeed, even within the same group of natives, as Eliot notes in his review of “Savonarola,” variant explanations of cultural behavior often emerge over time, further complicating the interpretive process.

Accordingly, Eliot found Lévy-Bruhl useful for helping to demonstrate the inadequacy of contemporary anthropological theorizations regarding the purpose of ancient religious ritual practices. The existence of multiple cultural perspectives on and interpretations of a given set of practices prohibits the over-simplistic explanations of these practices offered by theorists such as Frazer or Harrison. Nevertheless, he ultimately criticizes Lévy-Bruhl for inadvertently falling into the same trap of interpretation that entangles his opponents, a point Piers Gray makes as well (121-22). In

a footnote to his review of “Savonarola,” Eliot notes that Lévy-Bruhl “seems to me to fall into the same difficulty [as his opponents]. . . . He invents an elaborate ‘prelogism’ to account for the savage’s identification of himself with his totem, where it is not certain that the savage, except so far as he had mental processes similar to our own, had any mental process at all” (775). That is to say, almost despite himself, Lévy-Bruhl attempts to construct an explanatory theory to account for certain sociocultural practices, a theoretical intervention which Eliot of course rejects.

While Eliot maintains certain reservations concerning Lévy-Bruhl’s views, he seems far more approving of Durkheim’s. Indeed, Jain rightly observes that Eliot dedicates the “central part” of “The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual” to Durkheim, rendering him the pivotal figure in his argument (123). As Eliot reads him, Durkheim refuses the typical interpretive errors characteristic of Lévy-Bruhl, Frazer, Harrison, etc., in large part by remaining sensitive to the degree to which the internal itself proves capable of objectification. That is to say, for Durkheim, individual purposes (whatever they might be) matter much less than the objectively external “collective representations” that necessarily inform those purposes. For Durkheim, Eliot argues, social forms exercise a constraining power over the individuals subjected to those forms. As such, to an extent, the inner lives of individuals within a given social group remain determined by the social practices and “collective representations” characteristic of that group. As Skaff notes in his discussion of Eliot and Durkheim, “[b]ecause our consciousness actually consists of [these] collective representations, they determine the very nature of our world” (60).

In this sense, the external exerts a determining force over the internal; it shapes, directs, and informs it. Because the internal here relies upon the external for its form and meaning, Eliot argues that it obtains an objective quality. It becomes, he affirms, a “social fact.”⁶⁰ For both Durkheim and Eliot, these “facts” entail “the ways of acting, thinking, and feeling, external to the individual, which are endowed with a power of coercion by virtue of which they impose themselves upon the individual” (Eliot, “Interpretation” 117).⁶¹ The external, that is, obtains a certain priority over the internal, exerts a determining influence on it. As these “facts” retain a satisfactory degree of objectivity, they become suitable data out of which anthropologists, then, can construct (less questionable) theories of the development of social forms and practices. As Eliot puts it, Durkheim “believes, in short, that the ‘facts’ of the social life obtain sufficient clearness and precision to be traced historically, and joined logically, without the interpolation at any time of [idiosyncratic] facts from the life of the individual” (110). Description supersedes inventive interpretation; facts replace speculation. Indeed, Perl points out that Eliot ultimately endorses a model of “dense description” that somewhat “resemble[s] the ‘thick description’” later popularized by the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz (78).

Still, Eliot expresses certain hesitations over Durkheim as well, and confesses his dissatisfaction with any treatment of religion (such as Durkheim’s) which defines it

⁶⁰ Translating Durkheim, Eliot notes, “Any mode of action . . . fixed or not, which is susceptible of exercising on the individual an exterior constraint, is a social fact” (111).

⁶¹ Eliot provides this quotation in the original French: “des manières d’agir, de penser et de sentir, extérieures à l’individu, et qui sont douées d’un pouvoir de coercition en vertu duquel ils s’imposent à lui” (110). The editors of the *Complete Prose* provide the translation to this passage in their notes for Eliot’s essay.

“wholly . . . by external impression” (i.e., as merely mechanical “social behavior”) (111). Internal meanings continue to exist for individuals and provide the immediate experiential motivations for their actions, even if social scientists neglect such inner purposes. As Eliot argues, a complete description of a social phenomenon would necessarily include a description of its “inner meaning” in addition to its external form; it would recognize the ultimate inseparability of belief and behavior (112). Behavior alone, Eliot asserts, “is only a half-way stage,” for “[w]hat is a religious phenomenon,” he asks, “which has not a religious meaning for the participants?” (112). Meaning matters, Eliot affirms, even if that meaning remains inaccessible to scientific investigation; and it matters because the meanings individuals ascribe to their actions themselves function as facts in the context of a comprehensive description of a given social practice. “We must treat the subject in terms of social behavior,” Eliot exclaims, yet must also remain suspicious of descriptions which ignore inner experience (112). But for Eliot, that includes every contemporary description of religious practice. No “definition of religious behavior can be satisfactory,” he suggests, because such definitions remain merely externalized descriptions, and thus misrepresent the totality of the phenomenon they seek to define (115). For Eliot here, “meaning . . . hovers between the social and the individual,” between the external and the internal (112). Each implies the other, exerts a force on the other. From a certain point of view, the internal exists only as an expression of external forces. And yet the internal maintains its own vitality, its own determining “imaginative and emotive element[s]” (115). Thus, Eliot’s critique of Durkheim

ultimately aligns with his critique of the cultural evolutionists. Both neglect to acknowledge the complex dialectical interplay between the external and the internal.

As Eliot reads them (I argue), anthropologists such as Frazer, Harrison, and to an extent Lévy-Bruhl place too much emphasis on the internal, inventing purposes that may or may not exist, and ignoring, too, the way purposes evolve over time and remain contextually dependent. Others (like Durkheim) overemphasize the external at the expense of the internal, utterly subsuming the one into the other.⁶² And while Eliot roughly aligns himself with Durkheim, he does so primarily because his “method has the singular merit of putting us on guard against itself” (115). As noted above, Eliot finds Durkheim’s theory the “best because it is the nearest to being no theory at all,” in that it attempts to limit itself to clearly observable social phenomena. Both Eliot and Durkheim prefer “social facts” to speculation, and interpretive restraint to invention. Both thinkers, too, place the internal and the external in tension with one another, and each affirms how impersonal social forces permeate human consciousness (despite Eliot’s sense that Durkheim overstates the dominance of the external).

But Eliot resists Durkheim only to the extent that he feels that internal experience (i.e., individuals’ own experiential self-understanding of their behavior) should as far as possible enter into an objective description of that behavior. “Social facts” should not only consist of the ideological “collective consciousness” of a given group (which determines behavior), but should also include the phenomenological perspective of the

⁶² As Eliot comments in his second review of Webb’s *Group Theories of Religion and the Individual* (also 1916), “Durkheim talks far too much about ‘society’; everything is ascribed to its influence” (431).

believing, practicing individual within the group. Again, for Eliot, meaning matters, for in emphasizing meaning, Eliot also emphasizes the connection between behavior and belief, between external determinates and the conditioned consciousness itself. That is to say, Eliot endorses Durkheim's methodology, his desire to understand social behavior in terms of collective modes of thought and experience. But he goes further than Durkheim, and argues that a full description of a given social practice also necessitates a description of individuals' interpretations of their own actions. Behavior and belief interpenetrate one another; conditioned behavior roots itself in conditioned selves who nonetheless find meaning in their collective behavior.

Eliot's position here remains remarkably consistent over the course of his career. For example, decades later, in *Notes toward a Definition of Culture* (1948), he makes the Durkheimian argument that "the culture of the individual cannot be isolated from that of the group, and that the culture of the group cannot be abstracted from that of the whole society" (96). Individuals remains inseparable from the group collective. Their sense of self (manifested through their behavior) remains informed by the values, perspectives, and ideological horizons of the groups to which they belong. Indeed, Eliot suggests that culture, which "includes all the characteristic activities and interests of a people," utterly permeates individual consciousness (103-04).⁶³ It constitutes individuals' "*whole way of life . . . from birth to the grave, from morning to night and even in sleep*" (103, emphasis in original). Skaff argues rightly when he suggests that "Eliot's contention in his later

⁶³ Eliot goes on to provide an interesting list of these "characteristic activities and interests": "Derby Day Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar" (104).

writings that society should by nature embody the religion of its people unconsciously, beyond any deliberate and over religious profession or observance, is an application of Durkheim's concept of the collective conscience" (61-62). The external thoroughly informs the internal, even as the internal expresses itself in the external. Easy binary distinctions cease to have meaning, as the line between the two polarities blurs. "[B]ehavior," as Eliot goes on to argue, "is also belief, and . . . even the most conscious and developed of us live also at the level on which belief and behavior cannot be distinguished" (104).

Furthermore, Eliot emphasizes in *Notes* the essential *impersonality* of personal behavior, since it remains externally grounded in culture (i.e., in group and collective consciousness). Social practices, mental categories, and ideological presuppositions form the framework that underpins individual action and belief. As Eliot puts it, culture "can never be wholly conscious—there is always more to it than we are conscious of; and it cannot be planned because it is also the unconscious background of all our planning" (170). It constitutes the horizon of possible meanings for individuals embedded within a particular cultural context. It delimits identities and individuals' subjective experience of their worlds. Yet again, Eliot demonstrates his ongoing debt to Durkheim. But he also emphasizes the way in which individuals experience these impersonal forces as personally self-constitutive. Behavior is belief, Eliot affirms; it is that which individuals experience as most intimately their own. "[T]o understand the culture," he argues, "is to understand the people," because culture, he claims, "is *lived*" (113, emphasis in original).

Thus, again, as in his philosophical thought, Eliot offers a model of the relationship between interiority and exteriority that evades the simplistic reduction of either term to the other. His emphasis remains on the constructive tension between the two terms, and on the insufficiency of either viewed in isolation from the other when attempting to provide a comprehensive description of sociocultural phenomena. Taken together, Eliot's philosophical speculations (i.e., his Bradleyan epistemology) and his social sciences critique point directly to a specific notion of human subjectivity which Eliot goes on to dramatize in his poetry and drama. To affirm with Bradley that the "self . . . seems to depend upon a world which in turn depends upon it, and [that] nowhere . . . can we find anything original or ultimate" is to affirm a deeply dialectical notion of the self (*Knowledge and Experience* 146). And to view individuals as constitutively cultural creatures who nevertheless "live" their cultural embeddedness as an intimate extension of their subjective experience is also to affirm a notion of the self in which the self "depends upon a world which in turn depends upon it." For Eliot, behavior without belief remains a meaningless description of external phenomenon. The meaning of the external depends upon the meaning attributed to it by the internal, deliberating consciousness. The two remain inextricably, dialectical, constitutively interlinked.

Of course, Eliot turned away from formal philosophical and sociological inquiry in order to pursue his literary interests. As a poet and critic, Eliot immersed himself deeply in the work of his literary precursors, redefining the canon according to his own criteria in reviews and essays that span the breadth of his career. But in the same way that his work in philosophy and anthropology/sociology remained consistently informed by an

underlying, evidentially preexistent interest in the relation between interiority and exteriority, so, too, his literary views remained informed by this interest as well. To understand Eliot as a poet means to understand him not only as a philosopher and social theorist, but also as a critic. And to better understand the particular way in which Eliot dramatizes human subjectivity in his poetry requires understanding how he views the representation of subjectivity in the work of his literary predecessors.

Eliot on the Nineteenth-Century Literary Tradition

Eliot famously repudiated his Victorian and Romantic forebears in much of his early critical writing. Regarding Swinburne, for example, Eliot again and again comments on the ornate excessiveness of language found in his poetry. In 1918's "Euripides and Professor Murray," for instance, Eliot comments on the "fluid haze" of Swinburne's work (48), an assessment he reiterates in 1922's "John Dryden," in which he comments that Swinburne uses "words [that] are all suggestions and no denotation" (273). In "Swinburne as Poet" (1920), Eliot again reflects on the "amazing number of words" Swinburne employs, and argues that his language (and the emotions that that language intends to dramatize) remains excessively "diffuse" (282). For Swinburne, he continues, "meaning is merely the hallucination of meaning, because language, uprooted, has adapted itself to an independent life of atmospheric nourishment" (285). That is to say, for Eliot, Swinburne's work lacks specificity, clarity, or particularity. His language remains overly suggestive ("diffuse"), at the expense of concrete meaning or determinant reference. Swinburne's poetry appears overindulgent, absorbed in the intricacies of its own locutions and linguistic elaborations. Atmosphere triumphs over precision.

Around the same time that Eliot develops these critiques of Swinburne, he offers a similar analysis of Blake. In 1920's "William Blake," Eliot admits that Blake possessed a "capacity for considerable understanding of human nature," and that he exhibited a "remarkable and original sense of language and the music of language" (279). But these capacities came, too, with the more questionable "gift of hallucinated vision" (279). Had Blake's strengths, Eliot argues, "been controlled by a respect for impersonal reason, for common sense, for the objectivity of science, it would have been better for him" (279). What Blake "required" (yet "lacked"), Eliot felt, "was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own, and concentrated his attention upon the problems of the poet" (279-80). As with Swinburne, Blake's work appears indulgent, self-entranced, excessively captivated by its own revelatory vision. It lacks grounding within a wider (literary) tradition. And it requires connection to that tradition in order to acquire greater cultural relevancy as well as aesthetic and conceptual coherency. Indeed, Eliot goes on to note, the same "[c]onfusion of thought, emotion, and vision" that Blake's work exhibits "is what we [also] find in such a work as [Nietzsche's] *Also Sprach Zarathustra*" (280). Both authors lack a "framework" that can provide conceptual (and emotional) order to their systems, and consequently, both authors produce work that remains eccentric, unintegrated, or disconnected from contemporary cultural currents.

In both of these instances (i.e., in his comments on Swinburne and on Blake), Eliot affirms the importance of specificity in language and the necessity of tempering poetic vision by contextually relating that vision to a preexisting, comprehensive

(literary, philosophical, and religious) cultural tradition. As Eliot reads him, Swinburne privileges inexact, effusive, atmospheric language over concrete signification in his texts. Similarly, Blake's inventive imaginings outpaces his capacity to meaningfully communicate them or the ideas they signify, since he refuses to ground them within any wider tradition (which would lend them resonance and greater intelligibility). For Eliot, then, Swinburne's "hallucination of meaning" and Blake's "hallucinated vision" both signify excesses on the part of the authors which ultimately mars their work, no matter their native talents. They each exhibit an idiosyncratic aesthetic grounded in the inarticulate privacy of personal vision. Each, that is, overemphasizes the internal at the expense of the external; each privileges the individual over relational interconnections with others.

Indeed, Eliot's core critique of the romantics and their Victorian heirs centers precisely on what he feels is their overemphasis on internal states and elevation of a notion of the subject that posits individuals as self-contained, self-sustaining concrete unities—what he calls in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" the "metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul" (42).⁶⁴ Carol Christ rightly notes that Eliot believes that the "emphasis which Romanticism places upon the individual imagination alienates the writer from tradition," but this is because for Eliot it suggests a false model of selfhood (8). And as he makes abundantly clear in his graduate work, Eliot disputes any metaphysical theory that asserts a monadic understanding of human subjectivity. For

⁶⁴ In *T.S. Eliot's Romantic Dilemma*, Eugenia M. Gunner argues that Eliot, following Irving Babbitt views romanticism as the "historical origin of the modern world's spiritual decadence and disorientation" (23).

Eliot, as discussed above, the “self” is a construct (not a substance in itself), and emerges only in the encounter with other selves as well as with the objects it posits in the world. As he argues in his dissertation, “the self depends . . . upon other selves; it is not given as a direct experience, but is an interpretation of experience by interaction with other selves” (146). The romantic Platonizes the self, elevates it such that it becomes a thing-in-itself, an object in the world, yet somehow transcending that world. And in fetishizing the self, the romantic fetishizes the self’s inner experiences, either overemphasizing feeling at the expense of the intellect or the intellect at the expense of feeling. As he suggests in his “Syllabus of a Course of Six Lectures on Modern French Literature” (1916), “Romanticism stands for *excess* in any direction. It splits up into two directions: escape from the world of fact, and devotion to brute fact” (471, emphasis in original).

Perhaps under the influence of Babbitt, Eliot points to Jean Jacques Rousseau as the paradigmatic figure here, the progenitor of all romantic excess. In the same lecture notes in which he defines romanticism, he also suggests that the “germs of all these [romantic] tendencies are found in Rousseau” (471). Rousseau, Eliot goes on to claim, privileged “the personal and individual above the typical,” emphasized “feeling rather than thought,” and stressed “Humanitarianism: [i.e.,] belief in the fundamental goodness of human nature.” He deprioritized “form in art” in favor of the “glorification of spontaneity,” and his “great faults” included “[i]ntense egotism” and “[i]nsincerity” (471). And he concludes that the “two great currents of the nineteenth century—vague emotionalism and the apotheosis of science (realism) alike spring from Rousseau” (471). That is to say, for Eliot, Rousseau marks the advent of an obsession with a flawed notion

of the self, grounded in an uncritical overemphasis on interiority and idiosyncratic subjective experience. As Eliot reads him, Rousseau posits a concrete, substantive self whose essential “fundamental goodness” validates that self’s inner experience of itself. This notion of the self leads to a kind of narcissistic “egotism” in which feeling as such triumphs over the intellect and originality triumphs over inherited traditional social (or aesthetic) forms. In the end, mood trumps precision (in language or thought) and “spontaneity” trumps tradition. And of course, these twin complaints form the basis of Eliot’s assessment of Swinburne and Blake. His critique of both figures stems from the condemnation of excess which he extends to all the romantics and their (supposed) Victorian imitators. Swinburne’s inarticulate effusions and Blake’s inventive speculations exemplify the “vague emotionalism” and “glorification of spontaneity” he ultimately roots in Rousseau.

Significantly, Eliot’s critique of the vague and imprecise language, excessive emotionalism, and idiosyncratic originality of romantic and Victorian writers corresponds precisely with many of the philosophical critiques he was making during this same period (i.e., 1914-1920). His reflections as a critic, that is, echo his concerns with description, precision, coherency, and contextuality that he also expresses in his philosophical work. For example, again and again, Eliot (as seen in his Harvard and Oxford papers) condemns the inexact or confused thinking of his intellectual contemporaries. As observed above, in his graduate work, he condemns Frazer and Harrison for their speculative confusions (i.e., that they impute purposes to events without valid cause). Around the same time, in 1914’s “The Relationship between Politics and Metaphysics,” he criticizes William

James' work by suggesting that his "philosophical writings constitute an emotional attitude more than a body of dogma" (90). And in the same paper, he goes on to denigrate the supposedly intellectually rigorous "neo-realistic movement" as nothing more than a "spontaneous outburst of feeling, a song without words" (90). And of course, his entire critique of Bergson (as delineated in "Inconsistencies in Bergson's Idealism") rests on his contention that Bergson's philosophy remains intellectually confused, and that whatever power it possesses derives from the emotional "seductiveness" of Bergson's prose style ("Relationship" 99). Indeed, in his 1916 *New Statesmen* review of Webb's *Group Theories*, he goes so far as to complain that "Bergsonism" has become a kind of contemporary intellectual "infection," an infection he then specifically goes on to align in the review with "romanticism" (417).

Moreover, Eliot repeatedly emphasizes in his Harvard work the extent to which meaning and coherency depend precisely on the contexts within which such concepts operate. Sociocultural theories, for example, depend upon the particular framework theorists construct in order to make sense of the phenomena they perceive. As discussed above, sociologists' view of social reality remains dependent upon their own individual point of view. Their particular perspective informs the meaning they perceive in the social practices they observe. As Jeffrey Perl puts it, "what [the theorist] does not see is that . . . knowledge of truth and reality is available only in the context from which [the theorist] has plucked those terms and within which they have their meaning" (70). Recall here Eliot's claim in 1914's "The Validity of Artificial Distinctions" that when the

philosopher (or anthropologist) constructs a theory to explain a particular phenomenon, she or he is “simply pulling out of his pocket what he put there himself” (191).

Still, as also suggested earlier, for Eliot, these individual theories come together to collectively contribute to a greater sense of the truth of an event or social practice (as contexts and perspectives proliferate). Stronger descriptions result from an accumulation of points of view, and events themselves accrue meaning only within the context of set of perspectives. For instance, in “Finite Centres and Points of View” (also 1914), Eliot argues that “it is only in a world of social intercourse that objects can come into being and maintain their existence” (174). The objects of study, he claims, remain “in a sense essentially public” (174). “On the one hand,” he suggests, the object of attention “seems to be merely the converging of various points of view, and on the other, the points of view seem to be nothing but differently coloured sectors of the same object” (174). Objects (like the self) exist within a relational and perspectival totality. For an individual to offer her or his isolated view of an object as the only (true) view is thus to misrepresent or distort the object of perception. Indeed, all views, for Eliot, prove provisional and subject to constant revision; they remain ad hoc constructions operative only within particular conceptual, perspectival frameworks. Thus to critique Swinburne and Blake for idiosyncratic excesses, for operating outside of normative literary culture (as with Blake) or for developing an ornate, unrestrained, atmospheric, and conceptually imprecise verse style (as with Swinburne), is for Eliot to extend his philosophical project into literary criticism.

Indeed, Eliot's most famous critical statement, in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), exactly echoes his philosophical views regarding relational contextuality, a point Jewel Spears Brooker makes as well (*Mastery* 182-83).⁶⁵ "No poet, no artist of any art," Eliot argues, "has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists" (38). The part remains an aspect of the whole, derives its meaning from its relation to the "ideal order" to which it inextricably belongs (38). The "existing monuments" of the tradition provide the generative matrix out of which the artist's particular vision emerges and against which posterity measures her or his contributions. As Eliot puts it, "[y]ou cannot value [the artist] alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead" (38). And yet, significantly, Eliot goes on to argue that the relation between poet and the preexisting "ideal order" remains profoundly dialectical. The artist, that is, affects the existing tradition inasmuch as the tradition necessarily informs the artist: "The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not onesided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it" (38). Each depends upon the other for meaning; each possesses meaning, that is, only within the terms of its relation to the other. Their relationality is mutually constitutive. For Eliot, the "new" retroactively, as it were, reconstitutes the past, introduces a comprehensive reordering as well as a revaluing of the tradition. "The existing order is complete before the new work arrives," Eliot reflects, but "for order to

⁶⁵ Brooker notes that "Eliot describes the relation between artists within the tradition as well as between the tradition and individual artists. By doing so, he provides a textbook example of the doctrines of the internality of relations and the systematic nature of the whole," concepts drawn from Bradley (182-83).

persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted” (38).

For Eliot the critic, then, as for Eliot the philosopher, singularity in itself remains conceptually illogical. The individual (poet, person, theory) lacks definitive conceptual meaning because it lacks the contextual coordinates constitutive of that meaning. But the context, too, remains fluid, as it remains dependent upon the singular (though interrelated) elements constitutive of that context. The poet, that is, remains a product of the tradition inasmuch as the tradition remains a product of the poet. As Eliot notes years later in his 1926 Introduction to Charlotte Eliot’s *Savonarola*, “the past is in perpetual flux,” because the past remains a product of the interpretations hoisted upon it by the present generation (771).⁶⁶ The two remain in perpetual dialectical tension, each in certain ways determining the other. And this tension recapitulates the dialectical tension between interiority and exteriority Eliot traces throughout his philosophical work, and which provides the conceptual foundation upon which he erects his critique against romantic and Victorian writers in general. Contextuality involves the external material and conceptual conditions that provide the structuring frameworks for interpreting the individual elements within a contextual field. The individual, on the other hand, functions as an element internal to that context, determined and informed by it.

⁶⁶ A historical novel, for instance, remains “much more a document on its own time than on the time portrayed” (771). Pointing to George Eliot’s *Romola*, Eliot notes that “[b]y comparing the period described in [the novel] as we know that period, with George Eliot’s interpretation of it, we can supplement our knowledge (which is itself an interpretation and relative) of the mind and of the epoch of George Eliot” (771). That is to say, *Romola* says far more about George Eliot’s period than it does about the historical period which it proceeds to document.

In fact, Eliot's key critique against Matthew Arnold, a significant figure for him, concerns exactly this tension between conditioning external contexts and the degree to which the individual remains determined by those contexts. In his essay on "The Modern Mind" in 1933's *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, Eliot argues that Arnold sought "to preserve emotions without the beliefs with which their history has been involved" (127). Arnold, that is, sought to dissociate certain feelings from the contexts that gave rise to them. Perceiving the "Sea of Faith" withdrawing (as he puts it in "Dover Beach"), Arnold sought to preserve the sense of transcendent meaning, purpose, and order Faith engenders by transferring the functions of religion (as he sees it) to poetry. But Eliot suggests that absent the enframing traditions that give context for and meaning to the experience of the transcendent (or of the sense of human significance derived from the experience), Arnold's project ultimately collapses, degenerating into the decadent celebration of art for art's sake, a "doctrine" Eliot sees as "mistaken" and as a "hopeless admission of irresponsibility" (145, 17).

For Eliot, the Victorian Arnold follows in the tradition of Rousseau and his romantic heirs, in that he privileges feeling over thought and atmosphere over precision. Nostalgia permeates Arnold's work at the expense of intellectual rigor and systemic coherency. Arnold "ventured into departments of thought," Eliot argues, "for which his mind was ill-equipped" (97). "In philosophy and theology," for instance, Arnold "was an undergraduate," and in religion, he was a "Philistine" (97).⁶⁷ Thus, he submits Arnold to

⁶⁷ As Maud Ellmann more forcefully puts it, for Eliot, Arnold (but also Bergson) "supplanted true religion with a glittering sham" (48).

the same critique he brings against Swinburne, Blake, and social scientists and philosophers such as Frazer, Harrison, and Bergson. Indeed, in “The Modern Mind,” Eliot specifically argues that Arnold “lacked the mental discipline, the passion for exactness in the use of words and for consistency and continuity of reasoning, which distinguishes the philosopher” (114). Like Swinburne, Arnold’s language remains diffuse. Like Frazer and Harrison, he lacks the “mental discipline” that would put him on guard against his own over-theorizing. And like Bergson, his thinking lacks “consistency and continuity.” Recall Eliot’s chief complaints against Bergson: that he prioritized individual intuition over comprehension and that his theories remained intellectually confused. Arnold, too, “confuses words and meanings” and his criticism, like his poetry, remained too focused on himself, “too reflective, too ruminative” (114). Arnold, that is, remains far too self-absorbed, far too obsessed with his own inner states; a self-concern which overshadows his thought, prevents it from “ris[ing] ever to the first rank” (114). Indeed, as Maud Ellmann argues, for Eliot, the “poet who supplants the priest, the sound that overwhelms the sense, the art that feeds on the declining faith: these parasites eventually destroy the [very] values that they poach upon” (49).

And yet, for Eliot, Arnold remained one of the preeminent figures of the Victorian period. Indeed, his “critical method” and “assumptions” set the “tone” for the second half of the nineteenth century, to which figures such as Walter Pater, Arthur Symonds, George Saintsbury, and even I.A. Richards all “bear witness” (115). As he notes in his essay on Arnold in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, Arnold remains a “representative figure” and proof that a “man’s theory of the place of poetry is not independent of his

views of life in general” (112). Arnold demonstrates for Eliot the extent to which what individuals desire (emotionally, spiritually) can permeate how they interpret and construct their realities. And for Arnold, this involved “confusing poetry and morals in the attempt to find a substitute for religious faith” (108-09). It involves, essentially, overemphasizing reflection and introspection, the typical habit of romantic thought since Rousseau (as Eliot argues). Indeed, in “The Metaphysical Poets,” Eliot famously declares that Tennyson and Browning, like Arnold, remain merely “reflective poet[s]” (64). They “ruminated” in their verse, implicitly privileging a notion of the self as self-enclosed, imprisoned in thought and isolating self-reflection (65). But what Tennyson and Browning expand upon in their dramatic monologues (as inheritors of the ruminating romantic tradition of Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley), Arnold in a sense perfects.

Arnold then, for Eliot, remained both a “representative” and influential figure. As Edward Lobb notes in *T.S. Eliot and the Romantic Critical Tradition*, he was a “symbol” of all the “tendencies in Victorian thought which Eliot most disliked” (76). Indeed, in his 1930 essay “Arnold and Pater,” Eliot traces a lineage that leads directly from Arnold to the (so-called) decadent poets of the 1890s, with Walter Pater as the transitional, pivotal figure. In fact, Eliot goes so far as to say that Arnold “father[ed]” Pater’s very “view of life” (349). In substituting “Culture in the place of religion,” Arnold left “Culture” an empty term which “each man . . . interpret[s] as he pleases” (351). Pater took up Arnold’s substitutionary project, elevating “Culture” as the privileged site for individuals’ existentially transcendent experiences, which as Eliot rightly points out is not so much a theory of aesthetics as it is of ethics, for “it is concerned not with art [per se] but with

life” (354). Accordingly, Pater was less an aesthete for Eliot than a moralist, but he was a moralist who valued experiential feeling or sensation above all other life experiences, a position Eliot condemns as both intellectually insufficient and morally “irresponsible” (356). Recapitulating his argument against Arnold, Eliot asserts that Pater was “incapable of sustained reasoning,” and that “he could not take philosophy or theology seriously,” despite Pater’s clearly philosophically informed aesthetics and epistemology (354-55).⁶⁸ He remained overly concerned with inner sensations, and his emphasis on these sensations, on the effect of a work of art on the viewer’s individual consciousness, overshadowed any critical interest in the external artifact as a cultural object in itself, situated within a particular sociohistorical context. Impression trumped critical reflection, and this, Eliot claims, in part helped “propagate some [of the] confusion between life and art” which perhaps contributed to the “untidy lives” of some of the poets of the 1890s (356).

For Eliot, ultimately, Pater’s chief limitation is that he overemphasizes inward experience, privileging subjective experience over all other forms of knowledge. But of course, this remains Eliot’s chief complaint against nearly all the English poets and critics of the nineteenth century. The objections he raises against Pater remain nearly identical to the objections he raises against Arnold, Swinburne, Blake, Tennyson, and Browning (among others). And they remain similar to the critiques that he raises against his

⁶⁸ Carol Christ notes the ironic similarities between some of Pater and Eliot’s aesthetic positions: for both critics, “[l]iterature composes unique formulas for experience which affect a sensitive but passive perceiver in a determined way. Eliot, like Pater, achieves a universality for private experience by depending upon sensation as the experience art offers. Objects implicitly contain the power of evoking particular sensations” (82-83).

philosophical opponents as well. Each in some way overemphasizes feeling at the expense of thought (consider again his charges against Rousseau or Bergson). Each deprioritizes the external, dissolves it into a series of subjective impressions (as with Swinburne or Pater). And each misunderstands the dialectical relation between the individual and the collective, the inner and the outer, the original and the traditional (as with Blake and Arnold, Tennyson and Browning, or Bergson and Harrison). For Eliot, context matters, because only context provides the coordinates by which the particular acquires meaning. But understanding context requires rigorous intellectual reflection, a sensitivity to the comprehensive material and historical conditions that inform individual objects and persons.

As a poet, Eliot rarely discusses (in essays specifically devoted to them) nineteenth-century novelists, whose concerns with the intersection between individuals and their social matrices might more closely parallel his own. He omits any comprehensive discussion of George Eliot, for instance, a writer whose concern for exploring the dialectical tensions between individuals and their environments certainly overlaps with Eliot's own aesthetic and philosophical interests, and a writer, too, whom Eliot confesses is "representative of [her] age" (along with Dickens and Thackeray) ("Syllabus" 479). Like Eliot, she emphasizes the balance between the internal and the external in her work (i.e., between psychology and sociology). She also strives to dissolve the typical tension (as Eliot would see it) between feeling and thought prevalent in the writing of her romantic predecessors. In her novels, for instance, she elicits emotional responses in her readers through a deliberately considered presentation of her

characters' socially-embedded lives. The dissociation of sensibility Eliot laments in so much of Western literary and philosophical tradition seems largely absent from George Eliot's work.

Interestingly, when Eliot does comment on George Eliot, he seems divided over her. In a letter to his mother (Feb. 6, 1918), Eliot admits that he "cannot endure George Eliot" (219). A month later, however, on March 4th, he affirms that he "was surprised" to find himself "enjoy[ing]" her work, although he quickly qualifies the assertion, noting that "there is a great deal of endless prosing, and I think my memory of pleasure is based chiefly on one story—*Amos Barton*—which struck me as far and away ahead of the rest" (221). Indeed, in an April 1, 1918 letter to Eleanor Hinkley, he expands on this thought, and suggests that "George Eliot had a great talent, and wrote one great story, *Amos Barton*, [but] went steadily downhill afterwards. Her best stunt was just this exact realism of country life, as good in its way as anything in Russian, [but] she thought her business was philosophic tragedy." *Romola*, Eliot concludes, "is the most inartistic novel I have ever read" (227-28). Significantly, when he praises George Eliot here, it is for her consummate realism, for her sustained focus on the external world and the social texture of community existence. But at the same time, he condemns her for her "endless prosing," an inexact phrase, but perhaps implying a critique of George Eliot's excessive authorial interventions into her own novels. Such interventions, T.S. Eliot would argue, introduce into a presentation of rural life a *theory* of that life, and thus a perspective which would subordinate observed experience beneath a particular (and entirely contingent) interpretive rubric.

As he explains in his reflections on sociological methodology (discussed above), Eliot values description above explanation, and the more comprehensive the description the better. Theory—interpretation—merely hoists upon observed events the idiosyncratic perspective of the individual observer. Theory remains partial, incomplete, even a distortion of observed phenomenon. The essence of an object lies in its relation to a context, even as the context derives its meaning from the way that it enframes particular objects. As Eliot notes in 1918's "The Hawthorne Aspect," George Eliot's "genuine" strength lies in her "visual realism," in the materially concrete manner in which she constructs social reality in her work (again, particularly in "Amos Barton") (739). In other words, for Eliot, at her best, George Eliot excels precisely in representing social context, in presenting the frame that provides her characters with meaning, purpose, and perspective. Implicitly, then, Eliot praises Eliot for her methodology, as if she were an anthropologist (a Durkheim or Lévy-Bruhl) documenting the social existence of a given group of individuals. And his criticism of her remains the same criticism he levies against such anthropologists as well: her "prosy" interventions. Thus, as with his critique of romantic and Victorian poets and critics, Eliot's assessment of Eliot remains thoroughly informed by his context-oriented, subject/object, relational philosophy, and further demonstrates the degree to which this perspective thoroughly permeated his thinking, even in his private letters.

As a philosopher, so as a critic, Eliot repeatedly emphasizes the constitutive relation between interiority and exteriority. He consistently resists efforts to resolve the tension between these two terms by subordinating one to the other. To appropriate his

own language from his essay “The Metaphysical Poets” (1921), Eliot resists the dissociation of the inner from the outer, and seeks to affirm their essential, relational, and mutually constitutive unity. For Eliot, the Romantics and Victorians err by placing too much emphasis on internal states, sundered from contextualizing conditions. As with Blake, they overemphasize originality and the idiosyncrasy of private vision. They ignore determining contexts and informing traditions, and in doing so minimize their capacity to represent objects (whether individuals, situations, or feelings) in their ontological fullness.

Indeed, when Eliot famously introduces his notion of the objective correlative in “Hamlet” (1919), he argues precisely that “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events . . . shall be the formula of [a] *particular* emotion, such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked” (48, emphasis in original). That is to say, the external renders apparent the internal, even as the internal finds its definitive expression in the external. The relation between the two terms remains reciprocal, each constitutively reliant upon the other for intelligibility. Because of this, Eliot privileges linguistic exactitude, and correspondingly criticizes the emotionally diffuse, hazy atmospherics of a Swinburne, whose verse (as Eliot reads it) lacks emotional and conceptual clarity. In contrast, when he praises George Eliot, he does so precisely for her “exact realism,” for her capacity to render “country life” in all its particular detail. And since for T.S. Eliot, the external necessarily correlates with the internal, to represent one implies the sufficient representation of the other. Exact

representations of social reality (“thick descriptions,” to again quote Perl’s reference to Clifford Geertz), that is, translate into representations of subjective experience.

Thus, the same preoccupations Eliot revealed as a graduate student in philosophy emerge in his criticism as well. Although his philosophical formulations regarding the relation between interiority and exteriority (knower and known, self and other, subject and object) in his graduate essays and dissertation remain more conceptually robust than in his critical work, these earlier formulations nonetheless utterly permeate Eliot’s aesthetics. The notion that the poles of this binary remain indissoluble and that in fact the two opposed terms emerge simultaneously each out of the other informs the content of his critique of Western writers since Rousseau. For Eliot, the individual self is not an isolated, self-defining, self-authenticating, trans-contextual entity. It exists neither as a monad nor as a preexistent, substantive essence. The self is not sufficient unto itself, but rather exists only as a conceptual construct situated within a matrix of contending, conditioning external forces. When writers attempt to construe the self as a definitive, transcendent essence, they distort and misrepresent the self and its relations to its social reality. Significantly, in the same way that Eliot continues to emphasize the irreducible relation between the internal and external in his philosophical and critical work, so, too, does he repeatedly explore the tension between these two notions in his poetry. Indeed, from the beginning of his career as a poet until his final work as a dramatist, Eliot continually examines the constitutive relations between subject and object, interiority and exteriority, self and other. Even in his earliest poems, before his encounter with Bradley, Eliot is already working from these assumptions, at least in nascent form. Chapter Four

will explore Eliot's early poetry up through *The Waste Land*, and discuss the ways in which this central binary undergirds his representation of individuals and their social environments.

CHAPTER IV
THE DISRUPTIVE GAZE: EXTERIORITY AND
INTERIORITY FROM THE EARLY POEMS TO *THE WASTE LAND*

In *Mastery and Escape*, Jewel Spears Brooker notes that *Four Quartets*, in many ways, “reads like [F.H.] Bradley versified” (187). She suggests that the poem dramatizes certain Bradleyan philosophical concepts, particular his notions of “immediate” and “transcendent” experience, as well as his general critique of conceptual thought and analysis (187-88). Brooker’s underlying argument, of course, is that Eliot remained a poet deeply informed by his philosophical concerns and influences, a claim William Skaff makes as well, although more forcefully. Indeed, he begins his study, *The Philosophy of T.S. Eliot*, by claiming that Eliot “is the first poet since Coleridge to have constructed a comprehensive philosophical system out of eclectic sources and then to have allowed those ideas to determine the nature of his verse and his principles of literary criticism” (3).⁶⁹ To claim that Eliot’s philosophical views constitute a coherent philosophical system perhaps reaches too far, but they certainly reflect a comprehensive concern with the epistemological problem of knowledge. As I argued in Chapter Three, throughout his philosophical work, Eliot remains consistently focused on the question of how knowers know what they know (i.e., how knowers know “reality”), and thus with the

⁶⁹ Skaff goes so far as to conclude that Eliot’s philosophy influenced “even the conduct of his personal life” (3).

question of the relation between subject and object, self and other, or inner and outer. As Skaff rightly intimates, such interests dictate the thematic concerns of his poetry as well.

Of course, as Eliot himself remarks in “Dante” (*The Sacred Wood*, 1920), the philosopher and the poet perform different tasks, which “cannot be carried on at the same time” (95). Whereas the philosopher attempts to “deal with ideas in themselves,” the poet attempts to “realize” them in verse (95). But this does not mean, Eliot stresses, that poetry as such cannot be philosophical. “The poet can deal with philosophic ideas,” he suggests, “not as matter for argument, but as matter for inspection” (95). He continues: “poetry can be penetrated by a philosophic idea, it can deal with this idea when it has reached the point of immediate acceptance, when it has become almost a physical modification” (95). And in the case of Dante, he argues, it is indeed impossible to separate out the philosophical (or theological) from the poetic (95). But the same applies to Eliot as well. For critics like Donald Childs, for instance, “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” remains a profoundly Bergsonian poem (53),⁷⁰ while for Brooker, “Gerontion” remains fundamentally Bradleyan (*Mastery* 82). Other poems, too, from the same early period (circa 1918), employ overt philosophical language or themes, such as “Mr. Eliot’s Sunday Morning Service” and “Whispers of Immortality.”

Significantly, even the poetry Eliot wrote prior to his exposure to Bradley (or Bergson) reflects a pronounced concern with philosophical ideas, however obliquely or ironically treated. In 1910’s “First Debate between the Body and Soul,” for example,

⁷⁰ Childs argues that “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” “is in many ways dogmatically Bergsonian, but it is not about Bergson. This philosophy in ‘Rhapsody’ is a matter not of presenting ideas but of realizing them” (53).

Eliot refers to the “pure Idea” and the “Absolute,” clearly indicating some familiarity (however ironized) with Hegelian or neo-Hegelian thought. In “Goldfish” (also 1910), Eliot refers (again ironically) to “eternal truths,” “problems of the soul,” and of “Philosophy [drunk] through a paper straw.” And in “Spleen” (yet again 1910), Eliot alludes to the “Absolute,” drawing here on a specifically philosophical vocabulary in reference to God (i.e., God as the abstract God of the philosophers, rather than an anthropomorphized personality). From his earliest poetry, then, all the way to *Four Quartets*, Eliot reveals an abiding interest in philosophical ideas and terminology, varyingly incorporating these elements into his work in sometimes subtle, sometimes ironic, and sometimes explicit ways.

However, Eliot does more than simply satirize metaphysical systems or terminology in his poetry. Rather, his work reveals (or dramatizes) his own metaphysical preoccupations and speculations. For in the same way that his chief philosophical concern in his graduate work involves the relation between interiority and exteriority (or subject and object), so, too, does this remain a chief concern in his poetry as well, both early and late. This chapter will explore the way in which Eliot dramatizes the inner/outer binary in his early poetry, from his first unpublished poems all the way to *The Waste Land*. Of course, an exploration of the relation between the internal and the external necessarily entails, too, a discussion of human subjectivity. For Eliot’s particular representation of these two binary terms suggests a view of the self in which (for his unpublished work, especially) the internal reduces to the external, and the external to the internal. That is to say, Eliot collapses the space between these two poles, leaves no

substantive gap between them. At first, I argue, he appears to privilege the external over the internal, since to reduce the internal to the external and the external to the internal is necessarily to flatten both into an objective appearance—a surface. And yet, as his work progresses, Eliot offers ever more complicated construals of this basic model, so that by the time he reaches “Prufrock” (and especially *The Waste Land*), a model of self emerges predicated upon the (re)development of a gap between the internal and external.

Interiority as such develops out of an individual’s experience of reflexive self-externalization, an experience however, which paradoxically suggests the ultimate identity of the inner and the outer (in that the two terms remain dialectically mutually constitutive). Thus, even as he introduces a gap between the two terms, he (re)collapses it, thereby not only inverting the binary but in the end dissolving it.

Eliot the Laforguian?

In *T.S. Eliot’s Silent Voices*, John Mayer notes that Eliot’s discovery of the nineteenth-century French poet Jules Laforgue in December of 1908 “changed him into the poet we know” (39).⁷¹ Prior to his reading of Laforgue, Eliot’s poetry (what there was of it) lacked identity and direction. Poems such as “[A Lyric],” “A Fable for Feasters” and “At Graduation” (all published in 1905 in *The Smith Academy Record*), remain stylistically and thematically unremarkable and derivative, which should not surprise, of course, given his very young age at the time. Indeed, in the 1937 essay “Byron,” Eliot

⁷¹ As is well-known, Eliot came to Laforgue through Arthur Symons’ 1899 *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. For a brief overview, see James Miller’s *T.S. Eliot: The Making of an American Poet* (99-104). See, too, David Rosen (“T.S. Eliot and the Lost Youth of Modern Poetry”), who notes that Eliot’s encounter with Symons “is surely the clearest line of demarcation between Eliot’s Harvard and high school styles” (479).

himself admits to what degree these earliest poems, especially “A Fable for Feasters,” remained overly influenced by his romantic precursors. Byron was his “first boyhood enthusiasm,” he confesses, and influenced him to write in these early poems “in the manner of *Don Juan*, tinged with that disillusion and cynicism only possible at the age of sixteen” (*On Poetry* 223).⁷² Yet, by 1908, with his discovery of Laforgue, Eliot’s poetic project began to take on new purpose and direction, and he began to forcefully cast aside previous poetic models. Mayer argues that Laforgue “attracted Eliot for personal reasons; there was a fundamental psychic affinity” that drew him to the French poet’s work and to the “Laforguian turn of mind” (39, 40). And he goes on to point his readers to Eliot’s own reflections on Laforgue’s influence in *On Poetry and Poets* (in his 1940 essay, “Yeats”), where Eliot writes that young poets will “look for masters” who will help them discover the “consciousness” of what they “want to say” as well as the “kind of poetry that is in [them] to write” (295).⁷³

But Mayer claims that Eliot “experienced a kind of total identification with Laforgue’s way of thinking,” that he “touched Eliot elementally” (40). “Laforgue the man,” Mayer argues, “reached to the core of Eliot’s being” (40). While Laforgue certainly proved of monumental influence to Eliot, a point Eliot himself makes, Mayer nevertheless overstates the nature of that influence.⁷⁴ In 1950’s “What Dante Means to

⁷² James Miller argues that Eliot placed the setting of “A Fable for Feasters” purposefully in a monastery in order to “shield from the view of his teachers and parents his poetic model, Byron’s *Don Juan*” (37).

⁷³ Eliot affirms here, too, that the “kind of poetry that I needed, to teach me the use of my own voice, did not exist in English at all; it was only to be found in French” (295).

⁷⁴ Here is how Ronald Schuchard puts it: “In Laforgue . . . Eliot experienced a shock of recognition: here was a poet with a seemingly similar temperament, a poet experiencing similar difficulties and desires, a poet whose voice was more intimate and less intimidating than Baudelaire’s” (70).

Me,” for instance, Eliot reflects on Laforgue’s impact on him, confessing “that he was the first to teach me how to speak, to teach me the poetic possibilities of my own idiom of speech” (126). Eliot notes, too, that in Laforgue he found a “temperament akin” to his own, and found as well a “form of expression” in his work which provided “a clue to the discovery” of his (Eliot’s) “own form” (126). That is to say, Eliot found in Laforgue (his style, his temperament) an authorizing model. Through him, Eliot found the way to begin articulating his own vision. But Mayer’s claim overstates Eliot’s relation to his French precursor, in that it blurs Eliot’s distinct concerns with Laforgue’s. It risks reducing Eliot to Laforgue, as if Eliot were merely an English version of the French original.⁷⁵ For just as Eliot’s philosophical views did not find their origin in Bradley, but only their “confirm[ation]” (Langbaum 108), so, too, did Eliot’s “way of thinking” not find its origin in Laforgue, but only the validation of its mode of expression.

Like the bulk of Eliot’s poetry, Laforgue’s poems often focus on the city (“whoring Paris,” as he puts it in “The First Night”) and its milling denizens (*Selected* 16). As Wallace Fowlie argues, Laforgue dramatizes human life—indeed the “earth” itself—“as some abysmal mediocrity,” and yet “always ends by parodying his own anguish” (87). Indeed, this parodic or ironic impulse is perhaps what most distinguishes his work, an impulse that takes on added force as Laforgue develops the character (or persona) of the clown Pierrot (Fowlie 88). And it is this Laforguian irony, Fowlie

⁷⁵ Schuchard notes that Eliot’s earliest 1908 poems (such as “Nocturne,” “Humouresque,” “Spleen,” and “Suite Clownesque”) have generally “been . . . dismissed as slight, derivate detritus of Eliot’s attempts to master Laforgue’s symbolist techniques” (76).

reflects, which Eliot goes on to appropriate for his own project (89).⁷⁶ And yet, as suggested above, Laforgue only enabled Eliot to speak in a certain way. He gave Eliot a language with which to begin articulating his own distinctive vision (as well as certain tropes to draw on—the pathetic clown-figure, for instance). Significantly, key differences exist between the two poets. Despite his irony, Laforgue remains manifestly a “poet of interiority,” who privileges the inner landscape of subjective response. He offers a Cartesian conception of subjectivity, in which individuals remain constitutively severed from the objective world of perception. His speakers are observers, who look out on the world, find it baffling, inscrutable, or indifferent, and who remain marked by a sense of their own self-delimiting inwardness.

In Laforgue’s “The First Night,” for instance, the speaker “meditate[s] at [his] window,” separated from the city evening which he observes (16). Yet through the repeated use of the first person possessive pronoun (“My cat,” “my window”) as well as through the act of positing himself as an actor in his own drama (“I imagine myself within the cemetery”), he reinforces his own inner subjective position (16). In “The Impossible,” too, his speaker reflects on “pilgrims of pale solitudes” among “distant worlds,” thus suggesting a model of the self characterized by isolation and finitude (and thus also implicitly emphasizing the inward while at the same time opposing that sense of inwardness against an outer, alien cosmos) (15). And in “Apotheosis,” the speaker ponders the “dismal isolation” of the stars and his/her own separation from the “universal

⁷⁶ John Soldo affirms, too, that Eliot was most affected by Laforgue’s “wit,” by his attempt to “stamp out sentiment” in favor of a “detached, impersonal” poetic persona (141-42).

order” (9). In each of these instances, Laforgue portrays solitary observers, self-contained and self-constituted in their Cartesian isolation, gazing upon an objectified, exteriorized otherness, whether of the city or the “universal order.”⁷⁷ Eliot, as I will argue, challenges this binary throughout his poetry.

Inventions of the March Hare: Eliot and the Poetry of Exteriority

Although Eliot’s early poems clearly remain indebted to Laforgue, as Mayer rightly notes, they nonetheless map out an understanding of the relationship between subjects and objects distinct to Eliot (a relationship he will go on to develop in his graduate work). Placing Eliot’s early work in context of Laforgue at the beginning of my discussion thus helps not only trace out the stylistic genealogy of his poetry, but (more importantly) helps illustrate Eliot’s underlying epistemological and anthropological assumptions.⁷⁸ These assumptions emerge even in Eliot’s earliest work. For example, in Eliot’s ostensibly Laforguian 1909 “Convictions,” Eliot introduces the figure of the marionette, an image to which he will return repeatedly (implicitly and explicitly) in these early poems. He offers in this poem a series of vignettes, all of which serve to critique the Boston upper class and its social practices and posturings. He ironizes bourgeois courting rituals (the “Hero and heroine” who “Go picking paper roses), drawing room philosophizing (his “Paladins” who talk of “effect and cause”), and bourgeois femininity (the “lady with a fan” who “Cries to her waiting-maid”). He

⁷⁷ All three of these poems come from Laforgue’s earliest volume of poetry, translated by William Jay Smith as *Outcries of the Earth (Le Sanglot de la terre)*. Smith notes that Laforgue composed these poems between 1878 and 1881 (5).

⁷⁸ In a sense, Laforgue helps serve as a foil for better understanding Eliot’s own distinct philosophical preoccupations.

suggests that each of these individuals vapidly reproduces certain social conventions, such that any supposed authentic inner space reduces merely to inscribed social formulas. For the poem's speaker, such individuals remain little more than puppet-figures: "My marionettes (or so they say) / Have these keen moments every day" (11).

Thus, in "Convictions,"⁷⁹ Eliot portrays characters lacking in depth or inwardness, existing only as exteriorized surfaces. He collapses the gap between interiority and exteriority, here privileging the exterior as the sole determining locus of identity. He suggests, too, that their "enthusiasm" is merely performative, a hollow display for some imagined "audience." "The enthusiasm is intense," he writes, "They see the outlines of the stage / Conceived upon a scale immense / And even in this later age / Await an audience open-mouthed" (11). They subject themselves to an imagined exteriorizing gaze which reduces them to objects intended solely for visual consumption. Nothing remains but the objectified performance, so much so, that the speaker feels he can assert a kind of imagined predicative control over their actions. They are *his* puppets ("my marionettes"), a possessive declaration with which the poem both opens and closes. They remain objects seemingly subject to his manipulative control, a figurative suggestion which only serves to amplify the poem's insistence on the utter lack of inwardness displayed by these marionette-figures. Nor does the speaker himself offer an alternative model. As David Rosen notes, the narrative persona here "seems detached or estranged," the "sense of a self . . . weak" (478). What the poem offers is an observing, objective/objectifying,

⁷⁹ As David Rosen rightly suggests, even the title "Convictions" is thoroughly ironic (478).

ironizing gaze, itself without depth or substance. What remains, then, is a vision of subjectivity (inflected by class-critique) as inherently flat and mechanically performative.

With variations, Eliot repeats this theme throughout much of his early “Laforguian” work. Again and again, he portrays consciousness as imitative and superficial, lacking in both depth and authenticity. No core essence of self emerges in these early poems; individuals all too often remain shells, reflective surfaces that merely repeat what they perceive in their social environments. Indeed, this general concern with exteriorization remains the overriding impulse. In “Interlude in London” (1911), for instance, the speaker describes himself as “hibernat[ing],” “Indifferent,” “apathetic,” and “Careless” (16). “We hibernate among the bricks,” he writes, “And live across the window panes / With marmalade and tea at six / Indifferent to what the wind does / Indifferent to sudden rains” (16). In this strikingly Prufrockian poem, he again dramatizes the sterility of social formalities and rituals. Subjectivity remains superficial, performative, and repetitive. The self (interiority) attenuates into an exteriorized parody of itself. The speaker himself (as a speaker) recedes behind the anonymity of the collective “We,” thus again revealing a “detached or estranged” and weakened self. Of course, the image of hibernation might suggest the latent possibility for the existence of sense of interiority (i.e., it exists, but sleeps), but the space as such remains a closed, negated space, lacking any positive content or sense of an openness to (self) experience. What remains is an experience of oneself merely as a surface, an object for others to perceive *as* an object (devoid of substantive depth).

Even a poem like “Silence,” which might otherwise seem to indicate a clear sense of interiority, in that the speaker experiences a concrete emotional state (fear), in the end privileges exteriority. Again like Prufrock, the speaker in this poem wanders “Along the city streets,” observing the “garrulous waves of life / Shrink and divide” (18). As in many of Laforgue’s poems, the speaker here witnesses city life as a detached observer, experiencing its impressions as an outsider of sorts. The city thus remains an external object, removed and detached from the roaming, disembodied “I” of the speaker. But the speaker here also confesses to a seemingly authentic emotional experience. He encounters a moment in the city when its bustle seems suddenly stilled, and he finds the moment terrifying: “This is the ultimate hour / When life is justified. / The seas of experience / That were so broad and deep, / Are suddenly still. / You may say what you will, / At such peace I am terrified. / There is nothing else beside” (18). In a surprising inversion, what he at first characterizes as the broadness and *depth* of city life ceases, and what might have turned into a moment of respite becomes instead its opposite. For it is a peace which seems inaccessible and alienating. It shuts the speaker out; he cannot penetrate or fully articulate its (deeper) meaning. The terror arises precisely from his experience of estrangement from city existence—the city flattens out, stills, motion and activity cease, its depth erodes into an occluded and occluding impenetrable surface.

In his notes to this poem, Christopher Ricks points out the resonance between Eliot’s speaker’s terror and Pascal’s terror at the inscrutable “eternal silence” of the

universe's "immense spaces" (126).⁸⁰ Indeed, in the *Pensées*, Pascal goes on to reflect on the "small space I occupy and which I see swallowed up in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I know nothing and which know nothing of me" (19). The universe as such presents itself to the rationalist human mind as a vast cipher, an impenetrable blank which the individual confronts as an imposing externality.⁸¹ In "Silence," the city's sudden calm presents the speaker with a similar sense of an imposing externalized impenetrability. In contrast to this view, though, Lyndall Gordon sees this poem as exclusively autobiographical, arguing that Eliot relates here a sublime experience of mystical transcendence, what she calls "his first and perhaps most lucid description of the timeless moment" (23). She argues that the poem dramatizes an experience of "peace," and that this moment would remain in Eliot's memory over the course of his life "as a tantalizing reminder of an experience beyond his grasp" (24). For Gordon, then, the poem suggests a moment of profound spiritual penetration or insight, however inarticulately expressed (and thus the opposite of Rick's view). But her reading suppresses the Pascalian terror the poem also conveys, and in doing so misrepresents the nature of the experience the poem relates. For the poem seems less about the penetration of some ineffable mystery than about its sheer impenetrability. The world reveals itself in the poem not as an object susceptible to rationalistic understanding or the experience of

⁸⁰ In the *Pensées*, Pascal writes (in translation), "The eternal silence of these infinite spaces fills me with dread" (66). Ricks notes that Pater quoted this passage in *The Renaissance*, and that Eliot "marked it in his copy" (126).

⁸¹ Pascal goes on to suggest that the individual remains just as inscrutable an object to rational inquiry as does the universe itself. "Yet this is the thing we understand least," he argues, "man is to himself the great prodigy in nature, for he cannot conceive what body is, and still less what mind is, and least of all how a body can be joined to a mind. This is his supreme difficulty, and yet it is his very being" (65). That is to say, for Pascal here, human beings themselves remain objectively inscrutable.

mystical unity, but as a strange, alienating otherness. As Eliot ironically puts it in 1910's "First Debate between the Body and Soul": "life evaporates into a smile" (65). What might seem possessed of discernable, comprehensible depth "evaporates" into the experience of an unfathomable superficiality.

Of course, individual portraiture dominates the early poetry much more than first-person subjective mystical reflections, and these portraiture almost unvaryingly involve the "marionette" trope, whether explicitly or implicitly. In "Goldfish" (1910), for example, Eliot directly refers to the poem's characters as "marionettes": "And the waltzes turn, return, / Float and fall, / Like the cigarettes / Of our marionettes / Inconsequent, intolerable" (26). As in "Convictions," the poem offers a critique of upper middle class social forms and practices, and suggests the essential vacuity of bourgeois consciousness. The poem's characters' actions remain hollow, empty, formalized (externalized) gestures. As they "turn" and "return," they merely performatively repeat a series of ritualized social activities. As puppets (lacking depth or the capacity for reflection or deviation), they remain "inconsequent, intolerable." Characterized only by their "Verandah customs" and "White flannel ceremonial[s]" (as he writes later in the poem), these individuals lack any sense of authentic interiority or even individual distinctiveness (28).

Other poems, such as "Mandarins" (1910), indirectly evoke this marionette trope.⁸² Section I of the poem, for instance, portrays an unnamed man (amidst an equally anonymous crowd) who "stands and waits / Upon his own intrepid dignity; / With fixed regardless eyes— / Looking neither out nor in— / The centre of formalities" (19). The

⁸² For another explicit use of the "marionette" trope, see Eliot's 1909 poem "Humouresque."

poem provides a “hero” here who remains essentially a blank. He remains immobile, self-enclosed, and unreadable. He looks “neither out nor in,” suggesting a certain vacuity, the absence of any substantive inner space. What he *is*, is only a “centre of formalities,” a shell of social performativity without reference to any inner content. Section II of the poem provides a similar portrait of “Two ladies of uncertain age” who likewise enact a socially prescribed script, as they drink their tea “With assured tranquility” and “approve / The abstract sunset” (20). The poem provides no sense that these “ladies” contemplate the sunset in itself as a concrete (non-abstract) reality. Rather, using the notion of “sunset” as a verbal counter, they enact a social ritual, repeating a pre-established formalized routine (i.e., tea and disinterested remarks on a sanitized natural world that appears only to exist for the benefit of idle, weakly aesthetic reflections).

Indeed, as with many of Charles Dickens’ characters, Eliot’s personages in these early poems remain defined almost entirely by their exterior traits, appearances, and prescribed social practices. “Suite Clownesque” (again 1910)⁸³ explicitly makes this point. In the poem, Eliot presents the “comedian” focal character as a “self-embodied role, his soul / Concentrated in his vest and nose” (32). He is literally a performer, another kind of puppet, and apparently lacks any sense of identity outside of his given “self-embodied role,” a point Christopher Ricks makes, too, in his comments on the poem (165). He remains utterly a surface, his “soul” present only as exteriorized in his clothing

⁸³ Eliot’s “comedian” figure echoes Laforgue’s Pierrot, as Ricks comments in his notes to the poem (162). But Laforgue’s Pierrot served, as John Mayer argues, as “a new and modern embodiment of the traditional French clown whose sophisticated and whimsical playfulness is a function of Laforgue’s personal need to defend himself from his own Romantic vulnerability” (44). Eliot’s comedian, on the other hand, possesses no such “sophisticated and whimsical playfulness.” He remains an object of critique, rather than self-liberated expressiveness.

and body (his “vest and nose”). Even the poem’s description of his immediate physical and social environment suggests the degree to which his world remains defined exclusively in terms of performativity. The poem describes his world as if it were a kind of stage set, replete with “painted colonnades,” “terra cotta fawns,” “potted palms,” “lawns,” “cigarettes and serenades” (32). As with the man in Section I of “Mandarins” or the ladies in Section II, the “comedian” of “Suite Clownesque” suggests the degree to which individuals lack any substantively self-aware sense of inwardness. No gap exists between individuals’ exteriorized social performances (or even environments) and an inner self-consciousness capable of critically reflecting on that performance. Indeed, the poem scathingly and ironically reflects: “Here’s the comedian again / With broad dogmatic vest, and nose / Nose that interrogates the stars, / Impressive, sceptic, scarlet nose; / The most expressive, real of men” (32). The poem ironically suggests here, of course, that the “comedian” lacks any authentic expressiveness or substantive reality. He remains a façade, a shell, a reflected copy of other individuals who themselves remain reflected copies. All that remains is surface.

This notion of exteriorization perhaps takes its most articulate form in 1909’s “On a Portrait,” first published in the *Harvard Advocate* (Miller 78). In the poem, the speaker describes (a portrait of) a woman who “stands at evening in the room alone” (*Complete* 599). Yet in describing the woman, the speaker admits that her expression resists comprehension. Rather than appearing as a “tranquil goddess carved of stone,” whose facial expression would prove readily interpretable, she seems instead “evanescent” and “immaterial.” “Her dark eyes,” the speaker confesses, “keep their secrets hid from us,”

and she remains “Beyond the circle of our thought.” The woman remains closed to the speaker, an incomprehensible façade whose inner spaces elude detection. Yet in closing off access to the woman’s interiority and presenting her only as an inscrutable externalized object, the poem also implicitly calls into question interiority as such. The gazing eye only has access to surface realities. Interiority remains a supposition at best, and at worst, merely an internalization of externalized forms, falsely perceived as authentic (as in “Mandarins” or “Suite Clownesque”). Indeed, the poem’s final lines seem to suggest precisely this point by associatively linking the woman with a parrot: “The parrot on his bar, a silent spy, / Regards her with a patient curious eye” (599). Is the woman, too, a kind of parrot, an evasive mimic, whose elusiveness only indicates her essentially imitative subjectivity? Does the same hold for the speaker, too?

As noted in the Introduction, Francis Dickey makes precisely this point in “Parrot’s Eye: A Portrait by Manet and Two by T.S. Eliot.” She sees both the woman in Eliot’s poem as well as the poet-speaker as human parrots.⁸⁴ The woman is literally only a painting, an “aesthetic object,” a pure surface on which the speaker projects his own speculations regarding her supposed interiority (130). And of course, as a painting, she merely aesthetically mimics a certain social form and appearance. And inasmuch as the poem implicitly associates the parrot with the woman, it also associates it with the speaker, since the parrot’s gaze appears to replace the speaker’s gaze at the poem’s end (129). Is the speaker, Dickey asks, only parroting romantic clichés concerning interiority

⁸⁴ While I largely concur with Dickey’s reading of “On a Portrait,” I disagree with her interpretation of “Portrait of a Lady,” a position which I will discuss in more detail below.

as he contemplates the woman's portrait? Is his attempt to discern her authentic thoughts and emotions merely a derivative exercise? Dickey's answer is yes, for the poem as she sees it ultimately "foreclose[es] the possibility of both inwardness and originality" for both characters (124). The woman remains an inscrutable façade, while the speaker "forgets himself in contemplation of an aesthetic object" (130). Indeed, Dickey rightly concludes that "the object of his absorption raises doubts about whether there is any inner space to enter—hers or his" (130). The "figure of the parrot," she explains, "returns [the speaker] to the painting's surface and to the imitative rather than expressive quality of his thoughts or interior speech" (130). In other words, Eliot's poem suggests the extent to which interiority itself remains a kind of illusion. In suggesting that the experience of inwardness remains an illusory construction, the poem suggests, too, that individuals remain constituted by the very façades they present both to others and to themselves. Thus, as Dickey puts it, "Eliot's conception of subjectivity emerges in this poem as both flat and theatrical (or dramatic)" (135), which is to say both superficial and imitative. As in "Convictions" or "Goldfish," "Mandarins" or "Suite Clownesque," Eliot again offers an image of the individual as a kind of marionette, a puppet devoid of any sense of substantive interiority, parroting instead inherited social (or literary) form.

In each of these early poems, then, Eliot appears to invert the standard romantic privileging of interiority over exteriority. He suggests instead a model of self wherein the self appears almost exclusively socially constructed, over-determined by class and its corresponding social forms and rituals. Thus, the self exists only as the externalized reproduction of certain structuring social conditions. His early characters remain

depthless edifices, lacking in both self-awareness and individual distinctiveness. Each of his marionettes, in the end, remain thoroughly interchangeable with one another. Nothing differentiates them since each remains merely a superficial copy of certain socially prescribed identities. As Arthur Symons reflects in 1908's *The Symbolist Movement* (the edition Eliot read),⁸⁵ "Are we not all puppets, in a theatre of marionettes, in which the parts we play, the dresses we wear, the very emotion whose dominance gives its express form to our face, have all been chosen for us?" (154).⁸⁶ Contra the romantic notion of an inner, authentic identity which constitutes individuals' core self (as in Wordsworth, Arnold, or Pater), these early poems suggest that no such inner space exists. Even the speaker of these poems remains a distant and severely attenuated presence. He or she appears more a roaming, disembodied eye than a situated, centered, self-knowing and self-revealing voice delineated by some well-defined sense of inwardness.

Again, in this, Eliot differentiates himself from precursors such as Laforgue, for whom the speaker's inwardness remains a prominent element of his poetry, even when ironically rendered. As Symons suggests, even in his "parodies," Laforgue's "frivolity becomes an escape from the arrogance of . . . the world as it appears to the sober majority" (107). Indeed, he continues, Laforgue remains "terribly conscious of daily life, cannot omit . . . a single hour of the day; and his flight to the moon is in sheer desperation" (107). Or, as Mayer puts it, "Laforgue preferred the strategy of the persona to give voice to the range of his own feelings" (44). That is to say, Laforgue's work

⁸⁵ This is the second edition. Symons originally published his book in 1899.

⁸⁶ Symons writes this in his essay on Maeterlinck, immediately following the chapter on Laforgue.

emphasizes the existence of a gap between a clearly delineated inwardness and an external world the individual finds hostile, vapid, or artificial. Eliot, on the other hand, not only blurs the distinction between the inner and the outer (as he will do in his philosophical papers), but in the end suggests that the internal reduces to the external, such that the internal loses any sense of substantive self-consistency. Façade triumphs over supposed inner essence. Or, at the very least, Eliot confesses to a profound tension between the two polarities, which results in the end in the primacy of the external in these poems.

This is not to suggest that these early poems merely map out an early version of Eliotesque “impersonality.” In deemphasizing interiority (whether the speaker’s or the characters’), these poems implicitly advance an epistemology and ontological thesis. They posit a particular notion of knowing and a particular notion of being according to which the external gains priority over the internal. Yes, these poems reflect a kind of “escape from emotion” and “personality,” as Eliot famously puts it in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (43), but only in the sense of an “attack” on the “metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul,” as he also puts it in that essay (42). That is to say, in deemphasizing the internal, these poems also suggest a certain model of subjectivity that runs counter to those models of subjectivity that predominated among Eliot’s literary precursors. These early poems already work to challenge normative notions of human being in a way that his philosophical and anthropological work will only extend. Eliot challenges notions of the “personal” or of “personality” in his poetry not necessarily in an effort to “hide himself,” as Maud Ellmann puts it her critique of Eliot in the *Poetics of*

Impersonality (15), but because he also perceived the epistemological complexity than characterized the relation between internality and externality. Critics like Grover Smith, who argue that impersonality functions for Eliot merely as a mask by which he “disguises” otherwise “ordinary romantic material,” inadvertently reduce Eliot’s work to some transparent exercise in emotional purgation and confession (28).⁸⁷ And while a basis for this view certainly exists, these critics (i.e., Maud, Smith) neglect to take into account the intellectual consonance between his poetry, literary criticism, and his philosophical and anthropological work. For in fact, as discussed above, his philosophical work reveals a thinker deeply concerned about the relation between subjects and objects, and so, too, does his poetry. Of course, these earliest poems almost invariably privilege the exterior over the interior, simply reversing, then, the binary established by his literary predecessors, such as Arnold and Browning. Yet even in these early poems, Eliot begins to question such a simplistic inversion, suggesting that a more complicated relation exists between internality and externality than these marionette poems necessarily imply. Indeed, in “Portrait of a Lady,” written only a year after “On a Portrait,” Eliot moves beyond a mere reversal of the binary to suggest, instead, the way in which its two poles remain fundamentally mutually constitutively interrelated.

“Portrait of a Lady”: Another Marionette Poem?

Recall Eliot’s reflections in 1914’s “Objects: Real, Unreal, Ideal and Imaginary” in which he asserts that “in becoming aware that [an object] is an object, I become aware

⁸⁷ Consider, too, Lyndall Gordon, who grounds Eliot’s project exclusively in the language of “confessional urgency” (324).

that I am a subject, and its objectivity is relative to a subject” (169). In a very Hegelian formulation, Eliot suggests that subjects and objects exist only in terms of one another. Neither exists in isolation from the other; each roots itself constitutively in its relation with the other.⁸⁸ To contemplate an object, then, is to implicitly situate oneself as a subject in relation to that object. And conversely, to assume subjectivity is implicitly to assume an objective reality distinct from one’s own subjective position which gives it coherence and definition. Objectification implies a subject for whom objects manifest *as* objects. Otherwise elements in the material (and metaphysical) world sink back into a spatially, temporally, or conceptually undifferentiated (because unperceived or undesigned) mass. As Eliot puts it, “For as [an object] passes out of our vision, it resumes its place in reality from which it was for the moment detached . . . it is in the end completely absorbed by its relations” (170). Only a subject can arrest an object and separate it (however momentarily and provisionally) from its continuity within its more ontologically comprehensive context. Indeed, in “Objects: Content, Objectivity, and Existence” (also 1914), Eliot affirms that an object “is anything upon which the attention may be directed” (165). The “real world,” he suggests, “is built up upon the moment of perception,” even if the “real and ideal, perception and cognition” all remain “abstractions, legitimate enough, but relative and unsubstantial” (166). In other words,

⁸⁸ In his introductory study of Hegel, for instance, Peter Singer writes that for Hegel, “Self-consciousness . . . cannot exist in isolation. If consciousness is to form a proper picture of itself, it needs some contrast. It requires an object from which to differentiate itself. I can only become aware of myself if I am also aware of something that is not myself” (75). Or, as Hegel himself puts in the *Phenomenology*: “self-consciousness is the reflection out of the being of the world of sense and perception, and is essentially the return from *otherness*” (105, italics in original).

here, only four years after his earliest Laforguian poetry, Eliot clearly grapples with many of the same issues that inform his dramatizations of subject/object relations in his poetry.

As argued above, Eliot largely emphasizes in these early poems the object side of the binary. His characters remain stick-figures, puppets, animate objects without an animating autonomy. They lack “soul,” as it were. They exist only as objects for the gaze of others, and in existing only for others lack existence in themselves (i.e., as self-knowing consciousnesses aware of themselves *as* subjects). And yet, even as Eliot is writing poems that dramatize individuals as utterly externalized creatures, a counter-movement emerges in his work which complicates this formulation. This counter-movement becomes most initially manifest in Eliot’s 1910 “Portrait of a Lady,” first published in the journal *Others* (1915), and then again in 1917’s *Prufrock and Other Observations*⁸⁹ (Miller 148-49).

Francis Dickey reads “Portrait of a Lady” as further confirmation of her thesis that Eliot, almost without exception, is a poet of exteriority (a direct reversal of those such as Lyndall Gordon, J. Hillis Miller, or A. David Moody who affirm Eliot as a poet of interiority). Indeed, she claims that over the course of his career, from his earliest poetry to his verse dramas, Eliot more and more dramatizes individuals as “both flat and theatrical,” lacking any sense of interiority as they merely ape (or parrot) exterior, prescribed social identities (135). Dickey argues that “Portrait of a Lady” (along with “On a Portrait”) inaugurates this trend in Eliot’s work, since (for Dickey) Eliot’s poem

⁸⁹ Even the title of this collection (*Prufrock and Other Observations*) is significant, in that it suggests a perceiving consciousness observing others as objects of study.

attempts to “represent the very idea of inwardness as itself an imitation or reflection” (114). That is to say, Dickey reads “Portrait of a Lady” as an argument affirming the illusory nature of interiority; that what individuals (potentially) perceive as an authentic inner space is in fact only an internalization of external social conditionings. Still, while she’s right to point out the way in which Eliot privileges exteriority in poems such as “On a Portrait” and (to an extent) “Portrait of a Lady,” she neglects to grasp the way in which he nevertheless goes on to complicate his own project.

Of course, as with so many of Eliot’s early poems, “Portrait of a Lady” certainly portrays characters who appear to lack any discernable sense of inwardness, at least at first. Indeed, through the bulk of the poem, the speaker and the woman remain marionette figures, puppets who unreflectingly enact the social codes appropriate to their class position. Even as the poem opens, it presents a description of the setting which, as in “Suite Clownesque,” suggests the theater and its attendant scenery: “Among the smoke and fog of a December afternoon / You have the scene arrange itself—as it will seem to do— / With ‘I have saved this afternoon for you’; / And four wax candles in the darkened room, / Four rings of light upon the ceiling overhead, / An atmosphere of Juliet’s tomb / Prepared for all the things to be said, or left unsaid” (18). The poem sets the stage, as it were, for the marionette roles its actors will enact, and it does so in a way that renders the actors powerless participants. The scene “arrange[s] itself,” presents itself as a stage the actors passively occupy, constructs itself in a way that compels from the actors a certain kind of behavior. The “set” not only consists of “four wax candles in the darkened room,” but it consists, too, of language, of a set pattern of exchanges, conversational topics,

accepted responses, and tonal inflections (e.g., their talk of Chopin or of the subtle romanticized allusions to “velleities and carefully caught regrets”). Not only the candles, then, but the woman’s statement, “I have saved this afternoon or you,” constitutes the poem’s stage setting, as indeed do all of the echoes of past performances which work here as compulsory templates for potential future encounters. Thus the poem, from its very first lines, suggests the degree to which individuals necessarily conform to the material conditions that define their contexts. The physical and social environment itself compels a certain kind of puppet-like performativity.

Indeed, the conversation that unfolds between the speaker and the woman merely repeats certain expected patterns, which alongside their predictable lines and posturings reflect the theatricality not only of the encounter itself but of their identities. Grover Smith notes that just as the “setting appears false and theatrical,” so, too, “does the bond of acquaintance” between these two individuals (11). Dickey extends this line of thought further, and correctly argues that in this poem Eliot “has seized on the problem of imitation and subsumed it into a larger thematic of theatricality, where the theatrical is defined as a kind of automatic behavior that does not express internal feeling” (130). And certainly, both of these characters exhibit “automatic behavior,” uttering stale lines about concerts, friendship, and the passing of time. The woman, for example, adopts a culturally inherited, upper class (and thus privileged with the leisure to brood), romantic attitude towards what she terms her “buried life” (obviously appropriated from Matthew Arnold’s poem, “The Buried Life”), as she expresses nostalgia over her passed youth. “Yet with these April sunsets,” she remarks, “that somehow recall / My buried life, and

Paris in the Spring, / I feel immeasurably at peace, and find the world / To be wonderful and youthful after all” (19). The speaker, on the other hand, predictably (but silently, only to himself) mocks the woman’s sentimental reflections, referring to her voice as an “insistent out-of-tune / . . . broken violin” (19). He adopts the cynical stance of the disaffected, culturally-privileged male, critiquing her performance while largely unaware that he, too, merely performs a role—both in his comments to her, which align with certain public codes of normative class behavior), but also in his negative reflections on her, which merely reinscribe a certain fin-de-siècle decadent cynicism and sense of ennui.

In other words, both the speaker and the lady reduce to their performances. Each exists only as a surface, devoid of depth, self-awareness, or authenticity. Interestingly, in her study of “Portrait of a Lady,” M. Laurentia argues that the poem’s “central conflict” involves “male aggressiveness” and “female persistency,” which she further characterizes as an opposition between “the woman as she is” and “the man as he wishes himself to be” (410). She emphasizes precisely the gap that exists between the speaker’s public behavior towards the woman and his private resentment of her. “He wishes that he were strong and masterful,” Laurentia argues, and that he “might take some forceful means and free himself once for all from his slavery to the woman” (410). But he can neither free himself from her nor openly articulate his antipathy to her. He remains impotently confined to the role he feels condemned to play. Laurentia suggests implicitly, then, that in his muted hostility the speaker in fact expresses a degree of inner authenticity. He resents the persona he adopts towards the woman, yet feels powerless to abandon the act. He remains “somehow bound to the woman by a civilized code which he feels impelled to live up

to,” yet which at the same time he privately resists (411). Thus, the very gap opened up between the speaker’s resistance to the woman and the attitude he publically adopts towards her in fact authenticates the speaker’s originary sense of an autonomous self. For *Laurentia*, the speaker’s animosity stems from an inner space that remains intrinsically his own.

While Eliot’s poem indeed offers a space for interiority (as I argue below), *Laurentia* misstates the reasons why. Certainly, the poem suggests the existence of a gap between the speaker’s behavior to the woman and his actual feelings. He first describes her room as “Juliet’s tomb,” for instance, immediately suggesting a negative view of the woman, and throughout the poem he repeatedly uses body language (notably smiles) to mask his actual feelings. After she reflects sentimentally on the transience of youth, he reflects to himself, “I smile, of course, / and go on drinking tea” (19). The “of course” proves crucial here, in that it suggests the speaker’s smug knowledge of his own performance. And yet, paradoxically, the supposed self-knowledge the speaker evinces here proves delusory, for in fact, he knows much less than he thinks he knows, either about himself or the woman. As suggested above, the speaker’s inner resentment of the woman itself remains a kind of act, a performance just as posed and scripted as his outward behavior. As Grover Smith suggests, the speaker is only a “young man[,] inept and supercilious” (9-10). His behavior towards the woman remains motivated largely by blind egotism, an unwillingness or inability to sympathize with this woman who nonetheless pleads for sympathy, however artificially romanticized her appeals. He remains “attuned” only to his own feelings, as Smith puts it, and condescending towards

hers (11). He apes the behavior appropriate for the occasion, and in acknowledging the apery, generates the illusion of interiority. But his reactions and expressions (both public and private) remain just as much a performance as the woman's. He knows *how* to perform ("I keep my countenance, / I remain self-possessed"), but only because he knows nothing else. Indeed, as he admits to himself, "You will see me any morning in the park / Reading the comics and the sporting page" (20). He mimics certain socially inscribed routines just as much as the woman does.

Dickey, too, makes the point that the speaker's sense of interiority derives not from some authentic sense of self-awareness, but rather from the gap the speaker perceives between the woman's comments and his own private reflections—in other words, from his hypocrisy. Yet as the poem itself makes clear by the end, the gap is in fact an illusion, for the woman fully understands the true state of their relationship, and when she makes this clear to the speaker, he experiences a kind of inner collapse: "My self-possession gutters; we are really in the dark" (21). Dickey sees this as precisely the moment where the speaker's own artificiality becomes most manifest. "[H]is sense of having a private interior," she argues, rests on the woman's inability "to understand him," and "the collapse is brought on by her correct recognition that he is *not* her friend" (135, emphasis in original). When the gap between them collapses, so, too, does the illusion of interiority. "He sees himself, suddenly, as if from the outside," Dickey concludes, an experience which "reveals him as nothing but a surface onto which are copied (or mirrored) the appropriate facial expressions" (135). The woman's revelation forces the

speaker to see himself performatively conditioned in the same way as he had previously regarded her.

Both Laurentia and Dickey misread the poem's treatment of interiority and exteriority, although from entirely different perspectives. Laurentia implicitly privileges a normative notion of interiority in her study, and never questions its status or stability as a concept, nor the way the poem potentially interrogates it. On the other hand, Dickey challenges the poem's presentation of interiority, but does so only to reverse the binary, simply privileging, in the end, the external at the expense of the internal. She reads this poem in the tradition of the earlier "marionette" poems (pointing specifically to "Convictions"), without thinking through elements that definitively differentiate this poem from those earlier poems (131). Yet Eliot's poem proves far more nuanced than these two readings suggest, and in fact, contra Dickey, marks a shift in his representation of the inner/outer binary. As discussed above, in the earlier poems, Eliot almost invariably privileges exteriority over interiority. The poems serve in part as critiques, satirizing the vapid social personas of the Boston upper class, and in part as informal anthropological sketches, dramatizing a certain conceptualization of human subjectivity. In "Portrait of a Lady," however, Eliot initiates a shift in his representations of the self that will ramify throughout his work.

The Emergence of the Interior

Dickey rightly suggests that the poem largely dramatizes subjectivity as imitative and derivative. And yet I want to argue that the very moment that Dickey points to as evidence of the poem's final exclusion of the possibility of interiority proves in fact the

very moment of its initial appearance. When the woman reveals to the speaker her knowledge of the true nature of their relationship and thus closes the gap the speaker had assumed divided them, she, as it were, holds a mirror up to the speaker, and forces him to see himself in a way that he had not before. “I have been wondering frequently of late,” she unexpectedly says to him, “Why we have not developed into friends” (21). His reaction is telling: “I feel like one who smiles, and turning shall remark / Suddenly, his expression in a glass” (21). The figure he employs to describe his experience proves significant. He sees himself reflected back to himself, encounters himself as a surface. He finds himself startled out of himself, out of his illusions regarding their relationship, and out of his rote performance. Dickey argues that the speaker discovers in this penetrating moment of self-reflection the realization of an essential inner lack. In the reflection, she suggests, he discovers the absence of any substantive inwardness. He perceives himself as a purely performative creature, and knowingly exclaims, “And I must borrow every changing shape / To find expression . . . dance, dance / Like a dancing bear, / Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape” (21). He can find no “expression” that is itself not already a performance. All he can do is to “parrot” or “ape” existent social forms. And for Dickey, this parroting goes all the way down, so to speak. Nothing in the speaker escapes the imitative imperative.

But Dickey misses the point that in perceiving himself as a surface, the speaker perceives himself self-experiencing, thus reflexively generating the very inwardness that the realization itself would seem to foreclose. The moment he *recognizes* himself as merely performatively constituted, proves precisely the moment he escapes the confining

delineations of his social constitution. He sees himself reflected back to himself, perceives his own lack of depth. He can no longer sustain the initial illusion of interiority that had sustained his sense of control over his own dissimulative performance. In acknowledging her awareness of the state of their friendship, she, in a sense, penetrates his self-illusions, renders him transparent, exposes him to himself. In doing so, she causes him to experience his own self-objectification, and he finds the experience disorienting and disordering to his sense of self. She has robbed him of his self-complacency, and he recognizes now that he must “borrow every changing shape / To find expression.” In a sense, he is like a puppet who has just gained knowledge of himself *as* a puppet, yet all the while continues to remain a puppet. The shift remains subtle, but nonetheless crucial in that it suggests the possibility for further dialectical developments. Indeed, that the poem concludes with a question remains significant, in that it marks both his newly discovered self-uncertainty, but also the development of an inner space *for* the experience of uncertainty. “Should I have the right to smile,” he asks, a significant question given that throughout the poem his smiles have been paradoxically that which most marked his lack of depth (21).

Thus, “Portrait of a Lady” marks a shift away from the predominant representation of subjectivity characteristic of Eliot’s earliest work. Rather than portraying individuals purely as marionettes, stick-figures lacking either depth or self-consciousness, he initiates in this poem the beginnings of an alternate model. Confronted with his own reflection (via the woman), the speaker encounters himself as an object, sees himself, as it were, from the outside, and he finds the experience bewildering and

self-negating. His placidity shattered, what remains is a tenuous new self-perception, although highly undeveloped and largely unarticulated. Indeed, he experiences this new (sense of) self not as some more authentic inner version of himself that had previously been obscured, but rather as an experience of pure negation. Inner space, as it were, opens up, but only in the sense of an abyss opening up beneath a previously solid surface. Ending with a question, the poem suggests the speaker's utter disorientation. He no longer knows "what to feel or if I understand / Or whether wise or foolish, tardy or too soon" (21). In a sense, the experience has thoroughly deconstructed him.

To appropriate Eliot's own language from "Objects: Real, Unreal, Ideal and Imaginary," "in becoming aware" of himself as an object, the speaker in "Portrait of a Lady" becomes aware of himself as a subject, and also comes to realize that his objectivity is somehow relative to his status as a subject. The two terms intertwine, for in coming to perceive himself as an object, he comes, too, to a new perception of himself as a subject *capable of objectification*. The same dynamic that Eliot affirms in his philosophical work on subject/object relations thus characterizes (to an extent) the speaker's experience in this poem, as it will come, too, to characterize the experience of speakers in a number of his later poems. Indeed, as Eliot was working on "Portrait," he was also working on "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," a poem that also grapples with a speaker's experience of self-objectification. But whereas the speaker in "Portrait" never quite moves beyond the disorienting effects of objectification and self-negation (he remains only a hollowed shell of a self by the end of the poem; "interiority" remains an abyss on whose edge he teeters), Prufrock incorporates the experience of objectification

into his very experience of self, thus modeling a notion of subject/object relations that aligns much more precisely with Eliot's philosophical speculations.

"Prufrock" and the Drama of Self-Emergence

Eliot composed an initial version of "Prufrock" in 1911, the year after his work on "Convictions," "Mandarins," "Goldfish," and "Suite Clownesque," although he notes in a March 8th, 1946 letter to John Pope that he began thinking of the poem "some time in 1910," thus placing it firmly within this Laforguian grouping.⁹⁰ Indeed, these poems all share certain similarities. Each focuses on upper class Boston social life. Each presents individuals thoroughly circumscribed by their sociocultural contexts, confined to a narrow range of culturally ritualized behavior. And each offers portraits of individuals who exist only as inflected through their socially prescribed performances. Social identity, in other words, comes to mark the limits of identity as such: exteriority and interiority converge, as inwardness merely recapitulates outward appearance. But "Prufrock" complicates this formula, in that it introduces a figure who seems not only aware of the social script which delineates his identity (both public and private), but of the tension between that social script as publically enacted and privately experienced. Just as "Portrait of a Lady" opens up a gap between the internal and external, so, too, does "Prufrock," but the latter extends its treatment of this gap in a way that more fully

⁹⁰ In his notes to the poem, Christopher Ricks points us to this letter (176), which John Pope (the recipient) first published in his 1947 essay, "Prufrock and Raskolnikov again: A Letter from Eliot." The full passage reads: "The poem of Prufrock was conceived some time in 1910. I think that when I went to Paris in the autumn of that year I had already written several fragments which were ultimately embodied in the poem, but I cannot at this distance remember which. I think that the passage beginning 'I am not Prince Hamlet,' a passage showing the influence of Laforgue, was one of these fragments which I took with me, but the poem was not completed until the summer of 1911" (Pope 319).

illustrates the mutually constitutive dialectical relationship between the two. In fact, in many ways, Eliot's dramatization of subject/object relations in "Prufrock" precisely parallels the view of subject/object relations he promulgates in his philosophical work only two and three years later, in his essays on Kant and Bradley.

A number of critics point to "Prufrock" as a poem that illustrates solely the enfeebling experience of a speaker claustrophobically self-enclosed. J. Hillis Miller, for instance, argues that the "reader is plunged with the first words [of the poem] into the spherical enclosure of Prufrock's mind" (137). For Prufrock, Miller observes, "Everything exists because [he] thinks of it, and the bubble of his thought is never broken" (137). From Prufrock's perspective, there is no escape from the "bubble" of self, and consequently the external world ceases to have objective reality for him. Carol T. Christ agrees, adding that "Prufrock constructs a monologue whose fictions insulate and preserve him in a solipsistic dream world, a chamber of the sea" (48). He invents the world he inhabits, she suggests, fictionally dramatizes himself as an actor in his own self-narrative. Similarly, for Lyndall Gordon, Prufrock's "life is [only] a succession of psychological states, memories, and roles," and although he "longs to confide in someone, an admired woman," he cannot, confined as he is to the torturous windings of his own insular consciousness (68). As Gordon seems to read it, "Prufrock" traces out an accumulation of inner states that in themselves lack connection with any objective, external world. Prufrock can experience nothing but his own inner world, nor can he relate that experience of inwardness to the outer realities of other consciousnesses. Thus, for each of these critics, Prufrock remains confined exclusively to the experience of his

own inner consciousness. He possesses no authentic (or verifiable) link to the external world. In fact, the external world that he grapples with in the poem proves more or less only a figment of his own self-absorbed (and absorbing) imaginative projections.

For critics like these, then, “Prufrock” emerges as a poem intently focused on the problem of interiority. Indeed, for these thinkers, “Prufrock” dramatizes not merely the experience of interiority, but the experience of a solipsistically delineated interiority. No discernably objective relation exists between Prufrock’s sense of himself and the outer world. He simply finds himself thrown into a particular social and cultural environment which, yes, he finds bewildering, but which also, ultimately, remains dualistically uncoupled from Prufrock’s essential sense of inwardness. That is to say, for Miller, Carol Christ, and Gordon, Prufrock’s interiority remains an ontological “given,” a preexistent space in itself that finds itself in tension with an alien environment (also an ontological “given”) with which it can find no means to communicate. The self remains an essentialized “bubble” in conflict with an unintelligible externality that the self attempts to comprehend by projecting onto it its own inner, psychological content. Thus, these critics posit a dualistic relation between the inner and the outer that utterly severs the connection between the two. They construct a binary which they themselves then impose onto the poem, and proceed to argue (whether directly or only through implication) that the poem necessarily privileges the inward element over the outward.

Of course, “Prufrock” undoubtedly focuses on interiority, and does so in a way that clearly demarcates this poem from much of Eliot’s work from the same period. Indeed, as a dramatic monologue, this poem serves as a vehicle for the expression of

inward states of consciousness. Miller makes this same point when he argues that the “poetry of the dramatic monologue collapses [the] realism [typical of novels] into the isolation of a single mind” (137). The dramatic form itself dictates the emphasis on internality, as it involves a single speaker speaking out of a particular psychological, intellectual, and emotional position. By definition, then, no other voice exists in the poem with which the speaker might engage. The result, as Miller observes, is the sensation of “an opaque sphere closed in on itself” (137). Tennyson or Robert Browning’s dramatic monologues effect this feeling (as Miller, too, notes), no less than do Eliot’s monologues (137). Moreover, that the dramatic monologue extracts an individual speaker *as* an individual from a particular social/cultural/historical context perhaps exacerbates the sensation of solipsistic self-enclosure. To emphasize the speaker’s own reflections at the expense of her or his dialectical immersion in a field of other voices necessarily, to some extent, distorts that voice—grants it an intensity or sense of isolation it might not otherwise possess if contextualized within a chorus of voices.

However, to suggest that “Prufrock” dramatizes the experience of interiority (as it does) is not the same as to suggest that the poem posits a notion of the self characterized by its dualistic severance from the external world. The dramatization of interiority does not in itself imply the essentializing of interiority, which is what Miller, Carol Christ, and Gordon each in their different ways appear to claim. Rather, as I will argue below, Eliot offers a much more complex and nuanced portrayal of interiority, which places inwardness in direct dialectical relation with its external conditions. Indeed, “Prufrock” I will claim undermines any notion of an ontologically autonomous inwardness, and

suggests instead that interiority arises only in dialectical friction with certain perceived external realities. Conversely, those external realities, too, only take on concrete determinant existence with the emergence of a sense of inwardness. Both poles of the binary remain mutually and persistently implicated in one another, neither separate from the perceived reality of the other, an anti-dualistic position Eliot also affirms in his philosophical work and literary criticism. In staging inwardness in this manner, “Prufrock” marks a pronounced shift in Eliot’s dramatization of the human. Rather than representing human beings as utterly exteriorized puppet-figures, he now offers a more nuanced portrayal of the genesis and contours of human subjectivity, even though he goes on to further complicate this model in his later work (see Chapter Five).

Dialectical Relations in “Prufrock”

Significantly, the poem initially stresses Prufrock’s exteriority, his status as an *object*, rather than his inner experiential reality. Specifically, despite the differences that clearly separate it from much of Eliot’s other work from the period, “Prufrock” relies on many of the same marionette tropes as do these other poems, thus suggesting a degree of continuity with them, rather than divergence. Indeed, in certain ways, Prufrock himself remains a kind of puppet, formulaically performing according to a particular social script and participating in particular social rituals (afternoon “toast and tea,” for instance [14]). His thoughts and concerns remain those of his class position, and demonstrate to what extent the horizons of his consciousness remain circumscribed by his location in the social order. Utterly immersed in his own socially derived existence, he exclaims that he has “known them all already, known them all— / [Has] known the evenings, mornings,

afternoons” (14). His social existence, “measured out . . . with coffee spoons,” remains his only mode of self-experience, and thus marks the boundaries of his capacity for self-knowledge (14). As with many of Eliot’s other early personages, Prufrock’s subjectivity remains largely performative, an enactment merely of certain social codes and behavior conventions. He simply reproduces the social and cultural forms expected of him, however haltingly. No interior space exists for him to withdraw to in order to escape the required performance. And it is in this sense that he remains a puppet, a wooden exterior lacking depth or substantive self-awareness.

Indeed, the poem in fact foregrounds Prufrock’s actual physical body in a way that reinforces this marionette image. The poem’s opening lines, for instance, compare the evening (“spread out against the sky”) to a “patient etherised upon a table” (13). But of course, the comparison just as well applies to Prufrock himself, who throughout the poem betrays his own mode of paralysis. But in linking the image to Prufrock, the poem also suggests the extent to which Prufrock appears as an anesthetized body, an exterior form without depth or inner consciousness. From its opening lines, then, the poem presents its speaker as simply a physical surface, a body closed in around itself, precisely that “spherical enclosure” to which Miller refers in his discussion of the poem (although with an emphasis on the sphere itself, rather than to that which it encloses). Indeed, as the poem proceeds, Prufrock repeatedly draws attention to his own physicality, to the “bald spot in the middle of [his] hair,” for instance, or to his “thin” “arms and legs,” or his “morning coat” and “collar” that “mount firmly to the chin” (14). The poem, that is, presents Prufrock as a singularly physical figure, gangly, stiff, and thin—just like a

marionette. It foregrounds Prufrock's body, and as such, emphasizes his exteriority (as opposed to his interiority).

Thus the poem, at least at first, presents Prufrock as a figure utterly devoid of interiority, an essentially imitative personality—a puppet—who merely enacts the ritualized cultural conventions of upper class Boston social life. Yet, crucially, the poem goes on to dramatize Prufrock's awareness of his status. And it is this awareness that then creates the gap between Prufrock's socially inscribed persona and the recognition of himself *as* a persona. That is to say, to experience himself as a subject first requires experiencing himself as an object. As with the speaker in "Portrait of a Lady," through the experience of his own self-objectification, he comes to experience himself as a subject *subject* to objectification. And, again like the speaker of "Portrait," Prufrock only comes to experience himself as a subject via the objectification to which others subject him. In a pivotal passage in the poem, Prufrock reflects, "And I have known the eyes already, known them all— / The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase, / And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin, / . . . / Then how should I begin / To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?" (14-15). Prufrock's experience of himself remains mediated, here, through the self-objectifying gaze of the other. He is (in his social instantiation) as these others perceive him to be. His identity remains that as constituted in their glance. Yet he "knows" the glance, understands its objectifying power, and feels himself overdetermined by it. It "formulates" him to himself no less than it formulates him for these others, yet he remains self-reflexively aware of himself as the object they have subjected to their formulations.

That is to say, figuratively pinned to a wall, he recognizes himself (a “sprawling” insect) as a subject capable of objectification. This insight opens up in him the subjective (and anxious) awareness of his own objectified status, and thus the creation of a self-perceiving inwardness distinct from his object-status. Consequently, his sense of himself as a self emerges only when he finds himself construed as an object in the eyes of the other (indeed, in the passage, he focuses obsessively on others’ eyes). Because self-experience (inwardness) requires self-objectification (exteriorization), each state remains dependent upon the other for its own felt phenomenological reality. To appropriate Eliot’s own language from his dissertation, “Everything, from one point of view, is subjective; and everything, from another point of view, is objective” (21-22). Or as he says elsewhere in the dissertation, “the self depends . . . upon other selves; it is not given as a direct experience, but is an interpretation of experience by interaction with other selves” (146).

Much more so than “Portrait of a Lady,” “Prufrock” dramatizes the dialectical relation between subjectification (i.e., as here defined, the emergence of subjective self-awareness) and objectification. Specifically, it presents the process of subjectification as emerging out of the subject’s sense of his or her own objectification. Whereas the speaker of “Portrait” remains, at the end of the poem, hovering on the edge of his own self-consciousness, “Prufrock” stages its speaker’s headlong plunge. His focus on his own body (its age and fragility) as well as his pervasive diffidence reflect the struggles of an individual utterly overwhelmed by the experience of himself *as* a self. “Shall I part my hair behind?” he asks, “Do I dare to eat a peach?” (16). “What is he?” he seems implicitly

to ask, but can come to no clear conclusion. But his questions reveal his awareness that his experience of self remains bound up in his own self-objectification, for in posing these questions, he implicitly seeks some definitive external confirmation of his own status as a self. He seeks, paradoxically, further self-objectification in order to stabilize the sense of self that emerges out of his initial perception of himself as an object.

Thus, “Prufrock” introduces a dynamic yet highly unstable model of self predicated on the dialectical relationship between internality and externality. Contrary to those critics, then, who would suggest that “Prufrock” forwards an ontologically stable, essentialized notion of self, the poem in fact suggests precisely the opposite. The experience of inwardness emerges only in relation to the experience of exteriorization. In itself it lacks conceptual coherence. Consequently, “Prufrock” does not trace out an experience of solipsistic, existentialist isolation.⁹¹ Rather, it emphasizes to what extent individuals remain radically bound up with one another. As Eliot notes in “Objects: Content, Objectivity, and Existence” (written in 1914, and so exactly contemporaneous with “Prufrock”), “Solipsism is self-contradictory, because if A is to know only his own world, there must be another world to contrast it with: and there is none. If A knew only his own world, he would have to know that he knew only his own world” (168).

Prufrock’s problem is that he knows precisely that his subjective “world” is not the only world, that other subjective centers press on him, objectify him, and in doing so, elicit in

⁹¹ Referring to the poem’s opening lines, in which Prufrock appears to address an interlocutor (“Let us go then, you and I”), Miller argues that the “you” here remains merely a dramatic device. Prufrock, as it were, addresses himself here, as if he were speaking to another. “No other mind is present to violate the integrity of Prufrock’s isolation,” Miller argues, “[h]e has split himself into two persons, and speaks to himself alone” (138).

him that self-recognition which awakens him to himself. With “Prufrock,” Eliot completes a turn in his poetry begun in “Portrait of a Lady,” in which he dramatizes in ever more sophisticated ways individuals’ experience of interiority. Whereas “Prufrock” finalizes this initial turn, *The Waste Land* deepens it, extends its expression through its presentation of a series of individuals who lack the capacity to recognize their own objectification, while at the same time infusing the poem with a self-cognizant consciousness (Tiresias) who draws attention to the process of objectification and the consequences for those who cannot recognize it.

From “Prufrock” to *The Waste Land*

The Waste Land represents a distinct departure from much of Eliot’s earlier work, not only in size, but in conception and the radicalization of technique. Composed of a series of narratively disjointed scenes and lyric fragments as well as a bewildering succession of seemingly disconnected images, the poem privileges the experience of disjunction and disorientation. For many critics, the poem lacks the mode of coherency found, say, in “Portrait of a Lady” or “Prufrock,” both of which possess a clearly delineated central consciousness, a structurally stable narrative voice which speaks (or ruminates), and thereby provides the cohesion needed to unify otherwise ambiguous observations, apparent memories, and images. *The Waste Land*, on the other hand, would seem to sever the link between a coherent, pervasively present central narrative consciousness and the events of the poem. It offers instead a “kaleidoscopic confusion of themes, settings, structures, and of selves,” as Alireza Farahbakhsh puts it (71). Or, as Derek Traversi argues, it offers only a “world of fragments” which Eliot “set[s] out to

explore, because he had nothing else on which he could honestly build” (18). From this perspective, then, by its very form, *The Waste Land* already suggests a more complicated portrayal of the relationship between interiority and exteriority, because it blurs the boundaries between the two. The discernable, well-defined, singular speaker of “Portrait” and “Prufrock” dissolves into a multiplicity of indefinite voices, perspectives, perceptions, and encounters, whose exact relations with one another remain relatively indeterminate.

Still, in its many vignettes, the poem clearly dramatizes the experiences of particular individuals disconnected from one another, isolated monads confined to their own limited modes of self-experience. That is, inasmuch as the poem dissolves the boundaries between the inward and the outward (by blurring the distinctions between voices, perspectives, etc.), it also offers a portrayal of individuals as radically self-delineated. Indeed, the individuals it dramatizes lack any substantive sense of inwardness—they appear emptied out, hollowed shells devoid of any inner content. They lack self-awareness or introspection, even to the limited degree as that experienced by the speaker of “Portrait.” They exist only as passive, unresisting exteriorized objects. Thus, *The Waste Land* erects a certain tension between the inner and the outer unique to its own representational strategies. On the one hand, it dissolves distinctions between interiority and exteriority (by splintering and confusing perspectives, voices, etc.), and yet on the other, it emphasizes individuals’ profound monadic self-isolation and utter, unrelenting exteriorization. Indeed, in emphasizing such exteriorization, it recalls the particular portrayal of the inner/outer tension characteristic of Eliot’s marionette poems. As in these

earlier poems, the individuals in *The Waste Land* appear as puppet figures, possessing neither depth nor consciousness.

And yet, as in “Prufrock” and “Portrait,” *The Waste Land* also dramatizes the experience of self-recognition, only it does so indirectly (yet nonetheless crucially) through the figure of Tiresias. Indeed, the poem positions Tiresias as both internal and external to its events, but does so in a way that suggests the constitutive interdependency of the two locations. What Tiresias witnesses (as external to himself), he also experiences (as internal to himself). Both experiences arise simultaneously. As in “Prufrock” or “Portrait,” subjectivity here requires objectification, even as objectification requires a self-externalizing, self-destabilizing gaze. In short, as I will argue, Tiresias provides the lens through which to read Eliot’s poem as an extension of his metaphysical project. Through Tiresias, Eliot critiques normative notions of interiority (i.e., as ontologically self-contained or self-consistent), revealing instead an understanding of interiority as dialectically grounded in its own reflexive self-externalization.

The Waste Land and Interiority

As with “Prufrock,” many critics read *The Waste Land* as a poem concerned exclusively with the experience and expression of interiority, although now autobiographically inflected. A. David Moody, for instance, argues that the poem “essentially” traces out the idiosyncratic “landscape of an inward desolation” (116). At root, he suggests, the poem explores “the burden of profound personal emotion” that Eliot struggled with during this period of his life. Lyndall Gordon makes the same point when she suggests that *The Waste Land* functions largely for Eliot as a “guarded mode of

confession” (149). But she goes further than Moody, and suggests that the poem maps an even more fundamental psychological dynamic. “For [Eliot] to experience the world as a waste,” she argues, “was a prerequisite to experiencing it in faith” (157). Indeed, she roots this linear model of spiritual development (i.e., the movement from despair to redemption) in Eliot’s own cultural ancestry. “This notion of pilgrimage from imperfection to perfection,” she claims, “was deeply rooted in Eliot’s family and their Puritan past” (157). However, in reading the poem in strictly biographical terms, both Moody and Gordon not only over-reduce it to its immediate sociohistorical context, but also promulgate certain assumptions about the relationship between texts and authors that in turn suggests a certain notion of the self which Eliot’s own work counters. That is to say, in reading the poem as a biographical allegory, both critics assume the poem unproblematically, transparently translates the inner contents of Eliot’s life into aesthetic form. Implicitly, then, they each posit a notion of interiority as a stable, self-contained repository of intelligible experiences which the poet can access and then convert into verse. They thus erect a binary between individuals’ inner life and the world of experience which they confront and then communicate to others.

And yet, in his own philosophical speculations regarding subject/object relations, Eliot argues that no such radically polarized binary exists. Rather, interiority and exteriority (subject and object) remain constitutively interdependent. Each remains ontologically rooted in the other. No autonomous, self-contained, self-constituting inner space exists which simply absorbs outer experience before translating it into language. Such a Lockean or Cartesian notion of the self remains alien to Eliot’s anti-dualist

conceptualizations. Indeed, as Jewel Spears Brooker notes, Eliot's dissertation, in which he formulates his most developed views on subject/object relations, only "springs to life when it is understood in the context of the revolt against dualism" (178). The work's most fundamental "insight," for Brooker, "is that the world is one, that reality is one, that dualism always leads to self-contradiction" (178).

Nevertheless, other critics broadly concur with Moody and Gordon's reading of Eliot's poem, although they do not focus exclusively on the poem's autobiographical elements. In *T.S. Eliot's Negative Way*, for instance, Eloise Knapp Hay argues that *The Waste Land* is a "poem of radical doubt and negation, urging that every human desire be stilled except the desire for self-surrender, for restraint, and for peace" (48).⁹² The poem, that is, dramatizes emotional and spiritual dilemmas. It stages the individual's own self-struggle, a project necessarily inwardly focused. Similarly, in *The Mystical Philosophy of T.S. Eliot*, Fayek M. Ishak argues the poem maps the journey of a "devastated ego that seeks refuge in phantasmal 'appearances'" (65). For Ishak, the poem presumes the existence of a constitutively singular ego that confronts a hostile, alienating social reality, from which it then "seeks refuge." He goes on to argue that the poem highlights the "dangers of self-imprisonment and the possibility of attaining peace" (75). For Ishak, then, the poem expresses the inner spiritual lament and yearning of an individual quester, a point Grover Smith makes as well, when he suggests that the poem dramatizes a "quest through [a] private waste land, the poet's quest through the poem" (98). Indeed, by the

⁹² Of course, she goes on to echo Moody and Gordon, arguing that the poem maps the "prisonhouse" of Eliot's own life experience, that it reflects his own "personal, interior journey" (50).

end of the poem, for Smith, the quester “can expect, if not the joy of Ferdinand, then at any rate the liberation of Prospero” (98). Each of these critics sees the poem as a kind of quest-journey that a singular individual undertakes in order to gain some spiritual insight or sense of release. In this sense, their readings overlap with Gordon and Moody’s, for whom the poem serves to express Eliot’s personal spiritual and emotional journey. As such, they reproduce the monadic notion of self implicit in Gordon and Moody’s readings, a notion, again, which I argue Eliot strenuously disputes in both his philosophical work and in his poetry.

Voiding the Interior

Of course, as with “Prufrock,” *The Waste Land* obviously dramatizes individuals’ inner experience, although not in the way that these critics affirm (i.e., as an intelligible, ontologically autonomous “given”). For the above critics, the poem’s series of vignettes serve to illustrate (as a kind of objective correlative) the speaker-protagonist’s own sense of inner desolation (as Moody or Smith claim). They stage individual moments of disconnection, disillusion, and isolation which reinforce one another, collectively amplifying the putative speaker’s own self-experience. In essence, they function as case instances, exemplifying in miniature the speaker’s own interiorized crisis. But I want to argue that the poem’s many character portraits in fact undercut essentialized notions of interiority. I want to suggest that in these portraits the poem negates inwardness, portrays it only to suggest its absolute absence. It denies its characters interiority, by repeatedly dramatizing individuals who lack any substantive sense of inwardness. They exist solely on the surface, lacking the capacity to perceive themselves or others as persons capable

of possessing depth. Their behavior remains rote and mechanical, their relations characterized by mutual acts of objectification (and a corollary insensitivity to their own object-status). Consequently, their interactions remain exploitative and denigrating.

For instance, in Part III (“The Fire Sermon”), in its dramatization of the encounter between the clerk and typist, the poem presents individuals who not only utterly objectify each other, but lack any self-reflective awareness of their objectification. They act without cognition—no gap exists between impulse and behavior. Like the marionettes from Eliot’s earlier work, they simply perform. Mechanically, the typist comes “home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights / Her stove, and lays out food in tins” (68). The poem describes her in terms of her actions, rather than her feelings or thoughts. She acts, rather than reflects. It privileges, too, her immediate exterior environment: “Out of the window perilously spread, / Her drying combinations touched by the sun’s last rays, / On the divan are piled . . . / Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays” (68). If the poem invokes inwardness here, it does so only through its negation. She remains a blank for readers, characterized only by her mechanical behavior and by the material objects that share her space (those “stockings, slippers, camisoles,” etc.). Her existence is metonymic; she extends physically out into the objects around her. In a sense, they constitute her being. Indeed, the poem positions her as merely another object in the collection. Like them, she remains devoid of agency, awareness, or self-presence. She exists only as an object among objects.

When her “lover” (the “young man carbuncular”) arrives, he “assaults her at once,” and while his advances remain “unreproved,” they also remain “undesired” (69,

68). She neither invites nor deters him, but simply submits to him. Of course, his “vanity requires no response,” and he “makes a welcome of [her] indifference,” using her as an object without concern for the reality of her person (68). Afterwards, he “[b]estows one final patronising kiss,” before “grop[ing] his way” down the “unlit” stairs (a trope suggestive of a return back into the darkness of his own self-absence, i.e., into that blank abyss of the absence of inwardness) (69). The poem describes the clerk in animalistic terms, as a creature blindly reduced to the limited sphere of his own bestial desires. Utterly lacking in self-awareness (or sympathetic awareness of others), he possesses no substantive interiority. Rather, he acts only upon impulse, seeing the typist not as a person, but as an instrument for use according to his own unarticulated purposes. Indeed, she hardly registers him, either. After he leaves, “her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass: / ‘Well now that’s done: and I’m glad it’s over’” (69). Incapable of sustained reflection, she simply “smooths her hair with automatic hand, / And puts a record on the gramophone” (69). Like the clerk, she behaves mechanically, “automatically,” remains confined only to superficial modes of self-experience.

Thus, rather than depicting interiority, the poem presents the typist and the clerk as individuals utterly devoid of inwardness. Each exists solely on the surface, defined only by their actions and surroundings. They remain utterly immersed in their own unconscious activity, automatons unaware of themselves or of others *as* selves. Significantly, the poem repeatedly dramatizes this particular model of self. Indeed, in the final section of Part I (“The Burial of the Dead”), the poem offers its most succinct version of this view. In this section, the unnamed speaker reflects on the crowd of people

moving wraith-like over London Bridge. “Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,” he broodingly observes, “A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many” (62). They lack substantiality, “flowing” over the bridge, rather than “walking.” They lack, too, individuality or presence; they move together as a crowd, indistinguishable from one another. Most significantly, they strike the speaker as ghosts, lifeless, immaterial, and purposeless. They appear devoid of volition, and therefore depth or reflection, manifesting themselves only in their spectral movements. They remain moving shapes (or shades) rather than persons, each apparently fully interchangeable with the other. The speaker goes on to observe that each of these individuals “fixe[s] his eyes” directly “before his feet,” suggesting that they remain oblivious to (or at least uninterested in) one other, their vision closed in upon their own limited movements. They appear to themselves, then, as they appear to the speaker, sheer external motion. Like the typist and the clerk, they possess no substantive interiority. They remain confined to their own surfaces, their self-experience delineated by their own superficiality. Like objects in space, they merely move. Like a Mobius strip, they consist only of their own surfaces.

In this London Bridge passage, as in the encounter between the typist and the clerk, the poem again portrays human subjectivity as utterly void of interiority (thus privileging the exterior). Further examples abound. At the beginning of Part II (“A Game of Chess”), for instance, the woman and the man find one another incomprehensible blanks. She says to him, “Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?” (65). She remains haunted by the possibility that beneath his surfaces a vast emptiness lurks. He

appears to her a face without depth, a mask masking some inner nothingness. “What are your thinking of,” she repeatedly asks (65). The intensity and near hysteria of her incessant questioning betrays, too, the fear of her own inner lack. She consists only of the questions she continually poses. She dissipates into a constant stream of words that then constitutes the texture of her own self-experience. That is, she experiences herself only in terms of the questions she poses to the man, which effectively are questions she poses to herself as well. Indeed, as with the typist, the poem also identifies the woman here with the materiality of her own surroundings. At the beginning of the scene, before the man arrives (in an action that parallels the clerk), the poem positions the woman as an object in a room full of other objects (e.g., a “sevenbranched candelabra,” “jewels,” “vials of ivory and colored glass,” etc.). She dissolves into her surroundings, exists only as one object among others, just as she dissolves into the questions she poses to the man and by extension to herself.

In each of these instances, *The Waste Land* essentially recapitulates the particular portrayal of individuals found in the Laforguian-era marionette poems. Like these earlier poems, *The Waste Land* in these vignettes emphasizes individuals’ sheer externality. It portrays individuals devoid of any sense of an inner life, who merely ape certain social and cultural conventions, and who treat one another as use-instruments. Individuals experience others only in terms of their object-status, as opaque shells substantively lacking any inner reality. They lack, too, any sense of that dialectical self-reflexivity out of which a sense of personal inwardness might emerge. And yet, unlike these earlier poems, *The Waste Land* goes on to challenge this model of self, although not in the

manner Moody or Gordon might affirm (i.e., that these “marionettes” merely dramatize an inner experience of spiritual or emotional numbness; that they function as objective correlatives that transparently communicate the experience of a substantive, ontologically stable inner self). Rather, as I will argue below, the poem introduces in its portrayal of Tiresias a dialectical procedure similar to (but not identical with) that which operates in both “Portrait” and “Prufrock.” That is, through Tiresias’ particular mode of relationality, the poem dramatizes interiority as the product of self-reflexive self-perception (as opposed to postulating an essentialist model). Tiresias perceives himself in the suffering of others, thus initiating through empathetic identification the self-externalization necessary for the development of interior self-experience (i.e., he experiences himself experiencing). The many individuals the poem portrays, then, function less as varied illustrations of the poet-protagonist’s emotional state, than as elements in a dialectic that calls interiority itself into being. Indeed, in offering multiple portraits, the poem suggests the radical comprehensiveness of dialectical relationality. For Tiresias never experiences self-externalization as a completed project, but as an ongoing, inexhaustible encounter with others he comes to identify with as himself.

Tiresias and the Self-Externalizing Gaze

In his notes to the poem, Eliot famously suggests that Tiresias functions as a “spectator” rather than a “character” properly immersed in the poem’s field of action, and that he “is . . . the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest” (78).⁹³ He

⁹³ Some critics resist granting Tiresias any privileged unifying position, emphasizing instead the utter fragmentary nature of the poem. See, for instance, Alireza Farahbakhsh’s “Eliot and Postmodern

goes on to note that “What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem” (78). Crucially, in explaining Tiresias, Eliot focuses on the act of seeing. He identifies Tiresias’ gaze as his defining feature, as that which grants him his privileged position. Both a character internal and external to the poem, he functions ultimately as a detached perspective who perceives and comprehends the events and experiences the poem dramatizes, and as such, grants the unity of a focal consciousness to the poem (a point a number of scholars note).⁹⁴ Of course, Tiresias appears by name only during Part III, as the typist awaits the clerk. At the beginning of this scene, he reflects, “I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs / Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest— / I too awaited the expected guest” (68). Outside the scene’s concrete action, a mere observer, he nonetheless participates in the event. He “foresuffer[s] all,” experiences himself the brute sterility of the encounter “[e]nacted on this same divan or bed” (69). Yet unlike the typist or clerk (or the crowd that flows over London Bridge in Part I, or the wealthy couple in Part II), he possesses the capacity for sustained reflection and self-articulation. He experiences *and* knows what he experiences; “though blind,” he “can see” (68). He brings a consciousness to these events that others lack. Indeed, as Eliot suggests in his notes, Tiresias functions *as* their consciousness, to an extent. Each of these characters’ experiences and perspectives (not just the typist and the clerk’s) meet together in him, and find articulation through his voice.

Selfhood,” or William Austin’s *A Deconstruction of T.S. Eliot: The Fire and the Rose*. See, too, F.B. Pinion, who claims that “it seems an unconvincing ingenuity . . . to claim that Tiresias . . . is the ‘most important personage’ in the poem” (129). What these critics miss is the dialectic process that Tiresias dramatizes. His unitary function is procedural or structural, not necessarily narratological.

⁹⁴ See discussion of Grover Smith, Calvin Bedient, and Robert Langbaum below.

But understood structurally, Tiresias embodies a very particular procedure which parallels that advanced in Eliot's philosophical speculations regarding subject/object relations. Tiresias' self-reflexive cognition arises precisely out of his position as a detached observer. He experiences himself refracted through these other figures, encounters himself multiply in them; their experiences he perceives as his own, even as they remain unaware of him. Through others, he finds himself externalized to himself. They mirror him back to himself in a manner that renders palpable the experience of self-objectification. The poem suggests, then, that in order to "see," he must extract himself from the events he witnesses. Distance, Tiresias demonstrates, proves prerequisite to perception, both of the self and of the other. Perceiving himself in others (as others) draws him out of himself as an object to himself, in a sense doubles him (so that he is both himself and another). And it is precisely this self-objectifying mirroring process that gives rise to the self-reflexivity necessary to articulate the inner impressions of this outer experience. He both distances himself from those whom he observes and projects himself onto them. In doing so, he distancing himself from himself (doubles himself), thereby generating the conditions of possibility by which he might recognize himself as a self. That is, perceiving himself as othered to himself allows Tiresias to experience his own self-objectification. Thus, he extracts himself from these characters' experience (objectifies them) only to better immerse himself in it (as an experiencing subject reflectively self-aware of the experience). They present him to himself in a manner which reveals him to himself as an object capable of subjective reflection. In a sense, he posits himself as them, so as to dialectically transmute their experience into his own self-

articulation. To articulate himself through them, in a way, redeems their sordid experiences, because it provides them voice. He becomes the subject (i.e., inner self-cognition) correlative to their objective condition.

Tiresias, then, demonstrates the necessary and mutually constitutive relation between subject and object. Indeed, as noted above he recapitulates the dialectical procedure Eliot explores repeatedly in his philosophical work. As he says in his dissertation, for example, “there are the two sides, subject and object, neither of which is really stable, independent, the measure of the other. In order to consider how the one came to be as it is, we are forced to attribute an artificial absoluteness to the other” (22). Neither subject nor object ontologically subsist in their own self-essence, but rather rely on each other for provisional coherency and conceptual stability. No self, as such, exists, any more than does an object without its corresponding subjectively positioned perceiver. Tiresias serves precisely to demonstrate the artificiality of an absolutist conception of the subject-in-itself or the object-in-itself. Each pole of the binary draws its reality from its position in relation to its opposite. Tiresias’ self-awareness roots itself in his awareness of the condition of those persons he observes. In them, he observes himself, while at the same time preserving the distinctions between their subject positions and his own (the very difference, of course, which provides the engine for the poem’s dialectical operations).

It is Tiresias’ particular relation to others, though, that also constitutes the core difference between the portrayal of this dialectical procedure in *The Waste Land* from its portrayal in “Portrait” or “Prufrock.” In the earlier two poems, the speaker comes to self-

cognizance through the experience of forced self-objectification. The poem characterizes the encounter as a kind of violent self-awakening (e.g., as when the speaker in “Portrait” exclaims to himself, “My self-possession gutters; we are really in the dark” [21]). The speakers obtain a sense of their own inwardness only through the mediation of an intrusive, rupturing gaze. Objectification shocks them into self-presence, as it were. But no such sense of shock characterizes *The Waste Land*’s treatment of this dialectic. The gaze itself originates in Tiresias, and lacks the intrusiveness that marks its presence in the earlier poems. Indeed, the objects of Tiresias’ gaze remain unaware of his presence. They remain unconscious of him (and of themselves), even as he subjects himself to their objectively portrayed lived experience.

In effect, the mirroring function proceeds differently in *The Waste Land* than in “Prufrock” or “Portrait.” Tiresias is not recognized (and thus self-objectified) in the semi-hostile gaze of other persons, but rather comes to his own self-recognition through the self-externalizing, self-positing of his own gaze in the lives of others. In a sense, then, the gaze is sympathetically inflected (i.e., he suffers with those he observes), and emanates from the very person reflexively transformed by that gaze. Tiresias’ subjective self-awareness does not arise out of some intrusive act of self-objectification that renders him subjectively present to himself *as* an object (i.e., from an act that emanates from outside him). Rather, the self-reflexive act arises out of Tiresias’ own sympathizing gaze projected onto others who themselves remain unaware of his presence. In this way, the poem paradoxically shifts its emphasis away from the self’s near hysterical experience of itself (as in “Prufrock”), and onto its dialectically sympathetic relationality with others.

For this reason, too, the poem deemphasizes Tiresias as a vocal presence in the poem, focusing instead on the multitude of other figures whose lives he sympathetically (indeed empathetically) enters. Their experience is his experience, for it is only through them that he comes into any awareness of himself.

A number of critics emphasize Tiresias' central position in the poem, but for reasons contrary to those explored above. Robert Langbaum, for instance, argues that the poem possesses a single quester (the unnamed speaker), who adopts in Part III the "Tiresias consciousness," in order to better perceive the "underlying ancient pattern" that (unconsciously) informs the actions of each of the poem's characters, and thus the "ancient pattern" by which the speaker-quester can himself find redemption (95). Indeed, for Langbaum, "we must understand all the characters as aspects or projections" not only of Tiresias, but of the quester (i.e., "projections of his consciousness") (96). In this, the poem functions "essentially" as a "monodrama" (96). Insofar as each of the characters meet in Tiresias, he serves as an indicator of the way that each of the characters also meets in the speaker-quester. Grover Smith also points to Tiresias as a central figure, and in fact makes no distinction between Tiresias and the poem's unifying focal consciousness. Discussing the poem's opening stanzas, Smith notes that it is Tiresias himself who "has been content to let winter cover him 'in forgetful snow, feeding / A little life with dried tubers'" (72). And it is Tiresias, at the end, as Fisher king, who shores fragments against his own ruin (98). "What his memories have dramatized," Grover argues, "is his past effort to appease the gnawing of fleshly and spiritual desire. They have summed up the crucial experience that leave him unable to participate,

through his interior life, in the April renewal of earth” (98). And Calvin Bedient, in an argument that echoes not only Langbaum but Lyndall Gordon as well, claims that “all the voices in the poem [Tiresias included] are the performances of a single protagonist . . . nameless stand-in[s] for Eliot himself” (ix).

Yet all of these critics possess the same deficiencies that characterize Moody and Gordon’s position (as delineated above). To unify the poem beneath the banner of a singular, stable, questing consciousness reduces the nuances of the poem’s treatment of the nature of human subjectivity. It suggests a solipsistic view of the individual, rather than a view that sees the individual as immersed in self-constitutive dialectical encounters with others. That is to say, these critics misunderstand the particular manner in which Eliot dramatizes the subject/object binary in the poem. Indeed, J. Hillis Miller points to the well-referenced quotation from F.H. Bradley that Eliot offers in his notes to the poem as evidence of the poem’s essential solipsistic impulse. Bradley writes, “My external sensations are no less private to my self than are my thoughts and 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” (80). For Miller, this passage demonstrates the way in which “each mind in [all of] Eliot’s early poetry is isolated from all the others” (136). In Eliot’s poetry, Miller explains, “the self can never encounter anything other than itself” (136). No external world exists for the self to encounter, and against which it can define itself. Interiority is all. As Miller argues, “I am because I am everything” (136).

But as Jewel Spears Brooker notes, Bradley vehemently denied solipsism, even devoting an entire chapter to the subject in *Appearance and Reality* (193). And in his dissertation on Bradley, Eliot, too, devotes a chapter specifically intended to refute the possibility of solipsism. The passage Eliot includes in the notes to *The Waste Land* comes from Chapter XXIII of *Appearance and Reality*, on “Body and Soul.” Placed in its proper context, the passage refers only to individuals’ inability to fully articulate lived experience. In this section of the chapter, Bradley focuses on the nature and limits of communication, not self-consciousness. Significantly, and in contrast with Miller’s assertions, Bradley argues in an earlier chapter that “Self-consciousness, as distinct from self-feeling, implies a relation. It is the state where the self has become an object that stands before the mind” (109). Indeed, even more to the point, he argues that “We begin from the outside, but the distinguishing process becomes more inward, until it ends with deliberate and conscious introspection” (90). In other words, self-consciousness (interior self-experience) arises out of the encounter with an external otherness that re-presents (or objectifies) the self back to itself, precisely the procedure that Tiresias embodies.

Thus, *The Waste Land* stands at the end of a trajectory begun in the Laforguian marionette poems, in which Eliot first offered a dramatization of individuals as utterly self-externalized. But it also recapitulates and extends the dialectical operation initiated in “Portrait” and “Prufrock,” in which the speakers first come to an awareness of their own self-externalization. In each of these poems (from “Convictions” to *The Waste Land*), Eliot consistently refuses to privilege interiority as an ontologically stable mode of subjectivity sufficient in itself. Individuals either remain confined to their own surface

features (i.e., their socially inscribed personas or set performances), or develop a sense of inwardness out of a self-reflexive realization of themselves as objects subject to objectification. In “Portrait” and “Prufrock,” the speakers encounter themselves as selves only through the process of (semi-) violent self-objectification. An intrusive, external gaze initiates the dialectic. In *The Waste Land*, on the other hand, self-objectification through identity with the other renders the self visible to itself. Tiresias perceives himself externalized in others’ experiences, an act of self-objectification which renders him present to himself through the experience of experiencing others *as* the self, an interiorized self-consciousness which he proves in the very act of articulating it. As in his philosophical work, Eliot thus portrays the subject/object binary in terms of the mutual interdependency of the two terms. Both interiority and exteriority (or depth and surface) imply one another. Neither exists in isolation from the other, but dialectically intertwine, such that only the experience of objectification (for instance) can reflexively give rise to the experience of interiority. And conversely, interiority as such implies the self-conscious experience of oneself as an object.

However, neither “Portrait,” “Prufrock,” nor *The Waste Land* dramatizes this dialectical relation between the inward and the outward as a positive experience. Each of these poems, in various ways, portrays the emergence of interiority as the end product of an agonizing process. As noted above, in both “Portrait” and “Prufrock,” self-consciousness results from a near violent encounter with the objectifying gaze of the other. Moreover, the speakers’ own self-experience remains characterized by a near-hysterical sense of disorientation and dislocation. And in *The Waste Land*, Tiresias’ self-

experience comes inflected through the experience of self-suffering (as well as witnessing others suffer, especially since they remain incapable of acknowledging it). Moreover, these poems each appear to suggest that the sense of interiority generated through encounter with an external otherness itself then remains stably established (even if negatively experienced, as in “Prufrock”). While this fundamental dialectical relation between interiority and exteriority will remain unchanged over the course of Eliot’s career (whether in prose or poetry), the way he encodes the experience does alter. Chapter Five will discuss the ways in which Eliot alters the dramatization of this binary in his later work, from “Ash-Wednesday” to *Four Quartets*. Rather than portraying the subject/object relation negatively and as a final product, Eliot’s later work reveals a more positive view of the relation, while at the same time refusing closure to the process. That is to say, Eliot’s later work demonstrates how interiority remains inherently unstable, and yet how this instability itself offers the possibility for a self-transcendence which his later work will go on to affirm.

CHAPTER V
DISSOLUTION AND CONSTITUTION IN
SWEENEY AGONISTES, “ASH WEDNESDAY,” AND *FOUR QUARTETS*

In 1929’s “Dante,” Eliot writes of those in the inferno, that “the torment issues from the very nature of the damned themselves, expresses their essence; they writhe in the torment of their own perpetually perverted nature” (220). They remain closed in on themselves, he seems to suggest, twisted round their own distorted thoughts and desires. Their suffering stems from their own inability to distance themselves from themselves, to come to some self-reflective awareness that they remain the source of their own torment (that it “expresses their essence”). In other words, they lack self-knowledge, a lack that links them to many of the figures in Eliot’s own work, from “Convictions” through *The Waste Land*. (Recall those marionettes from the *March Hare* poems, or the ghostly crowd that “flows” over London Bridge in *The Waste Land*.) Significantly, in the same passage from “Dante,” Eliot contrasts the souls in the inferno with those in purgatory, and argues that for those in purgatory, “the torment of flame is deliberately and consciously accepted.” Those “in purgatory,” he continues, “suffer because they *wish to suffer*, for purgation” (220, emphasis in original). In “their suffering,” he adds, “is hope” (220).

The difference, then, between those in the inferno and those in purgatory perhaps lies in the difference between their respective states of reflexive self-awareness. Indeed, those in purgatory actively seek the “triumph of a new renunciation”; they seek to

unmake and then reconstitute themselves in an act of submission to a divine order which both exceeds and encompasses them (226). That is to say, Eliot appears to posit a model of dialectical renunciation in his study of Dante that parallels the model of selfhood he advances in his own theory and poetry. He suggests that damnation consists of individuals' inability to experience themselves as objects to themselves. They remain perpetually confined (condemned) to their own insular sphere of subjective self-experience. Conversely, those in purgatory come to some awareness, however limited, of themselves as objects acting in a world of other objects. Thus externalized to themselves, they seek to purge away the merely subjective (the limited, the insular) in order to achieve a higher, more complex or comprehensive state of refined selfhood.

Significantly, this gap between these two states formally correlates to the shift in his poetics that takes place between "Convictions" and "Prufrock." As I argued in Chapter Four, in his earliest poems, Eliot dramatizes individuals who lack any sense of self-awareness. They exist only as depthless surfaces, confined to rote performances which they mechanically enact. Beginning in "Prufrock" (although gestured towards in "Portrait"), Eliot's personages come to a nascent awareness of themselves as subjects capable of objectification. That is, they come to experience their own self-objectification.

But in contrast to Dante's vision, the emotional valence of Eliot's earliest poems remains highly negative. Indeed, as the epigraph to "Prufrock" suggests, Eliot casts his speaker as one of the damned, rather than a soul working its way through purgatory. While the portrayal of the self-reflexive structure of subjectivity remains similar between the two poems (*Purgatory* and "Prufrock"), Eliot suggests that individuals do not

experience self-objectification as redemptive. However, by the time he reaches “Ash Wednesday,” Eliot has not only transformed a negative experience into a positive one, but further complicated his own dialectical procedure. For rather than emphasizing only the emergence of self-awareness through the experience of self-objectification, Eliot’s later work advances a third procedure, whereby the sense of self established through awareness of the self is itself subjected to further (self-negating) objectification. That is to say, individuals do not reflexively discover some deeper, ontologically stable self (as Matthew Arnold or Henri Bergson might argue), but rather encounter a self that itself remains subject to further de-constitution. Eliot denies the self an essential uniformity, and suggests rather that the self remains ever susceptible to further rupturing through further experiences of self-objectification. In essence, Eliot posits a purgative process, by which the self experiences its own perpetual self-emptying. And just as for Dante, purgation remains a positive experience, so, too, does it remain redemptive for Eliot.

This chapter will trace in Eliot’s middle and late work the emergence of a new stage in his portrayal of the dialectical relation between interiority and exteriority. I will argue that Eliot moves beyond the emphasis on bounded, sealed surfaces as developed in his earliest *March Hare* poems as well as in *The Waste Land*, and that he complicates and extends the dialectic he first begins to explore in “Portrait” and “Prufrock.” I will argue that in poems (or verse dramas) such as *Sweeney Agonistes*, “Ash Wednesday,” and *Four Quartets*, Eliot portrays surfaces as constitutively unstable, permeable, and prone to disintegration and fragmentation. He emphasizes their abject vulnerability, or tendency towards perpetual decay. Since for Eliot, external surfaces necessarily represent inner

experience (as a kind of objective correlative), so then to represent the incoherence of the surface is to represent the incoherence of the interior. Whereas in “Portrait” and “Prufrock” reflexivity gave rise to a nascent (though tenuous) sense of semi-authentic inwardness, his later work undercuts this newly emergent sense of an inner self by suggesting its fundamental, constitutive instability. For even as the self manifests to itself through the process of its own self-externalization, the self which manifests remains vulnerable to further acts of self-sundering objectification. That is to say, Eliot portrays a notion of self characterized by the endless dialectical interrelation of the inward and the outward (the unending subjective experience of self-objectification).

Each of these three texts (*Sweeney Agonistes*, “Ash Wednesday,” and *Four Quartets*) dramatizes this dialectical procedure, and each, too, portrays this process as a kind of self-redemptive purgative experience. Indeed, each builds incrementally upon the other, as Eliot’s purgative, self-deconstructive vision slowly develops. *Sweeney* largely retains the negative valence of his earlier poems, while at the same time emphasizing the instability of the body/self that the later two poems will further explore. “Ash Wednesday” initiates a tonal transformation, by which bodily (or self) disintegration comes to seem a necessary step in the further development of interiority. And in *Four Quartets*, through the image of incarnational embodiment, Eliot offers a vision of the self as poised between disintegration and continuance, between its own self-rupturing externalization and sense of internal self-perpetuation. Each of these works, then, reflects the ongoing presence of a dialectical operation that began to emerge in his poetry as early

as “Portrait,” and of an unending preoccupation with the relation between interiority and exteriority that dates from his earliest unpublished poetry.

From “Prufrock” to *Sweeney Agonistes*

As discussed in Chapter Four, in “Prufrock,” Eliot dramatizes the experience of self-objectification and the resultant, disorienting sense of inwardness that reflexively emerges. As noted then, Eliot draws attention to Prufrock’s own bodily materiality, to his concrete, self-bounded material form. Prufrock fixates, for instance, on his “morning coat” and on his “collar mount[ed] firmly to the chin.” He obsesses, too, over the “thin[ness]” of his “arms and legs” as well as the “bald spot in the middle of [his] hair” (14). In dwelling on his body in this way, he reveals the sense of self-enclosure and isolation that characterizes his immediate self-experience. His body marks the extent of his own self-experience, functions as an encircling, imprisoning sphere. But Prufrock’s focus on the body also reveals an anxiety over the solidity or coherence of that body. His descriptions of himself implicitly reflect a concern over his own self-attenuation. His “arms and legs” are *literally* “thin,” as is his hair. He confesses, too, “I grow old . . . I grow old,” suggesting a sense of permeating bodily weakening (16). But the text goes further. In a striking image, which anticipates some of the imagery of “Ash Wednesday,” Prufrock sees his “head (grown slightly bald) / brought in upon a platter” (15). He portrays his own self-dismembering, however briefly. Most significantly, though, when recounting those “eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,” he likens himself to an insect pierced by a pin, “wriggling on the wall” (14). Prufrock experiences the gaze of the other not merely as an assault, but as an impaling. Their gaze ruptures his sense of self-totality.

Even as they “fix [him] in a formulated phrase” (and thereby externalize him to himself as an object subject to their gaze), they disrupt the tentative coherence established in the act of that objectification. “Prufrock,” then, portrays not only the process of self-objectification, but reveals, too, the ultimate instability of the object generated through that process.

Thus, in “Prufrock,” Eliot emphasizes the lack of any ontologically intrinsic external coherence. Surfaces, the poem suggests, remain open, permeable, and contingent. The external itself (as a concept) remains the product of an externalizing, objectifying gaze, and thus remains vulnerable to further reconstitution within that gaze. As Eliot himself puts it in his dissertation, “We arrive at objects . . . by meaning objects; sensations organize themselves around a . . . point of attention and the world of feeling is transmogrified into a world of self and object” (137). But for Eliot, “objects are constantly shifting, and new transpositions of objectivity and feeling constantly developing” (155). Thus objects (as objects) remain inherently unstable, subject to perspectival alterations and new relations. When the self perceives itself as an object through the self-externalizing gaze of the other, the self, too, perceives itself as an object subject to further reconstitution. Prufrock, of course, senses this and responds with a degree of horror. Still, as argued in Chapter Four, Eliot’s early work focuses predominately on the mutually constitutive dialectical interrelation between subjects and objects. Inwardness develops when individuals perceive themselves as selves through their own self-objectification. His later work, on the other hand, goes on to emphasize the inherent instability of the subjects and objects generated out of this dialectical matrix.

Indeed, beginning with *Sweeney Agonistes*, Eliot emphasizes the de-constitution of the self, whether figured as subject or object.

As Russell Elliott Murphy points out, Eliot originally intended *Sweeney Agonistes* as a kind of “successor” work to *The Waste Land* (380). Following the success of the latter, he sought a new direction for his poetry, and turned to verse drama as a “suitable” vehicle (380). Indeed, in a conversation with Arnold Bennett in 1924, Eliot confessed that “he had definitely given up [the] form of writing” exhibited in *The Waste Land*, and that he now sought to “write a drama of modern life (furnished flat sort of people) in a rhythmic prose ‘perhaps with certain things in it accentuated by drum beats’” (qtd in Roby 22). Eliot began work on portions of *Sweeney* as early as 1923, only two years after the publication of *The Waste Land* (Murphy 380). But of course, as a character, Sweeney stems from much earlier in Eliot’s career, featuring in four other poems, “Sweeney among the Nightingales,” “Sweeney Erect,” “Mr. Eliot’s Sunday Morning Service,” and (however briefly) *The Waste Land* itself. As such, despite Eliot’s protestations to the contrary, *Sweeney* marks a continuation of his earlier projects, at least at one level, despite the variation to dramatic form. Indeed, Helen Gardner argues that not only the characters mark a continuation between the two periods, but that thematic similarities exist as well. What Sweeney reveals, for Gardner, “is the boredom and horror that lie beneath the commonplace and ugly” (129). But such is the theme, she suggests, of all Eliot’s early work. “The theme of Mr. Eliot’s early verse,” she affirms, “finds supreme expression in *The Waste Land*, to which *Sweeney Agonistes* appears a rather sterile appendix” (132). Murphy echoes this when he claims that Sweeney “strikes a ponderous

tone sufficient to make it seem now, with the possible exception of ‘The Hollow Men,’ the last gasp of *The Waste Land*’s more despairing and depressing aspects, revealing the mordantly savage quality of verse that had become virtually a hallmark of Eliot’s poetry by this point in time” (380).

But Gardner overlooks the profound differences that the dramatic form of the play introduces. Drama places individuals in confrontation with one another in a way that highlights their ontological distinctness from each other. It thus allows for a more distinct portrayal of subject/object relations in that individuals speak out of their own subjective centers while at the same time engaging others as objects of attention. Speakers constitute themselves in relation to one another in the very act of engaging with one another. On the other hand, the dramatic monologue (such as “Portrait” or “Prufrock”) necessarily privileges the perspective of a single subjective persona. What the speaker of a dramatic monologue perceives is necessarily constrained by the epistemological frame intrinsic to the speaker’s own subjective position. Even *The Waste Land*, which (strictly speaking) is not a dramatic monologue (contrary to what Grover Smith may suggest),⁹⁵ privileges the subjective perspective, in that it works to convey the same sense of self-enclosure and entrapment (the gap that divides the subject from the object or the inner from the outer) that characterizes poems such as “Prufrock” or even “Convictions.”

What *Sweeney*’s dramatic form offers, then, is a new method for positing subject/object relations. It allows Eliot to continue to explore the inner/outer binary in a way his earlier work would no longer allow, despite the fact that he left the play

⁹⁵ For Smith, as noted in Chapter Four, Tiresias is *The Waste Land*’s speaker.

uncompleted (although, as Kinley Roby notes, “with the passage of time” the play “appears increasingly . . . to be . . . a finished work” [22]). For indeed, *Sweeney* dramatizes the same concern with the relation between the internal and the external that characterizes much of Eliot’s work, as he continues to emphasize the fundamental instability of both terms of the binary (of both subject and object). But in *Sweeney* he no longer dwells solely on the emergence of an inwardness predicated on the experience of self-objectification, but focuses rather on the desire for self-dissolution, although he does so by first emphasizing the same sense of isolation and epistemological limitation that characterizes much of his earlier work. In this sense, Gardner is right to claim that the poem dwells on the self-imprisoning “boredom and horror” that underlies social reality. And yet, she overlooks the poem’s deeper dialectical impulses. In short, what *Sweeney* dramatizes is the individuals’ inner experience of itself as an isolated subject oppositionally opposed to the object of the other, and the concomitant desire to overcome that status through self-dissolution into the other.

Sweeney and Oppositional Relations

Sweeney Agonistes consists of two “fragments,” both of which take place in what appears to be a brothel (or flat-turned-brothel). As such, from the beginning, the play hints at a model of human relations characterized by objectification and opposition. In this, the play also channels the relational dysfunction and sexual objectification that characterizes a number of crucial passages in *The Waste Land* (e.g., the clerk and the typist, the wealthy couple in “A Game of Chess,” Lil and Albert). And as in *The Waste Land*, *Sweeney* also presents individuals largely devoid of any sense of substantive

interiority or self-awareness. Indeed, as in his work ranging from “Convictions” to *The Waste Land*, in *Sweeney* Eliot collapses the gap between inner and outer, reduces the inward to its outer expressions. Individuals exist only as the series of shifting outer surfaces they present to others. Shortly after the play opens, for example, Dusty and Doris play at cards, identifying others according to particular cards drawn from the deck:

Dusty: First is. What is?
Doris: The King of Clubs
Dusty: That’s Pereira
Doris: It might be Sweeney
Dusty: It’s Pereira
Doris: It might just as well be Sweeney
.....
Doris: Here’s the three. What’s that mean?
Dusty: ‘News of an absent friend’. —Pereira
Doris: The Queen of Hearts!—Mrs. Porter!
Dusty: Or it might be you
Doris: Or it might be you
.....
Dusty: The Knave of Spades
Doris: That’ll be Snow
.....
Doris: Of course, the Knave of Hearts is Sam! (117-118)

They link Pereira here to the “King of Clubs,” Mrs. Porter to the “Queen of Hearts,” and Sam Wauchope to the “Knave of Hearts. (117, 118). The play configures these individuals as repeatable, predictable types. They lack depth, individuality, or even specificity (e.g., they identify both Sweeney and Pereira with the “King of Clubs,” for instance). Each corresponds with a card which in some significant way seems to

encapsulate their persona or essence. The inward (what exists of it) literally corresponds with an externalized marker.⁹⁶

Grover Smith makes a superficially similar argument when he points out that the play presents characters in pairs, one female and three male: Doris and Dusty, Sweeney and Pereira, Sam and Horsfall, Klipstein and Krumpacker. He goes on to argue that each of these pairs “suggests opposed personalities,” although he admits that “the rudimentary dramatic construction makes the matter uncertain” (“T.S. Eliot” 432). He argues further that this “pervasive doubling denot[es] perhaps dark and light sides to the self, as in Yeats” (433). That is to say, Smith sees *Sweeney*’s characters essentially as types, as opposed elements of a generic binary rather than as complex, unrepeatable, singular individuals. He privileges their oppositional status, views them simply as partial persons, lacking individual self-coherency or substantiality. They exist only insofar as they exist relationally and superficially. But Smith’s binary involves a kind of pseudo-Jungian psychology that ignores the tension generated by the oppositional relations he emphasizes. He takes for granted their typological status while overlooking the very antagonisms encoded in the binary that characterizes their relations. In other words, he ignores the subject/object binary that necessarily complicates the reductionist oppositional (and psychological) binary he constructs. And in overlooking the subject/object binary, he misrepresents the mode of typological flattening which the play dramatizes.

⁹⁶ In a sense, Eliot revisits in *Sweeney* the marionette trope prevalent in his Laforguian-era poetry. These characters lack any sense of themselves as selves. They perform together, blindly enact certain roles.

For the play indeed portrays individuals as half-formed, flattened, marionette-figures (i.e., types), but it also places individuals in generative, antagonistic tension with one another, and in doing so, creates the conditions of possibility by which individuals come reflexively to experience themselves as experiencers, and thus to a nascent sense of inwardness. Indeed, the play's first epigraph (of two) comes from Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* (*The Libation Bearers*), and points towards a theme Eliot will explore in more detail in *The Family Reunion*. In the epigraph, Eliot quotes one of Orestes' lines: "You don't see them, you don't—but I see them: they are hunting me down, I must move on" (115). As in both "Portrait" and "Prufrock," Eliot introduces here at the very beginning of the play the notion of the self-destructive and yet self-generative gaze. Referring to the Furies that pursue Orestes for avenging his father's death by slaying his mother, the passage suggests both a threat to the self as well as an identity generated out of the protagonist's relation to the gaze. The individual encounters an externalized otherness, which works to position the individual as a subject *subject* to the antagonizing gaze. Thus, the play opens with an epigraph that suggests a certain notion of subject/object relations out of which a degree of tenuous inwardness emerges (i.e., that the self knows itself as that which the furies pursue).

In fact, the opening lines between Dusty and Doris only reiterate the binary suggested by the initial epigraph. In the first line of the play, Dusty says to Doris, "How about Pereira," to which Doris responds, "He's no gentleman, Pereira: / You can't trust him" (115). In turn, Dusty reflects, "And if you can't trust him— / Then you never know what he's going to do" (115). The conversation is not an accidental one. As they

converse, the two women await Pereira's expected call, but remain apprehensive about what to say to him when he finally phones:

Dusty: Sam's all right
Doris: But Pereira won't do.
We can't have Pereira
Dusty: Well what you going to do?
Telephone: Ting a ling ling
Ting a ling ling
Dusty: That's Pereira
Doris: Yes, that's Pereira
Dusty: Well what you going to do?
Telephone: Ting a ling ling
Ting a ling ling
Dusty: That's Pereira
Doris: Well can't you stop that horrible noise?
Pick up the receiver
Dusty: What'll I say?
Doris: Say what you like: say I'm ill
Say I broke my leg on the stairs
Say we've had a fire. (116)

They seem to view him as a kind of threat, although they remain unable to fully articulate the nature of the threat he embodies. He simply hovers over them as a vague menace, suggested in part through the phone's insistent "Ting a ling ling," which foreshadows, too, the clamorous "knocking" which concludes both this scene as well as the second "fragment." As Rick de Villiers also points out, they associate him with the "King of Clubs," "a card emblematic of violence and brute, primitive force" (23). In this sense, Pereira possesses some of the same spiritual power and purpose as do the Furies. Doris and Dusty perceive him as pursuing them, and thus recapitulate (however ambiguously) the same subject/object binary that delineates the relation between Orestes and the Furies. Indeed, Carol Smith argues that Pereira "represents a positive spiritual force who keeps

insistently calling and who must some day be reckoned with, even if not now. . . . The pursuing spiritual force is no ‘gentleman’ both because he is unpredictable and relentless and because he demands the agony of purgation” (24). While it may be premature to claim, as Smith does, that Pereira embodies a “*positive*” force, she is right to point out that he demands from Dusty and Doris (and others, perhaps) a reckoning of sorts, in a similar way the Furies demand of Orestes.

Of course, the play never suggests that either Doris or Dusty achieve any substantive sense of interiority. They remain largely unconscious of themselves as selves (or of others as others), as do most of the play’s other figures, with the exception, perhaps, of Sweeney. Of all the individuals in the play, Sweeney corresponds most with the Orestes of the epigraph. For of all the play’s figures, Sweeney reveals a degree of self-awareness that in fact separates him from the other figures, and the knowledge haunts him, as the Furies do Orestes. Sweeney is the play’s Prufrock, the one who has come to some cognizance of himself *as* a self, as distinct from a mere role or social persona. “I’ve been born, and once is enough,” he declares to Doris, “You don’t remember, but I remember, / Once is enough” (122). None of the play’s other figures is capable of making such a remark. It denotes not only Sweeney’s distance from them, but Sweeney’s own sense of *his* distance from them.

Indeed, as the verse drama progresses, he sets himself up in opposition to the others, antagonizes them, attempts to provoke them, thus further demonstrating his essential difference from them. Consider this exchange between Sweeney and Doris:

Sweeney: Birth, and copulation, and death.
 That's all, that's all, that's all, that's all,
 Birth, copulation, and death.
 Doris: I'd be bored.
 Sweeney: You'd be bored.
 Birth, copulation and death.
 Doris: I'd be bored.
 Sweeney: You'd be bored.
 Birth, copulation, and death.
 That's all the facts when you come to brass tacks:
 Birth, copulation, and death. (122)

Functioning here as a foil, and in a sense standing in for the other characters (who remain silent during this exchange), Doris seems unable to comprehend Sweeney's negative vision of human relations and purposes. What for Sweeney constitutes his chief existential horror is for Doris simply "boring." As such, Doris helps illustrate through contrast Sweeney's fundamental difference from the other characters. He grasps the supposed "facts" in ways that they do not. They remain existentially oblivious, objects devoid of knowledge of themselves as subjects, whereas Sweeney understands himself in part in relation to his own existential finitude. He self-consciously perceives his own materially objective self-delineation. He perceives himself (as a self) in perceiving his own external limitations, however negatively construed. That is to say, he perceives himself as an object subject to external forces and constraints. In contrast, the other characters in the verse drama appear to lack the self-reflexive capacity to experience themselves as objects to themselves. They remain unable to perceive themselves externalized to themselves, and thus lack the consequent inwardness such experience provides.

More importantly, as Villiers argues, what differentiates Sweeney from the others is his “aware[ness] of sin,” an awareness that “makes his companions uncomfortable by drawing their attention to the spiritual wasteland in which they reside” (23). Sweeney expresses this sense of sin through his story of the “man [who] once did a girl in,” a man the text clearly identifies with Sweeney, figuratively if not literally (124). A crime of this magnitude places the perpetrator in a spiritual, emotional, and psychological category all to himself. As Eliot notes in a remarkably anticipatory passage from 1917’s “Eeldrop and Appleplex,” “In Gopsum Street a man murders his mistress. The important fact is that for the man the act is eternal, and for that brief space he has to live, he is already dead. He is already in a different world from ours. He has crossed the frontier” (*Complete* 527).

William Spanos notes the similarities between Eliot’s reflections in “Eeldrop,” the psychological portraiture in *Sweeney*, and Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*. Through his monstrous transgression, the spiritually sensitive criminal (Raskolnikov, Sweeney, etc.) “discovers another dimension of reality that transfigures his earlier perspective on life and death” (11-12). The world no longer appears as it once did to such an individual. Between the criminal and the normative community now yawns an impassable void.

Both Villiers and Spanos are correct to point to the notion of sin and the “phenomenology of alienation” (as Spanos puts it) that stems from it as crucial concepts for comprehending Sweeney’s spiritual condition (12). Indeed, Eliot himself writes in 1930’s “Baudelaire” that “the recognition of the reality of Sin is a New Life; and the possibility of damnation is so immense a relief in a world of electoral reform, plebiscites, sex reform and dress reform, that damnation itself is an immediate form of salvation—of

salvation from the ennui of modern life, because it at last gives some significance to living” (*Selected* 235). But Sweeney’s sense of sin only makes sense if understood within a particular dialectical framework. Sweeney must feel not only that his crime (or the crime that he recounts) is constitutively self-alienating (i.e., that it functionally excludes him from the community whose social norms he violates), but that in some sense his crime is in itself already *known by another*, even if the crime remains a secret.

That is to say, what drives the development of self-consciousness in him (i.e., of guilt, and thus of interiority), is the sense that he is subject to judgement, that some objective, perceiving, externalized otherness will in some sense call him to account. As the chorus chants at the play’s end (in an immediate response to Sweeney’s macabre tale):

When you’re alone in the middle of the night and
you wake in a sweat and a hell of a fright
When you’re alone in the middle of the bed and
you wake like someone hit you in the head
.....
And you wait for a knock and the turning of a lock
for you know the hangman’s waiting for you. (126)

In this, Sweeney’s situation indeed mirrors Orestes’. Both protagonists feel pursued, both sense the penetrating gaze of some externalized (though undefined) other. The sensation of guilt thus effects a self-doubling, whereby the self experiences itself externalized to itself. Sweeney (like Prufrock, to an extent) encounters himself as a stranger to himself, undergoes a profound decentering, which he experiences as an awakening of sorts. Significantly, Sweeney attempts to duplicate the experience of self-externalization

through the veiled attempts at confession he engages in with the others, but their deafness rebuffs him, and thus further isolates him, thereby intensifying the experience of self that has given rise to his sense of inwardness. His inability to communicate his inner experience further heightens his sense of himself as a self, since it amplifies the oppositional relation between Sweeney and the others. He senses his difference, even as he attempts to overcome it through confession (of a sort).

Thus, on one level, *Sweeney* recapitulates much of what Eliot explores in his earlier poetry. It portrays the marionette consciousness characteristic of individuals in many of Eliot's earlier poems, while at the same time dramatizing the emergence of a sense of interiority out of individuals' experience of self-externalization. In this, it rearticulates the dialectical relation between interiority and exteriority also prevalent in his earlier work. Sweeney develops a definitive sense of interiority only when he experiences himself externalized from (or to) himself. The experience of self-inwardness depends upon the experience of self-externalization. Both events remain inextricably bound up with one another, arise (as experiential events) concurrently. To this extent, Helen Gardner is correct. *Sweeney* in some sense does offer a "rather sterile appendix" to Eliot's previous efforts. Indeed, Gardner, too, points to an inner/out binary that provides the play thematic structure, although for her the binary is not essentially dialectical and involves rather the opposition between the "outer life of parties which tries to keep boredom at bay" and the "inner life of nightmare" (130).

Sweeney and Self-Dissolution

But what Gardner misses, and what fundamentally separates the play from what comes before is the play's unrelenting emphasis on self-dissolution and dissociation. Indeed, what separates *Sweeney*, say, from *Prufrock* is in fact what separates *Sweeney* from "Prufrock." Whereas "Prufrock" (or "Portrait" or even *The Waste Land*) emphasized primarily the dialectical development of a tenuous inwardness out of the experience of semi-violent self-externalization, *Sweeney* moves a step beyond this and dramatizes the subsequent experience of the dissolubility of this new sense of self. In other words, the play dramatizes the instability of the very inner/outer binary it implicitly constructs. The self (as inwardly experienced through its own self-externalization) retains a tenuousness that defies its own nascent sense of self-substantiality. Indeed, individuals experience inwardness as such as a traumatic encounter. The experience of self-objectification which renders individuals apparent to themselves at the same time marks an experience of self-sundering, by which the self experiences itself as doubled or internally ruptured. The boundary between inner and outer becomes subsequently unstable.

Examples abound. For instance, when *Sweeney* first appears (at the beginning of the second fragment), his first lines involve images of consumption and bodily disintegration. "I'll carry you off / To a cannibal isle," he says to Doris. To which she responds, "You'll be the cannibal" (121). Cannibalism immediately suggests not only bodily decomposition, but the disintegration of one individual into another. It involves, in other words, the dissolution of an object into a subject, the collapse of the space between

the two, in that the internal incorporates the external into itself. It reflects the subject's desire to violently overcome the distance between itself and that external to itself by literally devouring the external object. Sweeney's first words express a desire (however ironically or comically intended) to consume Doris, to dissolve her into himself. "I'll gobble you up," he exclaims, "I'll be the cannibal / . . . I'll convert you! / Into a stew. / A nice little, white little, missionary stew" (121). For Sweeney, this cannibalistic impulse stems not (necessarily) from some dehumanizing misogynistic masculine ideology which sees the female simply as an object to consume for the sake of bodily gratification (i.e., the female as the site for the exercise of male power), but from a desire to bridge the gap that marks him to himself as a consciousness internally aware of itself as an object distinct from other external objects. That is to say, Sweeney's (ironic, comic, nightmarish) desire to consume Doris marks a concurrent desire to lose himself in the act of consumption. He seeks to close the gap between himself and the other (the inner and the outer), a necessarily violent act which conforms to the violent act that first gives rise to the self's inward sense of itself as a self in contradistinction to others.

Sweeney's story of the "man [who] once did a girl in" only reiterates and deepens the emphasis on the dissolution of the distinction between subject and object (and thus of the instability of the self). His grotesque story involves a man who dissolves a woman in a bath of lysol. But the line between the literal and the figurative blurs, for Sweeney seems less interested in the factuality of the account than in its allegorical, psychological, or spiritual import. Indeed, the tale involves not only the woman's bodily dissolution but the man's psychological disintegration. That is, the woman's decomposition correlates

with the perpetrator's own self-decomposition as well. The disintegration of the external mirrors the disintegration of the internal. Both events necessarily, dialectically intertwine with one another. As Sweeney explains, the man loses the capacity to distinguish between his fate and the woman's (or between his identity and hers): "He didn't know if he was alive / and the girl was dead / He didn't know if the girl was alive / and he was dead / He didn't know if they were both alive / or both were dead" (125). These syntactic permutations suggest Sweeney's own sense of the binary relation between the inner and the outer (or the subject and the object). Who here is the subject and who the object, he seems to ask? Who in fact has been decomposed? Where is the line that distinguishes between the two individuals or states-of-being?⁹⁷ His violent act thus defines him to himself even as it deconstructs him as a self. In this, the lines suggest, too, that the sense of interiority generated through the self-doubling (or self-externalizing) his crime enables, remains subject to degeneration even in the moment of its initial self-constitution.

This sense of self-dissolution (or of the collapse between inner and outer) is not merely some incidental element tangential to the play's other interests. As noted above, the very first epigraph hints at themes of pursuit and self-destruction. The Furies pursue Orestes in order to rend him apart, even as Sweeney (it seems) feels similarly pursued. And indeed, the play's final lines, too, suggest such an image. In the final song, as quoted above, Wauchope, Horsfall, Klipstein, and Krumpacker sing, "You dreamt you waked up

⁹⁷ Wauchope and Horsfall reiterate this ambiguity when they sing, "Under the bamboo tree / Two live as one / One live as two / Two live as three" (122).

at seven o'clock and it's / foggy and it's damp and it's dawn and it's dark / And you wait
for a knock and the turning of a lock / for you know the hangman's waiting for you. /
And perhaps you're alive / And perhaps you're dead" (126). The same themes of pursuit
and bodily threat reappear here in the final lines, as, too, does the ambiguity over the
distinction between life and death (or self-constitution and self-dissolution). Indeed, the
play ends with a series of "knocks":

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK
KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK
KNOCK
KNOCK
KNOCK (126)

Such knocking (in insistent capitals, no less) implicitly suggests someone's arrival and
thus some imminent confrontation, consummation, or final deconstruction. That is to say,
the play concludes by hinting at the arrival of the "hangman." In a sense, Orestes
(Sweeney) can no longer evade his pursuers.

What the play dramatizes, then, is not only the development of an inwardly-
oriented self-awareness (as "Prufrock" and other poems similarly portray), but the
impermanence and essential insubstantiality of the self constituted through that
awareness. The self remains bound, the play suggests, to that which it experiences as
external to itself. Alternations to the external produce alternations to the internal. But
more than this, the play appears to suggest the self's desire for self-dissolution. It
dramatizes Sweeney's quest to dissolve the boundary that separates him (or his internal
spaces) from others. It dramatizes, in other words, Sweeney's desire to dissolve the

subject into the object, the inner into the outer. In this sense, the play portrays a process of purgation (or of the desire for purgation), i.e., of a burning away of the self. But in *Sweeney*, purgation, the loss of the self, remains an emotionally and psychologically horrifying experience. In Eliot's later work, from "Ash Wednesday" onwards, this sense of purgation obtains a less negative (though still ambivalent) valence.

Thus, in certain ways, *Sweeney* functions as a transitional work. It links together the earlier work with the later. Like "Prufrock," for instance, it dramatizes the emergence of self-consciousness out of the experience of self-externalization. But like the poems that follow it, it also dramatizes the insubstantiality and instability of the self so generated. "Ash Wednesday," then, marks a fundamental turn in Eliot's poetry, which *Sweeney Agonistes* first inaugurates.

Affirmation and Dissociation in "Ash Wednesday"

Eliot published "Ash Wednesday" in 1930, although various sections of the poem had appeared as early as 1927, the year of Eliot's conversion.⁹⁸ As others have noted, the poem in many ways represents a break with what had come before. Balachandra Rajan, for instance, notes that for many the poem "marks a decisive turn in Eliot's poetry and for some of them it is . . . a turn for the worse" (55). Similarly, Helen Gardner reflects on the "new style" of the poem, "which shows an extraordinary relaxation" in its "force of expression" when compared to the "extreme power of condensation" characteristic of his

⁹⁸ Eliot published Part II in 1927 as "Salutation," Part I in 1928 as "Perch' io non spero," and Part III as "Al som de l'escalina" in 1929 (Murphy 55). Murphy makes the point that as with "The Hollow Men," "there is no reason to conclude that Eliot was not conceiving of the three separately published poems to begin with as pieces of a larger whole, just as there is no reason to conclude that he was" (54).

earlier work (101). And A.G. George suggests that beginning roughly with “Ash Wednesday,” Eliot abandons the use of irony as a poetic device, implying a break with his previous practices (121).⁹⁹ At the very least, “Ash Wednesday” is distinct in that it is neither a play like *Sweeney* nor a dramatic monologue like “Prufrock,” nor does it possess the fractured multiplicity of voices characteristic of *The Waste Land*. Instead, in “Ash Wednesday,” Eliot offers an extended lyric meditation grounded in a singular speaking “I” that provides the poem a sense of structural and emotive coherence. Whereas “Prufrock” (or “Portrait,” etc.) presents a fictive character, “Ash Wednesday” immerses its readers in the consciousness of a speaker easily conflated with the author (and thus manifesting a degree of reality denied Prufrock). And whereas *The Waste Land* offers a series of structurally disconnected voices and vignettes (or as in *Sweeney* a chorus of contending, splintered voices), “Ash Wednesday” coheres around the utterances and ruminations of a single self-reflective speaker.

Still, similarities persist. Indeed, David Spurr notes that “In terms of poetic style, [the poem] departs less radically from the earlier works than the newly Christian theme has led most commentators to suppose” (60). He argues that Eliot had employed the “techniques of negation and repetition” since at least *The Waste Land*, and that its “syntactical formality” and “liturgical style” echoes that of “The Hollow Men” (60). Similarly, Russell Elliott Murphy observes that “the poem is not any break from but a continuance of issues and themes that Eliot had been essaying in his poetry all along”

⁹⁹ Russell Elliott Murphy also observes that “the suspicion persists that “Ash-Wednesday” is quite different from anything that had come from [Eliot’s] pen before” (55).

(58). For Murphy, Eliot's "turn" in "Ash Wednesday" "is into a poem, and a poetry, that is, rather than a lament . . . an expression of acceptance and communion with what vision there is that is available" (57). That is to say, for Murphy, Eliot had exhausted the theme of spiritual wasteland characteristic of his earlier work, and was ready now to explore in verse the process of "acceptance and [limited] communion" with a vision beyond that wasteland. Or, as Eliot himself puts it in the first part of "Ash Wednesday," he was now ready "to construct something / Upon which to rejoice" (89). For these critics, then, the poem marks a break with Eliot's earlier work only inasmuch as it marks his process of development as a poet. But, as Murphy suggests, such development remains necessarily predicated on what came before. In short, "Ash Wednesday" continues Eliot's project rather than interrupts it; it simply changes its key, as it were.

Both positions possess merit, for the poem marks both a break from and a continuation of Eliot's earlier work, but so, too, does every poem Eliot writes. In terms of genre and structure, "Prufrock," say, differs from "Convictions" to the same degree that *The Waste Land* differs from "Prufrock." And *Sweeney*, certainly, differs from all of them. Yet each of these poems nonetheless exhibits a shared constellation of themes, underlying assumptions, and intellectual preoccupations which structural variations cannot efface. I want to suggest that what links "Ash Wednesday" to Eliot's earlier work is a continued emphasis on and subversion of the inner/outer binary. In the same way that his other work posits (and undercuts) an opposition between interiority and exteriority (i.e., by suggesting the constitutive interrelation between the two terms), so, too, does "Ash Wednesday." But I want to argue, too, that what separates the poem from its

predecessors is not only an increased emphasis on disintegrative processes (as seen in *Sweeney* and hinted at in “Prufrock”) but an affirmation of these processes coupled, too, with the suggestion of their necessity.

The Dialectics of Self-Construction

In her discussion of “Ash Wednesday,” Gardner claims that “Instead of looking out upon the world and seeing sharply defined and various manifestations of the same desolation and emptiness, the poet turns away from the outer world of men to ponder over certain intimate personal experiences” (100). Eliot, that is, moves from a dramatization of the experience of desolation in others to a dramatization of his own individual spiritual struggle. In making this claim, Gardner expresses an understanding of the poem in terms of an inner/outer binary which (for her) lends the poem its structural and thematic coherence. Indeed, she adds that the “intensity of apprehension in the earlier poetry is replaced by an intensity of meditation,” suggesting that in “Ash Wednesday” Eliot turns from an externally oriented “apprehension” towards an internally oriented “meditation” (100). Fayek Ishak also draws attention to this “theme of ‘inwardness,’” but links it, too, to Eliot’s “preoccupation with the purgatorial efficacy of the soul,” as well as “the mysticism of the Dark Night expounded by St. John of the Cross, and the spiral ascent in Dante’s Mount of Purgation” (87). For Ishak, Eliot dramatizes anew “the spiritual drama of the soul” by employing the traditional language of Christian mysticism (106). Similarly, Audrey Rodgers argues that “Ash Wednesday” recapitulates the underlying psychological framework of Dante’s *Purgatorio*, in that it “emphasize[s] the formula of doing-suffering-understanding” (97). For Rodgers, Eliot’s poem, like Dante’s,

traces the “progressions and regressions of the soul . . . through the images of light and darkness, descent and ascent, death and rebirth” (111). For Rodgers, though, as for Gardner and Ishak, this process remains fundamentally (and necessarily) inwardly oriented.

Each of these critics (Gardner, Ishak, Rodgers) sees the poem as a record of the speaker’s own psychological or spiritual struggle. For them, “Ash Wednesday” maps out the inner landscape of the poet’s own “dark night of the soul.” Yet in emphasizing this inward experience, each of these critics in effect constructs a binary (explicitly so in Gardner) which too neatly divides the inward from the outward. Indeed, in drawing such a stark distinction between the inner and the outer, these critics foreclose the possibility of a more complex understanding of the relation between the two terms. Moreover, each of these critics posits (implicitly) that the poem represents interiority in itself as both self-contained and self-substantial. They inadvertently suggest a model of self characterized by that self’s own utter self-absorption. They suggest, in other words, that the speaker of the poem embodies an entirely self-directed, rational project of self-improvement through the process of purgation and renunciation. They posit an “I” implicitly in full command of itself, unified in purpose and effort, no matter the “progressions and regressions” that characterize its self-experience. They posit an ontologically stable, self-persisting “I” that endeavors to undertake a self-transformative process, for the “I,” of course, both precedes and succeeds the transformations by which it defines itself. It exists in itself as a stable ontological reality. Neither Gardner, Ishak, nor Rodgers acknowledges the possibility of a constitutive dialectical relation between interiority and exteriority which might call into

question the metaphysical reality of that “I.” In short, they inadvertently overstate the degree of unity and self-substantiality implied in the poem’s representation of subjectivity.

Still, the poem certainly dramatizes an inward turn, an exploration of the speaker’s own reflections and emotions, in distinction from an exploration of the minds or actions of others. The very first lines herald such a turn in their repeated use of the first person personal pronoun:

Because I do not hope to turn again
Because I do not hope
Because I do not hope to turn
Desiring this man’s gift and that man’s scope
I no longer strive to strive towards such things. (89)

The opening lines immediately reveal an inner landscape of contemplative self-reflection centered on a singular, pondering, persisting “I.” Certainly, in dramatizing a singular self-persisting speaker, the poem suggests for that speaker a degree of self-substantiality and inner-coherence. Indeed, the persistent continuity (whether structural or thematic) of the poem’s lyric “I” might be seen to imply a metaphysical unity to that “I” as well. Yet the “I” of the poem implicitly constitutes itself in agonistic relation with a world it posits external to itself. That is, in turning inwards, the “I” implicitly turns inward away from a perceived external reality. As the speaker confesses, he no longer “Desir[es] this man’s gift and that man’s scope / I no longer strive to strive towards such things” (89). But in seeking to renounce “such things,” he implicitly defines himself in terms of that which he rejects. He experiences the pressure of that externality even as he attempts to distance

himself from it. In other words, from the poem's very first lines, interiority appears bound up with the experience of exteriority. The internal derives its intensity from its rejection of the external, even as the external exists (for the speaker) only as that which powers the oppositional emergence of the internal.

The poem dramatizes this underlying dialectical tension in yet another, more fundamental manner as well. For not only does the poem suggest an implicit relation between the self's own inner experiential reality and a material reality perceived as external to itself (the concrete quotidian world), but it also places the self in relation to a trans-material reality it perceives as external to itself. The poem, that is, not only stages the poet's exploration of his own inner spiritual struggle (i.e., his effort to "construct something / Upon which to rejoice," as he puts it in the second stanza [89]), but it frames that exploration in terms of an appeal to some felt self-transcendent external reality. Thus the act of supplication that concludes Part I:

Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still.

Pray for us sinners now and at hour of our death
Pray for us now and at the hour of our death. (90, spacing in original)

The speaker pleads in this passage with a transcendent Other he perceives as utterly self-exterior. He subordinates himself to that which he perceives as outside himself, positions himself in relation to some self-transcendent power, thus defining himself in terms of that relation.

Echoing these lines, the poem concludes with an evocation of and appeal to the ambiguous and multivalent “Lady of Silences” (91):

Blessed sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden,
Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks,
Our peace in His will
And even among these rocks
Sister, mother
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea
Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee. (99, spacing in original)

The act of supplication and petition reveals the speaker’s sense of his own self-limits. Again, the speaker places himself in subordinate relation to a reality he perceives as ontologically transcendent. The Lady exists outside him, beyond him, and as such delineates him to himself *as* a finite self. She functions as a kind of existential foil. Indeed, the Lady appears in almost every section of the poem, either implicitly (as in Section I, as quoted above), or explicitly, as in the later sections. She appears, for instance, in Section II as the “Lady of Silences,” in Section IV as the “silent sister,” in Section V as the “veiled sister,” and in Section VI as the “Blessed sister” (91, 94, 97, 98). And each time she appears, he praises or petitions her, each time subordinates himself to her, thus privileging her as the medium of his own self-articulation. It seems, then, as if the speaker can only encounter himself as a self through the mediating presence of some already externalized other. To perceive himself requires the presence of a gaze capable of

sustaining him as an *object* to himself, or at least of validating his own reflexive self-objectifying gaze (i.e., by reference to a presence outside of himself).

In short, the Lady provides the point of attention that renders him apparent to himself, draws him together as a self. As such, the poet-speaker turns outwards at least as much as he appears to turn inwards, addressing that which he perceives as external to himself, even as he articulates the vicissitudes of his own self-experience. As Eliot argues in his 1913 essay “Report on the Relation of Kant’s Criticism to Agnosticism” (discussed in Chapter Three), “in order to know, we must begin with . . . the conception of an external relation, a real which is ‘outside of ourselves’” (44). The Lady seems to stand in for that “real which is ‘outside’” the speaker, which provides the dialectical counterpoint that powers his own emergent sense of self. In 1914’s “Objects: Real, Unreal, Ideal, and Imaginary” (also discussed in Chapter Three), Eliot affirms, too, that “in becoming aware that [an object] is an object, I become aware that I am a subject” (169). In acknowledging the Lady as an object external to himself, he acknowledges himself as a subject in relation to the Lady. But paradoxically, in acknowledging himself as a subject in relation to the Lady, he acknowledges himself as an object as well. The polarities coincide.

In turning towards a transcendent (or even quotidian) other, the poet turns outwards, away from himself as the center of his own self-experience. Dennis Brown argues that rather than the “monological, prophetic declaration[s]” of Eliot’s earlier work, “Ash Wednesday” presents “the voice of a dialogical confidante” (3). The turn outwards (for Brown) is thus a turn to the other. But this suggests a relation between equals (“confidantes”), when the poem in fact suggests the speaker’s sense of his own self-

insufficiency. Contra Brown, then, the outward turn implies that the inward lacks the capacity for its own self-constitutive fullness (thus the poet entreats the Lady, “suffer me not to be separated”). The speaker, that is, suggests that the inward in fact requires the outward. Indeed, the poem suggests paradoxically that a more intensified experience of inwardness consists precisely in the self orienting itself towards that which it identifies as extrinsic to itself. Not to do so would bind the speaker to the solipsistic confines of his own inner experiential realities. Such, after all, was Prufrock’s fate. As J. Hillis Miller puts it, in “Prufrock,” “the reader is plunged with the first words into the spherical enclosure of Prufrock’s mind. . . . and the bubble of his thought is never broken” (137). Certainly, “Ash Wednesday” thrusts readers into the “enclosure” of the speaker’s mind. His thoughts and emotions do indeed constitute the poem’s content. But the poem also reveals the dialectical engine that helps power the emergence of a self capable of such self-articulation, and as such, contests the very notion of such enclosure. For the self, the poet suggests, exists in generative tension with that which it perceives as external to itself.

Dismembering the Self

However, as with “Prufrock” or *Sweeney*, “Ash Wednesday” dramatizes the disintegration of the self inasmuch as it also dramatizes its dialectically emergent constitution. Even as the speaker defines himself in relation to that which he experiences as extrinsic to himself, he discovers the insubstantiality of the self thus constituted. For instance, one of the poem’s most arresting passages centers on an image of self-dissolution, on the puncturing of the self and thus the idea of the self as a self-contained

unit or unity. In Part II, the speaker describes being devoured by “three white leopards,” who feast upon him until all that remains are his bones:

Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree
In the cool of the day, having fed to satiety
On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been contained
In the hollow round of my skull. And God said
Shall these bones live? Shall these
Bones live? (61)

The speaker coolly recounts his evisceration and dismemberment by the leopards, the violence of the imagery only slightly lessened by the distanced tone he takes in describing the events. Crucially, the speaker does not inflict this dismemberment on himself, but rather experiences it originating in a source outside of himself. The leopards rend him apart, reconfiguring his sense of self such that it now includes his own self-rending. The experience of interiority here involves the violent intrusion of the external, to the point that the internal loses its own sense of self-coherency. Thus the passage portrays interiority as opened up to a reality it perceives as extrinsic to itself and capable of radically intervening in the self’s sense of self-constitution. That is, not only does the self posit itself as subordinate to some externally perceived reality, but it encounters that reality as a deconstructive force. In this, the poem dramatizes the relationship between the internal and the external as profoundly dynamic. The inner is not closed in on itself as if it were some solipsistic self-circumscribing sphere, but remains vulnerable, open to intrusion, violation, and the possibility of disintegration. The self exists in tension with that which it experiences as external to itself, subject to its dissipating, attenuating forces (even as it defines itself in relation to those external forces).

Moreover, the speaker's experience of his own dismemberment dramatizes an experience of self-dissociation. He perceives his mutilation from the outside, rather than the inside, as if he was simply an object of study to himself. Indeed the poem seems to suggest that self-perception entails self-dissociation, that to perceive the self involves a rending of that self, further undercutting any notion of an ontologically stable self as implied by Gardner, Ishak, and others. In a sense, then, just as Prufrock experienced his own self-objectification (which then reflexively generated a sense of interiority), so, too, does the speaker in "Ash Wednesday." Both poems present speakers who undergo a process of self-distantiation, and experience it as a rupturing of their former senses of self. Both poems, too, present speakers who experience self-objectification through the agency of external forces. For Prufrock, these forces manifest through the (hostile, pinning) gaze of the other. For the speaker in "Ash Wednesday," they manifest both through the leopards themselves as well as the Lady who seems to preside over the act of dismemberment. In both cases, the self becomes aware of itself as a self only when thrust into an encounter with that which it perceives as external to itself. Recall, too, the sensation of pursuit and threat of destruction that frames *Sweeney*. From the epigraph in which Orestes exclaims, "You don't see them, you don't—but I see them: they are hunting me down" to the final ominous "knock" which signals (perhaps) the arrival of the "hangman," the play dramatizes the presence of a menace presented not only as external to Sweeney himself, but to the play itself (i.e., since that which seems to threaten the characters never *fully* materializes).

But what separates “Ash Wednesday” from these earlier parallels is its attitude towards the events it portrays. For Eliot’s earlier work dramatizes the encounter with the other and the concurrent process of self-externalization (and subsequent self-dissolution) it initiates as a violent, destructive, fearful event in the inner life of the self. As discussed above, for Prufrock, the sound of “human voices” awakens him only to “drown” him (17). He experiences his own self-objectification as a violently intrusive act. Sweeney, too, experiences others as vaguely threatening, even as he seems vaguely threatening to them. But at least he seeks to efface the gap that separates him from them through veiled confession, and thus to dissolve the boundary between inner and outer, subject and object. And yet at the same time, he feels harried, exposed, as if teetering on the edge of his own destruction, though at the hand of some external force, which fills him with dread. *The Waste Land*, too, portrays the encounter between self and other (or inner and outer) as deeply antagonistic. This is most evident in Tiresias, who perceives himself refracted through all the other personages of the poem, and unites in himself their division and strife (i.e., he internalizes the external, and, conversely, externalizes the internal). He suffers with them, indeed *for* them, since they seem incapable of registering the pain they experience (or inflict). And yet, the experience disperses him. Others may unify in him, but they do not unify him: he “throb[s] between two lives” (68). Each of these three key works, then, in one way or another, portrays the encounter with the other as an experience which threatens the integrity of the self. Each portrays the constitutive dialectical relation between the inward and the outward as a profoundly self-enervating

experience. The speakers or actors in these works dread the dissolution of the self, or at best evince a profound ambivalence towards it.

“Ash Wednesday,” on the other hand, reverses the emotional valence of these earlier works, rendering self-disintegration a positive or even necessary experience in the inner life of the individual. In the leopard passage, for instance, the speaker chooses to focus not on the feast itself, but on its aftermath, when the moment of violence has passed. When the section opens, the leopards have already “fed to satiety” on him, and now recline “under a juniper-tree / In the cool of the day” (as quoted above) (91). In choosing not to focus on the act of violence, the speaker shifts the emphasis of the passage from one potentially characterized by terror (or horror) to one of relief and release. The speaker seems as relaxed and sated as do the leopards. Indeed, the presence of the Lady in the scene further defuses the sense of horror that might otherwise accompany such a description of evisceration:

Because of the goodness of this Lady
And because of her loveliness, and because
She honours the Virgin in meditation,
We shine with brightness. And I who am here dissembled
Proffer my deeds to oblivion, and my love
To the posterity of the desert and the fruit of the gourd.
It is this which recovers
My guts the strings of my eyes and the indigestible portions
Which the leopards reject. The Lady is withdrawn
In a white gown, to contemplation, in a white gown.
Let the whiteness of bones atone to forgetfulness. (91)

Silent, “withdrawn” in “contemplation,” she serves as a pacifying counterpoint to the scene’s violence (91). Her “goodness” and “loveliness” contrasts with the grotesque

image of loose “guts” and plucked eyes, such that she softens the lurid effect such an image would otherwise convey. More importantly, she serves, too, as a point of attention that draws the speaker further outside of himself. Rather than lamenting his own dismemberment, the speaker treats it as an occasion to address the enigmatic Lady. In a sense, she sanctifies the process for him, gives it purpose, redeems it in some sense, such that the self-scattering seems to the speaker somehow necessary or purposeful (e.g., “*Because of the goodness of this Lady*” the bones can “shine in brightness”).

Indeed, this section concludes with the speaker (or rather his bones) expressing satisfaction over his own dismemberment. Rather than lamenting his condition, the speaker in fact celebrates it:

Under a juniper-tree the bones sang, scattered and shining
We are glad to be scattered, we did little good to each other,
Under a tree in the cool of the day, with the blessing of sand,
Forgetting themselves and each other, united
In the quiet of the desert. (92)

“We are glad to be scattered,” his bones sing, “we did little good to each other” (92). His self-annihilation pleases him, as does the promise of forgetfulness such annihilation implies. For he seeks through such self-disintegration his own utter “oblivion,” desiring only the “quiet of the desert.” As he exclaims to the Lady, “I who am here dissembled, / Proffer my deeds to oblivion, and my love / To the posterity of the desert and the fruit of the gourd” (91). He embraces his own dissolution, seizes upon its emancipatory potential, its capacity (paradoxically) to free him from himself. “As I am forgotten / And would be forgotten, so I would forget,” he elsewhere declares (91). The speaker thus codes the self

as fundamentally insufficient to itself, as incomplete when rendered a totality in itself. It lacks “metaphysical unity,” as he puts it in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” and obtains coherence (again, paradoxically) only when dissolved into its external relations (whether figured through the leopards or the Lady). In discussing the portrayal of subjectivity in *The Waste Land*, Robert Langbaum argues that Eliot imagines individuals as locked within their own “prison-house[s] of self” (109). If that is so, then “Ash Wednesday” imagines individuals as escaping that prison-house through a near cheerful act of self-obliteration. More to the point, however, “Ash Wednesday” exposes the inadequacy of the self as a foundation for the self. The self exists, the poem suggests, not only in tension with external forces, but in constitutive subordination to those forces.

Kinereth Meyer rightly notes that “[t]hrough their ability to empty the subject of its (his?) contents, the leopards appear to be agents both of physical destruction and of possible spiritual regeneration” (441). But the same might be said, too, of the Furies (or “hangman”) in *Sweeney* or the “pinning” eyes in “Prufrock” or the sense of destitution that characterizes *The Waste Land* in general. Meyer never takes note of the way in which “Ash Wednesday” echoes these earlier works, and consequently never comments on the tonal differences that differentiate them. But whereas these earlier works clearly portray self-dissolution as a horrific experience, “Ash Wednesday” affirms it. Of course, to note that the poem in some sense affirms such an experience is not, in itself, new. Others have pointed to the poem as a dramatization of regenerative purgation, in which the newly converted Eliot appropriates Dante in order to convey the process of his own (positive) self-transformation. Lyndall Gordon, for instance, argues that “Ash Wednesday” “revives

[Eliot's] 'turning' towards the religious life" (153). For Gordon, in the "purgatory" of the poem, the "penitent [Eliot] sheds his past with his flesh . . . [and] breaks himself down to the bare bones of a rudimentary existence" for the purpose of self-renewal (294, 237). Similarly, Audrey Rodgers observes that Eliot employed Dante's *Purgatorio* as a structural and thematic "scaffold" for "Ash Wednesday" (98). Both poems detail the "steps of the journey of gradual and painful regeneration" (100). And George Williamson argues that "Ash Wednesday" "draws inspiration, both generally and particularly, from . . . the *Purgatorio*" (as well as Dante's *Vita Nuova*) (169). In shedding himself of himself, Williamson suggests, Eliot "pass[es] beyond despair" and obtains a "renewed sense of direction" (175, 184).

Certainly, these critics are correct to point to the poem's dramatization of (Dantean) purgation and renewal. Still, each of these critics overlooks the underlying dialectic that informs Eliot's dramatization of this purgative process, and in so doing neglects the conceptual continuity that links his early work (both poetic and philosophical) with his later. For inasmuch as his previous work dramatized subjectivity as dialectically constituted, so, too, does "Ash Wednesday." Interiority depends as much upon exteriority for its self-constitution as exteriority depends upon interiority for its experiential consistency. The self constitutes itself in terms of that which it locates outside of itself, and experiences its own self-dissolution as an act visited upon it by external (and self-externalizing) forces to which it necessarily submits (as a consequence of the self's dialectical structure). Thus, while well over a decade separates "Ash Wednesday" from his earliest published work, the particular relation between inner and

outer (or subject and object, surface and depth) he affirmed then continues to inform his representation of human subjectivity.

Of course, “Ash Wednesday” ends inconclusively. The speaker has not quite obtained the renewal or self-reconstruction he seems to seek (despite the insinuations of Williamson, Gordon, or Rodgers). Indeed, his final words entail a lament for himself and an appeal to the Lady: “Suffer me not to be separated / And let my cry come unto Thee” (99). As a self, he remains de-constituted, incompleting, and thus vulnerable and exposed (like Prufrock), even though he seems to affirm the necessity of this condition (e.g., “Although I do not hope to turn again”). Like Tiresias, he seems to “throb between two lives.” Or as he writes in Section VI, “This is the time of tension between dying and birth” (98). He seems, that is, to await further (self) developments, a waiting which again suggests a dialectical conception of subjectivity. Thus, “Ash Wednesday” concludes with a subtle reiteration of its speaker’s substantive incoherence and self-insufficiency. The sense of interiority he experiences depends upon an objectified view of himself as dissociated from himself (witnessing his own dismemberment), which in turn undermines any notion of a self-constitutive substantive inwardness. In the end, he remains torn between the inner and the outer, the substantial and the insubstantial, “dying and birth.” He experiences his own self-disintegration, even as he awaits some new mode of integration. Only in *Four Quartets*, however, does Eliot begin to move beyond this impasse. For while *Four Quartets* continues to dramatize the dialectic that (implicitly or explicitly) informs the conception of subjectivity present in all his work, the poem introduces a new mediating concept into that dialectic in the image of incarnation.

Four Quartets and the Dialectics of Transcendence

Eliot originally published *Four Quartets* as four separate poems over the course of several years. As Russell Elliott Murphy points out, “Burnt Norton” first came out in 1938’s *Collected Poems*, having grown out of some discarded lines from *Murder in the Cathedral* (189-190). In 1940, Eliot went on to publish “East Coker,” followed in 1941 by “The Dry Salvages,” and in 1942 “Little Gidding” (all published in the *New English Weekly*) (190-191). Finally, in 1943, at the height of the war, Eliot published all four quartets in a single volume (187). Like “Ash Wednesday,” *Four Quartets* is a meditative poem, grounded in the voice of a single contemplative speaker, presumably Eliot. Accordingly, many critics view the poem biographically. Dennis Brown, for instance, calls it “confessional poetry,” implying that the poem functions essentially as semi-veiled emotional or spiritual memoir (1). Lyndall Gordon echoes Brown, when she asserts that the quartets “recount Eliot’s [personal] struggle to recast his lot” (338).¹⁰⁰ George Williamson, too, makes a similar claim, affirming that the poem “make[s] a great lyric of history, personal but [also] representative” (205). Eliot, he claims, “attempts to recover the meaning of time” by focusing on places and times significant to him (207).¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ For Gordon, all of Eliot’s poetry is autobiographical in some way. Gordon argues that Eliot “devised his own biography, enlarging poem after poem on the character of a man who conceives of his life as a spiritual quest despite the anti-religious mood of his age” (1).

¹⁰¹ Williams goes on to argue that the quartets in fact rearticulate the view of the relationship between time (or history) and the individual already present in Eliot’s 1917 “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (205). In “Tradition,” Eliot had affirmed that the “historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence,” and that the individual poet has “his complete meaning” only in “relation to the dead poets and artists” that precede him or her (38). Similarly, *Four Quartets* maps the relation of the speaker to the past in terms of place. Indeed, for Williamson, “it is in [particular] places that you enter into history and escape from it” (206).

Certainly, *Four Quartets* contains strong autobiographical elements. As both Gordon and Williamson remind readers, the titles of the quartets themselves largely refer to places personally significant to Eliot. Burnt Norton, for instance, is the name of a manor house Eliot visited around 1934 with Emily Hale, and East Coker the name of a village to which Eliot traces his ancestry (Gordon 266, 346). The Dry Salvages are an actually existing group of “treacherous rocks . . . off the coast of Cape Ann,” which Eliot used as a landmark when sailing in his youth (Gordon 336). And while Little Gidding is a village with no immediate biographical significance for Eliot, it nonetheless emblemizes for Eliot the idea of a “devotional life” associated with a committed religious community (Gordon 371). For Williamson, “[t]hese titles make the circle of [Eliot’s] beginning and end, from point of family origin in England to America and return” (207). That is, the titles map Eliot’s own personal biographical journey. Just as “England and America meet in ‘Burnt Norton,’” Williamson observes, so, too, do “Missouri and Massachusetts appear in ‘The Dry Salvages’” (207). More significantly, Eliot employs these places in order to speak to his own inner spiritual development. “Moments of time must be in places,” Williamson comments, “and the spiritual, though not of time or place, is known in time and place” (206).

But to view the poem exclusively as Eliot’s biographically inflected attempt to map his own inner spaces or as his own personal version of a “talking cure” (as Brown sees it), is to inadvertently reduce the poem to an exercise in expressive self-absorption (13). It suggests a speaker concerned largely with his own self-development, and thus essentially disconnected from others, since his focus remains primarily upon his own

inner experiences. That is to say, in focusing on the poem's autobiographical elements, and thus on the poem as an expression of the poet's own inner life, these critics suggest that the poem implicitly posits a model of self predicated on a monadic vision of human interiority (i.e., the individual as self-relating, self-contained, and self-substantial). In other words, these critics make the same mistake that critics of Eliot's earlier work make when they similarly read his poetry simply as an expression of personal disgruntlement, as when A. David Moody calls *The Waste Land* a portrait of Eliot's own "inward desolation" (116).¹⁰² They present the self as enclosed in its own unbroken "bubble of thought," as J. Hillis Miller says of Prufrock (137).

I want to argue that Eliot's self-dramatization in *Four Quartets* proves more complicated than these critics suggest, since the model of self the poem affirms proves in fact more complicated. As in his earlier work, Eliot (I claim) constructs a model of subjectivity in *Four Quartets* predicated on a particular notion of the relation between interiority and exteriority. The self does not exist in isolation from that which it encounters outside of itself (and which it perceives as a traumatic intrusion upon its inner reality), but rather arises only in context of its relation to that outer reality. The poem voices the speaker's sense of his own immersion in a contextualizing objective reality that provides the generative tension out of which his own sense of self emerges. That is to

¹⁰² In contrast, consider Eliot's own reflections on Dante. In the *Vita Nuova*, Eliot argues, Dante offers a "mixture of biography and allegory . . . according to a recipe not available to the modern mind" (232). Dante attached importance to certain events that occurred to him not because those events were "important in themselves," but because "they seemed to him to have some philosophical and impersonal value" (233). In other words, biography is only important to the extent that it translates into a significance beyond itself. Compare this vision (from 1929) to the similar view of impersonality expressed in 1919's "Tradition and the Individual Talent."

say, his particular experiential sense of interiority arises out of his encounter with an external reality he perceives as utterly self-circumscribing and ultimately self-negating. More than this, though, the poem posits the mutually constitutive interpenetration of the internal and the external. As in “Prufrock,” *Sweeney*, or “Ash Wednesday,” the poem presents the individual as profoundly unstable, prone to disintegration or rupture (the internal riven by the external). But unlike these earlier poems, *Four Quartets* ultimately affirms the dialectical coincidence of opposites (i.e., of coherence and flux, and thus the internal and external) through the culminating image of “incarnation.”

Heraclitean Purgations

Eliot prefaces “Burnt Norton” (and thus *Four Quartets* as a whole) with a set of epigraphs drawn from the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, famous (in part) for the idea that “all is in flux” (Hussey 54).¹⁰³ The second of the two epigraphs, translated by Guy Davenport, reads, “The way up and the way down are one and the same” (Servotte 10). In his study of the poem, Grover Smith argues that this fragment refers (for Heraclitus) “to the transmutation of the elements, the cycle of earth, water, air, and fire, for which later philosophers cited Heraclitus as an authority” (256). For Heraclitus, Smith suggests, this “cycle proceeds everlastingly,” and “since for Heraclitus the primary substance is fire, fire motivates the cycle” (256). Of course, as other critics note, Heraclitus remains notoriously “obscure” and subject to variant, often conflicting interpretations (Osborne 81). Mary Ann Gillies, for instance, reads this quotation simply

¹⁰³ As Frederick Copleston argues, Heraclitus seems to “proclaim the unreality of ‘Reality,’” for “nothing is stable, nothing abides” (39).

as implying “that all time is the same” (98). Even more prosaically, Anthony Gottlieb suggests the passage refers “straightforward[ly]” to the fact that “a path going up a hill is also a path going down a hill, just as an entrance is also usually an exit” (48). Still, all three of these critics would agree that the fragment suggests the ultimate unity of opposed polarities, the eternal (dialectical?) transmutation of certain states into their opposites (water into fire, or up into down). Indeed, as Edward Hussey argues, the unity of opposites suggested in the fragment implies the “mutual interdependence” of opposed states (42). Or, as Frederick Copleston puts it, “the conflict of opposites” in fact implies a deeper underlying unity or collective order: “the One only exists in the tension of opposites: this tension is essential to the unity of the One” (40). That the “way up and the way down are the same,” then, suggests a non-binary view of otherwise diametrically opposed conceptual realities, a perspective fully in line with Eliot’s own views as explicitly expressed in his earlier graduate work.

Significantly, the first of the two fragments also invokes the concept of a universal order, although much more directly. As J.M. Mitchell translates it, “The law of things is a law of Reason Universal, but most men live as though they had a wisdom of their own” (Servotte 10). Smith interprets the “universal law” or “logos” here as the fire or “flux itself” (256). Catherine Osborne, on the other hand, suggests that “it seems wrong to take Heraclitus’s recurrent fire as an underlying element [as such], and better to treat it as a model for [the] radical discontinuity of matter” (89). That is to say, for Osborne, the image of fire suggests a cosmos characterized by unending transformative conflagration (i.e., its “law”). No substance exists simply (ontologically) in itself, but

only as part of a process of exchange, alteration, perpetual reconstitution, and ultimate disintegration. As Copleston argues, fire “is . . . all things that are, but it is these things in a constant state of tension, of strife, of consuming, of kindling and of going out” (41). In short, the “law of things” is that persistent process of consumption and transfiguration which makes and unmakes the “world.”

Thus, before the poem even begins, Eliot sets forth a set of philosophical propositions that helps establish a certain theme (i.e., the law of disintegrative flux and its corollary the coincidence of opposites).¹⁰⁴ And indeed, the poem goes on to explore this theme at some length. In Section III of “East Coker,” for instance, Eliot provides a near Heraclitean image of cosmic negation:

O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark,
The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant,
The captains, merchant bankers, eminent men of letters,
The generous patrons of art, the statesmen and the rulers,
Distinguished civil servants, chairmen of many committees,
Industrial lords and petty contractors, all go into the dark
And dark the Sun and Moon . . . (180).

The dominant image here is of an abysmal and eternal night, of a starless (“vacant”), endless reach of sky engulfing all within its impenetrable expanse. Harry Blamires rightly argues that this passage points to the “ultimate impermanence” of all human realities (ambitions, valuations, concerns, projects) (60). Human social reality as well as individual identity (“captains, merchant bankers,” etc.) fades into utter insignificance. But

¹⁰⁴ John Bradbury goes so far as to suggest that “the spirit presiding over the poems as a whole is that of Heraclitus” (256).

the passage points beyond this as well, to the annihilation even of the “Sun and Moon.” The conflagration proves total. All of material creation, Eliot seems to suggest, remains subject to some encompassing, consuming darkness. Nor does he exclude himself: “I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you” (180). As in “Ash Wednesday,” the speaker experiences (even invites) self-disintegration, but now the experience of annihilation reaches beyond himself as well, to encompass the cosmos as a whole. Nothing, Eliot suggests, escapes dissolution. Nothing possesses innate self-sufficiency, substantiality, or stability.

Indeed, in Section II of “East Coker,” Eliot relies on Heraclitean imagery in order to convey an even bleaker vision of cosmic negation:

Scorpion fights against the Sun
Until the Sun and Moon go down
Comets weep and Leonids fly
Hunt the heavens and the plains
Whirled in a vortex that shall bring
The world to that destructive fire
Which burns before the ice-cap reigns (178-79).

Here Eliot offers not only the image of an unending “vortex” (which in itself suggests interminable movement or change), but suggests that the vortex culminates in a transfiguring fire, which in turn “burns” itself into frigid self-annihilation. As Derek Traversi rightly notes of this section, the “emphasis is [clearly] upon images of disorder covering nature and the universe” (132). The fire purges away all prior forms of material reality, leaves in its wake only its own act of consumption. Again, Eliot offers a vision of

total cosmic obliteration. He denies objects ontological continuity (i.e., their being), prioritizing instead disintegrative processes as such.

In both of these passages, Eliot offers a metaphysics that clearly privileges “becoming” over “being.” Objects lack essences in themselves, in that they remain constitutively unstable, incapable of maintaining their own self-continuance. Indeed, Eliot’s vision of perpetual “becoming” entails reality’s utter material decomposition. Nothing survives the “vortex” or “destructive fire.” But this vision of destruction entails, too, (necessarily) the speaker’s own dissolution. And in fact, the destruction he envisions can be seen to function as a kind of objective correlative for describing such an experience. As noted above, he acknowledges his own subordination to the embracing “darkness” that consumes even the “Sun and Moon”: “I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you.” And in “Burnt Norton,” too, he traces a similar moment. In Part III, the speaker narrates a purgative descent in which the self experiences its own decomposition via the loss of all sense of identity: “Internal darkness, deprivation / And destitution of all property, / Desiccation of the world of sense, / Evacuation of the world of fancy, / Inoperancy of the world of spirit” (174). He dramatizes the inner experience of his own self-emptying, an utter “detachment / From self and from things and from persons,” as he puts it in “Little Gidding” (195). The self ceases to exist either as a self in itself or as known to itself. It lacks discernable content, as well as the capacity for connection with a world perceived as external to itself. Indeed, the self seems to have been emptied out into that world, dissolved into it, leaving behind only a blankness (or “darkness”).

Eliot offers in this passage an image of the self as void of substance, stripped of its (self) determining coordinates. As Kenneth Paul Kramer rightly reminds his readers, Eliot draws on “the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Aquinas, and especially St. John of the Cross” in order to dramatize this purgative process (both here and elsewhere in the poem) (53).¹⁰⁵ He proposes in this passage the “via negative” (or St. John of the Cross’ “dark night of the soul”) as a means for conceptualizing the utter withering away of the self he envisions. Kramer notes that for St. John of the Cross, “the negative way of ‘deprivations’ and ‘internal darkness’ . . . involves becoming reduced to a state of emptiness, poverty, and abandonment, for the sensual part is purified in emptiness and the spirit is purified in darkness” (54). Eliot certainly conveys a similar process of self reduction (both here and in “Ash Wednesday”), as suggested through his language of negation (“deprivation,” “destitution,” “Desiccation,” “Evacuation”). The self stripped of itself enters into a darkness that appears to subsist beneath that self. But, the “Internal darkness” Eliot imagines as the end-result of this series of self-purgations aligns, too, with the sun-devouring external darkness he posits as the end-result of cosmic purgation. The two states mirror each other, and in effect reproduce the same experience. Inner content has been purged away, leaving nothing behind but the (implicitly exteriorized and exteriorizing) process of purgation and negation itself. Suggestively, then, Eliot offers a model of self according to which the self itself (like the material cosmos) lacks any inner or core substantiality. No self-subsisting inner content exists

¹⁰⁵ Or, as Ronald Schuchard puts it, “By the mid-1930s Donne and Ignatius, Crashaw and Theresa, had gradually been displaced in Eliot’s mind by an English contemplative, George Herbert, and a Spanish mystic, St. John of the Cross. These two had become his companions, Herbert’s *The Temple* and St. John’s *Ascent of Mount Carmel* his handbooks, as he moved into *Four Quartets*” (174).

capable of resisting its own decomposition. The inner here appears to remain subject to corrosive external forces. And once those forces have completed their operation, inwardness itself ceases to have determinate meaning.

In other words, in *Four Quartets*, Eliot would seem at first glance to construct a binary relation between the inner and the outer which unambiguously privileges the outward. Inwardness remains fundamentally subordinated to exteriorized pressures or processes, lacking ontological substantiality (or coherence) in itself. Thus his lament in “The Dry Salvages”: “Where is there an end of it, the soundless wailing, / The silent withering of autumn flowers / Dropping their petals and remaining motionless; / Where is there an end to the drifting wreckage” (185). The flowers here remain subject to persistent disintegrative processes which would seem to act on the flowers from the outside. Indeed, in the above quoted “O dark dark dark” passage, Eliot dramatizes the experience of self-dissolution itself as originating ultimately in a source outside the self: “let the dark come upon you.” He places himself in passive relation to that perceived as external to himself. He is that to be acted upon, rather than that which is empowered to act. The “wounded surgeon” who “plies the steel” and “questions the distempered part” works upon him, cuts into him (in yet another image of bodily disruption), rather than the reverse (181). In short, as in *Sweeney* and “Ash Wednesday,” the self encounters external reality as a violently intrusive force, always threatening and ultimately succeeding in rupturing the individual’s sense of self-coherence. But of course, *Four Quartets* goes far beyond either *Sweeney* or “Ash Wednesday” in its dramatizations of negation, for the

poem negates not only the individual self but the entire social and physical cosmos along with it.

Incarnation and Resolution

Thus, whereas “Ash Wednesday” concludes with the two terms (inner and outer) in dialectical tension with one another, *Four Quartets* seems ultimately to privilege the external. And yet not quite. At the very least, the poem suggests that individuals define themselves precisely in terms of those oppositional energies which they encounter as emanating from outside themselves. The individual’s encounter with a hostile external reality provides the boundaries by which the self comes to understand itself as a finite self. The self defines itself precisely in terms of its subordinated relation to an incomprehensible external, self-delimiting reality. It seems less an isolated entity than as an *exposed* one, whose limitations and vulnerabilities prove constitutively formative of the individual’s sense of self. And these limitations and vulnerabilities emerge most starkly in those places in the poem where the narrator contrasts the human self and its egoistic pretensions with the profound and alien otherness of the non-human world, what C.O. Gardner refers to as the “grim realities” of a “mechanical universe” (327), and Harry Blamires as simply “nature” (79). What the self *is* becomes apparent only when seen against the backdrop of this contextualizing inhuman order—indeed the self that emerges is precisely a product of the contrasted relation between the two (i.e., self and “nature”). The poem portrays the self as blasted away, utterly negated by “the dark cold and the empty desolation” of the outer world (183).

However, the poem suggests much more than merely the oppositional identity of the inner and the outer (i.e., that the self defines itself in terms of its oppositional relation to an externally perceived reality). Rather, it suggests that the internal and external in fact ontologically interpenetrate one another. That is, inasmuch as the poem posits that the self lacks any substantive content, so, too, does it suggest that those external forces which rend the self apart in fact remain as much internal to the self as external to it. In “The Dry Salvages,” for instance, Eliot offers an image of nature which at first he represents as a destructive power purely external to individuals. Reflecting on the Mississippi,¹⁰⁶ he writes, “I think that the river / Is a strong brown god—sullen, tamed and intractable, / Patient to some degree, at first recognised as a frontier.” And yet, he continues, although “the brown god is almost forgotten / By the dwellers in cities,” it remains “ever . . . implacable, / Keeping his seasons and rages, destroyer, reminder / Of what men choose to forget. Unhonoured, unpropitiated / By worshippers of the machine, but waiting, watching and waiting (184). The river is a “destroyer.” Eliot portrays it as that which delimits the human, exposes the vanity of human endeavors, as well as of human self-complacency. The river marks humanity’s limit-point, and exists as a reminder of its (humanity’s) transience, despite human efforts to “tame” or control it or mask its force.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ In his annotations to “The Dry Salvages,” Servotte writes, “The river here is the Mississippi, which runs along the city of St. Louis where Eliot grew up; except for summers which his family always spent in New England on the Massachusetts seacoast” (35).

¹⁰⁷ Harry Blamires comments that the “river represents the flow of nature . . . which man has to subdue in civilizing himself and his world” (79). But the river undercuts these “civilizing” efforts, indeed undercuts all human pretensions to distinction and stability, its “seasons and rages” indicative of some absolute and alien otherness whose contours utterly resist comprehension. As Staffan Bergsten notes, the “river” in “The Dry Salvages” is as much as “symbol of the onward and irrevocable movement of time” as it is of nature and nature’s raw physical power (220).

In other words, he represents it as an external force that intrudes upon human social and psychological realities.

And yet, at the exact same time, Eliot suggests that “the river is within us,” that the external and the internal in fact in some deeper sense coincide with one another (184). Rather than maintaining the opposition between the two terms, Eliot goes on to suggest their ultimate identity.¹⁰⁸ In a lyrical passage which immediately follows the image of the Mississippi as a destructive “strong brown god,” Eliot writes:

The river is within us, the sea is all about us;
The sea is the land’s edge also, the granite
Into which it reaches, the beaches where it tosses
Its hints of earlier and other creation:
The starfish, the horseshoe crab, the whale’s backbone;
The pools where it offers to our curiosity
The more delicate algae and the sea anemone. (184)

Eliot offers an image here of deeply interwoven spiritual, biological, and temporal realities, in what Ronald Moore interprets as a “reconciliation of the particular with the absolute” (51).¹⁰⁹ Those very forces which work to undermine and negate human activity and which seem to stand in an oppositional relation to human consciousness, in fact penetrate the human, thus not only circumscribing individuals’ phenomenological realities but informing them as well. Human beings participate in the same order of being (putatively “nature”) from which they feel alienated. Indeed, the passage also places human beings in an ontological continuum with other creatures (i.e., “The starfish, the

¹⁰⁸ In positing the identity of the inner and the outer, he echoes the Heraclitean dictum regarding the unity of opposites from the poem’s second epigraph: “The way up and the way down are one and the same.”

¹⁰⁹ Moore goes on to argue that this “reconciliation” is the “core of Eliot’s metaphysic” as expressed in the poem (51).

horseshoe crab”), suggesting not only shared origins but a shared existential status as well. In so doing, Eliot essentially dissolves the distinction between the internal and the external, thereby complicating his earlier dramatization of interiority as utterly subordinated to self-annihilating external forces.

Indeed, elsewhere in the poem, Eliot expresses a similar sense of the fundamental reflexive identity of the self and that which the self perceives as supposedly external to itself. In “Burnt Norton,” for instance, he suggests that “The dance along the artery / The circulation of the lymph / Are figured in the drift of stars” (172), again suggesting a correlation between different, otherwise incommensurate orders of being (the human and the natural/cosmic). He links the body itself, its rhythms and visceral materiality, to the alien realities of the whirling constellations. As David Ward puts it, “the circling motion of the world is reflected in the circulatory processes of the body, and both . . . are reflected in the . . . motion of the stars” (237). The same energies and impulses, Eliot suggests, inform them all. Taken as *whole* (he seems to imply), the cosmos reveals underlying patterns and coherencies which resist binary formulation. The internal and the external ultimately coincide, overlap, or interpenetrate one another, such that to distinguish either from the other disrupts the conceptual coherence of both.

But Eliot goes even further than this, and through the use of the image of incarnation, offers a means for resolving the inner/outer binary that ultimately transcends any ontological or conceptual distinction between the two terms. This image finds its most significant articulation at the end of “The Dry Salvages,” where Eliot writes that,

The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.
Here the impossible union
Of spheres of existence is actual,
Here the past and future
Are conquered, and reconciled (190)

Eliot here deconstructs, as it were, the Cartesian binaries that structure Western epistemological and ontological perspectives. Through the image of “Incarnation,” he suggests a means by which modernity’s paralyzing dualisms may be overcome, a point Ward makes as well, calling “Incarnation” here the moment of the “resolution of the problem of duality” (263). “Incarnation” suggests a recognition of the interpenetration of the “spheres of existence,” of an underlying coherency structuring creation, in both its temporal (“past and future”) and bodily (material, fleshly “incarnation”) manifestations. It thus suggests a reorientation of the relation between (the interior) self and (external) nature as well. “Incarnation” provides an image through which the mind grasps and affirms its own immersion in the world of flux. That flux no longer manifests as a violent, threatening external presence, which the self confronts and resists, though eventually succumbs to. Rather, the idea of “Incarnation” enables a relaxation of the oppositional tension formally characteristic of the relation between the self and the external world, for it acknowledges the mysterious union between the two.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ The image clearly has its Christian overtones as well. Eliot was a practicing Anglo-Catholic, having converted to Christianity in June of 1927, and so it is certainly tempting to read “Incarnation” here specifically in terms of its Christian resonances. And yet, as Staffan Bergsten points out, “Incarnation” appears in the text without the definite article which would denote it unambiguously as *the* Incarnation of Christian faith (228). Similarly, Cleo McNelly Kearns remarks that the term “is never . . . further specified or directly associated with any familiar Christian imagery” (252). Indeed, earlier in this section of the poem, Eliot mentions Krishna (40), an incarnation (or avatar) of the Hindu deity Vishnu. Given this, Kearns remarks that “the term ‘Incarnation’ . . . comes to seem less a signifier for a predetermined doctrinal content than a ‘half-object,’ a truth half-glimpsed in the interstices *between* an Indic and a Christian point of view” (252, emphasis in original). Servotte makes a similar point, arguing that the “use of ‘Incarnation’

Thus, despite the poem's apparent dramatization of a strictly binary relation between the inner and the outer (in which the inner remains subordinate to the outer), the poem also offers an image of the ultimate unity of the two terms. "[Y]ou are the music / While the music lasts," Eliot affirms, again suggesting the mutually constitutive relation between the self and the external realities it perceives or experiences (190). Human beings themselves, he suggests, in a sense "incarnate" those deeper rhythms and powers that structure reality, despite their own temporal materiality. They mark the convergence of the internal and the external (or the subjective and the objective). For in the end, Eliot affirms a view of the self as an embodied self—fleshly incarnations of "the music," living embodiments of some "impossible union." The self, Eliot seems to insist, exists indivisibly from those immensities figured in the "drift of stars." Each element remains indivisible from the other, each implicated in the others' existence—or dissolution.

I do not intend to draw attention to the unitive vision implicit in *Four Quartets* for the sake of illuminating that vision. Many critics, of course, have already performed that operation. Fayek Ishak, for instance, notes at the beginning of his study of the poem that Eliot "gives a glimpse of reality" in the *Quartets*, "a mystical moment of peeping into the 'heart of light'" (107). Derek Traversi writes of the essentially "'religious' affirmation" at the heart of the poem (88). A. David Moody argues that the poem encapsulates an "eternal note of desire that will not be content, and which equates rest and motion, silence and utterance, fulfillment and annihilation" (181). And Ronald Schuchard similarly notes

instead of 'the Incarnation' seems to universalize the notion, i.e. not to limit it to Christ, but to apply it to many more cases and situations" (377).

that “In each quartet the eternal stillness of a divine pattern of reality is set against the endless movement of a temporal pattern, a pattern characterized by action and appetency, desire and knowledge, hope and despair, and . . . sin and error” (188). My goal, on the other hand, has been to trace out a certain dialectical procedure operative in the work, which in fact (as I argue) reaches back throughout Eliot’s career. As I see it, the importance of Eliot’s use of the image of “incarnation” lies in its logical and conceptual connection to a view of the relation between the inner and outer that well predates *Four Quartets*.

Recall Eliot’s dissertation work on F.H. Bradley years before (1916). As detailed in Chapter Three, Eliot develops a view of subject/object relations in his dissertation (as well as in his previous graduate work) which ultimately dispenses with the distinction between subjects and objects (or the inner and outer). “The object qua object,” he insists in his dissertation, “would not exist without this bundle of [subjective] experiences, but the bundle would not be a bundle unless it were held together by the moment of objectivity” (133). Or, more directly: “The self . . . seems to depend upon a world which in turn depends upon it; and nowhere . . . can we find anything original or ultimate” (146). The internal and the external intertwine. Each remains constitutively present in the other. Each dialectically entails the other. Objectivity implies subjectivity, even as subjectivity implies objectivity. Jewel Spears Brooker rightly calls this Eliot’s “revolt against dualism,” which she goes on to position as a rejection of Cartesian metaphysics (172, 173). But Brooker also goes on to argue that Eliot’s Bradleyian inflected “revolt against dualism” permeates his thinking over the course of his career, and indeed that

Four Quartets itself remains “deeply indebted to Bradley’s ideas” (Mastery 206). While Brooker does not speak specifically about the inner/outer binary present in Eliot’s work, her observations serve to corroborate my view that Eliot remains preoccupied with certain philosophical concerns throughout his life, notably anti-dualism.

Ultimately, I want to suggest that *Four Quartets* marks the culmination of a series of reflections that stretches back to Eliot’s earliest work, completing an arc begun as early as 1909’s “Convictions.” In *Four Quartets*, he offers a view of the relation between inner and outer that in many ways recapitulates the view propounded in all of his earlier work.¹¹¹ He portrays the two opposed terms as inextricably interlinked, reflexively grounded in one another, and thus denies either term ontological or conceptual priority over the other. He suggests that the exterior literally informs the interior (that the “river is within us”), even as the interior itself remains paradoxically subject to the rending forces of the external. In short, he turns the two terms inside out, placing the external within the internal and thus the internal within the external, thereby collapsing any essential distinction between the two. *Four Quartets*, then, posits a model of self in which the self (the subjective or internal) remains constitutively intertwined with the not-self (the objective or external). Contra those critics who would view the poem merely as an expression of the poet’s own unbroken “bubble of thought” (to allude again to Miller),

¹¹¹ Even in Eliot’s plays, he continues to explore this dialectic, although he never approaches the clarity of vision expressed in *Four Quartets*. In 1935’s *Murder in the Cathedral*, for instance, Eliot portrays individuals as most internally ramified only when subjected to their own external dismemberment (i.e., Thomas’ impending execution and the intense self-reflection it spurs). And in 1939’s *The Family Reunion*, Eliot revisits the themes of guilt and pursuit he first dramatized in *Sweeney*. Harry feels haunted (and hunted) by the avenging Furies. Their ceaseless, piercing gaze externalizes him to himself, renders him visible to himself as a self (i.e., their gaze generates his mode of inwardness).

Eliot in fact challenges any notion of self that would define that self as a self-enclosed bubble. As such, *Four Quartets* continues that “attack” on the “metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul” famously alluded to in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” developed at length in his graduate work, and dramatized throughout his poetry, both early and late.

Conclusion: Eliot and Modernism

From 1909’s “Convictions” to 1942’s “Little Gidding,” Eliot demonstrates a continual fascination with the relation between interiority and exteriority. In a sense, he dramatizes in his poetry what he explores discursively in his philosophical and critical work. As I have tried to make clear, Eliot posits a relation between the two terms (inner and outer) that prioritizes neither. Rather, he seeks to demonstrate how the two terms remain inextricably bound together. Each remains mutually implicated in the other. In his earliest unpublished work, Eliot offers a portrait of individuals as utterly exteriorized, depthless creatures. The inner collapses into the outer, as it were. Interiority as such emerges only when individuals encounter themselves reflected to themselves in the gaze of the other (as in “Portrait” or “Prufrock”). The self’s sense of itself relies upon an event of self-exteriorization. Inwardness derives dialectically from the interplay between surface and depth. But this means, too, that interiority remains provisional (i.e., ontologically unstable), subject to further destabilizing acts of self-objectification. As F.H. Bradley puts it in *Appearance and Reality*, the self “cannot . . . maintain itself against external relations. For these will enter its essence, and so ruin its independency” (119). The self never obtains self-unity, never congeals into some self-enclosed, self-

persisting monadic sphere. Thus, rather than affirming inwardness as a self-constitutive, autonomous state, Eliot in fact questions the very notion of interiority in his work. The self as such is an ongoing process (rather than a substance), continually made and unmade, never at rest. It exists as a function of the relation between the inner and the outer.

Early in his career, Eliot portrays this process negatively. The self encounters itself as a disturbing presence to itself, and perceives the process of self-externalization (or self-objectification) as a violent, intrusive experience which it both resists and resents, as seen both in “Portrait” and “Prufrock” (or even *Sweeney*, although with certain variations). But by the time of “Ash Wednesday,” Eliot comes to dramatize this dialectical procedure less as a negative experience than a necessary and even positive one, despite the poem’s tentative, inconclusive ending. And finally, in *Four Quartets*, Eliot offers a vision of the self at peace (in a sense) with its own contingency. While Eliot’s 1927 conversion to Christianity undoubtedly contributed to the evolution of the emotional valence attached to the model of self he forwards in his work (as it undoubtedly affected his choice of tropes and images), the basic framework or dialectical procedure of that model remains largely intact throughout his career. Even as early as 1913’s “Degrees of Reality,” Eliot is already denying “any absolute distinction between perception, image and judgement, between real and unreal, between real and ideal, or between true and false, or between truth and fact” (57).

Of course, as argued throughout Chapter Three, Eliot continuously attacks binary metaphysics in his philosophical and critical essays. Indeed, the year before his

conversion, in his 1926 Clark Lectures, he condemns Descartes himself as the source of modern binary modes of thought.¹¹² For Eliot, Descartes inaugurates a philosophical tradition which culminates with Kant and then Nietzsche. Each of these figures in their various ways introduces and perpetuates an inner/outer distinction. Each draws a line between the mind and the world it perceives. With Descartes, Eliot argues, “[i]nstead of having ideas as meanings, as references to an outside world, you have suddenly a new world coming into existence, inside your own mind and therefore by the usual implication inside your own head” (80). Descartes signals for Eliot the move from “ontologism to psychologism,” i.e., from a conception of the mind in generative tension with the external world to the construction of a sharp division between world and self (or inner and outer, self and other, subject and object) (83).¹¹³ Such was precisely his critique of romantic and Victorian poetry, which overemphasized (Eliot argued) the inner (self) over the outer (object-world). Even his early doctrine of “impersonality” captures something of this critique. As discussed in the Introduction, Eliot’s notion of “impersonality” stems from his belief that “the poet has, not a ‘personality’ to express, but a particular medium . . . in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways” (“Tradition” 42). Eliot posits the self encountering itself as an object to itself, as a complex of “impressions and experiences,” which the poet then externalizes in verse. He suggests that the internal does not exist in itself, but only in the awareness of the self’s immersion in its own self-constitutive external contexts, a

¹¹² These lectures were first published as *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry* in 1993. Also included in the volume are Eliot’s 1933 Turnbull Lectures.

¹¹³ Eliot makes much the same point in 1921’s “The Metaphysical Poets” with his well-known reflections on the “dissociation of sensibility.”

conclusion obviously antithetical to the binary formulations of Descartes and his modern successors.¹¹⁴

Thus, as I have repeatedly sought to emphasize, Eliot is a dialectical thinker. He resists easy binaries, and seeks instead to expose how conceptual polarities in fact inhere together as a unity. Jeffrey Perl rightly argues that, for Eliot, “subject and object, known and knower, are aspects of the total situation and can be distinguished only for practical purposes” (70). Such, too, is Bradley’s position, for whom “Reality is one” (519). In the “Absolute,” Bradley contends, “predicate and subject, and subject and object, and in short the whole relational form, must be merged” (172). And as Eliot himself puts it in his dissertation on Bradley, the “fact that we can think only in terms of things does not compel us to the conclusion that reality consists of things. We have found from the first that the thing is thoroughly relative, that it exists only in a context of experience, of experience with which it is continuous” (165). That is, Eliot denies any ontological distinction between “things” and their contexts. “I am only I in relation to objects,” he concludes, but adds that an object is only “a complex of experiences with a reference, and the reference itself is an experience” (158). The two poles of the binary intertwine, the subject existing only in relation to external objects, but those external objects existing paradoxically only in context of a perceiving subject. In short, in his prose and poetry (both early and late), Eliot propounds a non-dualist metaphysics in which he continuously critiques all binary modes of thought.

¹¹⁴ Thus his famous claim, too, that “No poet, nor artist of any art has his complete meaning alone,” but rather only in context of and connection with the tradition that precedes that poet (38).

As a dialectical thinker, then, Eliot emerges as a unique modernist figure, whose work remains grounded as much in a particular mode of Idealist philosophy as in a reaction against his Victorian precursors. Indeed, seeing Eliot as a dialectical thinker allows not only for a more nuanced understanding of Eliot, but suggests an alternative understanding of modernism itself (i.e., of its roots, influences, and varied aims). How is the movement typically defined? For many critics, modernism (as a culturally distinct though polytomous phenomenon) entails an increasingly radical departure from normative modes of representation and inherited formal conventions as a result of radically altered sociohistorical circumstances. New socio-ideological and material conditions require proportionately new representational and formal strategies.

For example, as Pericles Lewis defines it, modernism involves the “tendency of experimental literature of the early twentieth century to break away from traditional verse forms, narrative techniques, and generic conventions in order to seek new methods of representation appropriate to life in an urban, industrial, mass-oriented age” (xvii). For Lewis, modernism consists of a series of responses to disorienting historical, social, and economic developments. It constitutes an aesthetic reaction of sorts, an attempt to capture (or mirror) in art the “essence” of the age. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane make a similar argument when they claim that modernism “is the one art that responds to the scenario of our [modern] chaos” (27). “It is the art,” they argue, “consequent on Heisenberg’s ‘Uncertainty Principle’, of the destruction of civilization and reason in the First World War, of the world changed and reinterpreted by Marx, Freud, and Darwin, of capitalism and constant industrial acceleration, [and] of existential exposure to

meaninglessness or absurdity” (27). Or, as Michael Whitworth succinctly puts it, “‘Modernism’ is not so much a thing as a set of responses to problems posed by the conditions of modernity” (3).

Other critics define modernism in terms of its increased emphasis on consciousness and phenomenological reality, while nonetheless continuing to ground it in its proper historical matrix. Peter Childs, for instance, emphasizes modernism’s turn towards and attempts to adequately represent subjective experience. For Childs, modernism, in prose at least, “is associated with attempts to render human subjectivity in ways more real than [traditional Victorian] realism” (3). He goes on to argue that modernists seek “to represent consciousness, perception, emotion, meaning and the individual’s relation to society” in a manner that better “express[es] the new sensibilities of their time” (3). Similarly, Dennis Brown argues that modernism “in literature was a movement that radically probed the nature of selfhood and problematised the means whereby ‘self’ could be expressed” (1). As with Childs, Brown positions this reimagining of the self as a response to the “general diffusion of social alienation, the rise of the psychoanalytic movement, the disorientation brought about by the shock of the Great War and the increasing experimentalism of almost all the contemporary artistic movements.” (1). Charles Taylor, too, argues that in response to an increasingly urbanized, mechanized, and industrialized social reality, modernist “art has gone more inward, has tended to explore, even to celebrate subjectivity” (456).

Each of these critics defines modernism as a reaction response to contemporary sociocultural developments. Each suggests that modernists rejected traditional

representational strategies and genres in favor of novel techniques better able to mirror modernity's new social, ideological, and experiential realities. Eliot emerges for such critics as a zeitgeist poet, capturing in his work contemporary phenomenological experience. The fragmentation of *The Waste Land*, for instance, captures the fragmentation of modern social reality. As Brown puts it, "In so far as the poem speaks the Western mind of the twenties, it expresses it as heterogeneity, contradiction and multilayered multiplicity—in short, as a species of chaos" (91). Or, as Peter Childs argues, *The Waste Land*'s "dissonances, sudden transitions, shifts in rhythm and characteristically Modernist obsession with language has often been seen as indicative of an alienation from life and from history" (99). For both Brown and Childs, Eliot's poetry reflects its social conditions, translates those conditions into aestheticized form.¹¹⁵ In other words, these critics see Eliot's work as a reaction to modern social experience. In a sense, his is a *passive* endeavor. He merely mirrors social and psychological reality in his work, although he does so in technically novel ways (though only to better capture modernity's own particular novelties).

Thus, on this reading, Eliot emerges as a reactionary poet of existentialist angst or even nihilistic despair (at least in his early and mid-career work). He reacts to the conditions he observes, and encodes those conditions in his poetry in a form he feels best reflects them. Such is J. Hillis Miller's reading of Eliot. For Miller, Eliot portrays individuals whose lived experience reflects the social, cultural, and ideological

¹¹⁵ Similarly, for Richard Lehan, *The Waste Land* "depict[s] the decay of an industrial society" (132). "Like Baudelaire's Paris," he argues, "Eliot's London is a city of the walking dead—the spiritually dead in life, the mechanized dead in a commercial/industrial world" (132).

dislocations of modernity. “The quality of the life of the mind of Europe,” Miller writes, “is exactly the same as the experience of the solitary ego” in Eliot’s work (178). Both world and individual remain “characterized by fragmentation, aimless motion, lovelessness, [and] frustrated longing” (178). Miller argues that Eliot’s later work, too, encodes this same basic formula (i.e., mimetic correspondence), only now in a specifically Christian register. He seeks now to “recover the divine pattern,” i.e., to recover an “objective rather than subjective” understanding of history (187). Robert Langbaum makes a similar point, arguing that in *The Waste Land* (for instance) the “protagonist’s consciousness emerges from the collective consciousness of the time as another nameless, faceless modern voice” (97). The poem presents, Langbaum suggests, “where Western culture has come to . . . as of 1920” (97). In short, for these critics, Eliot’s work embodies a passive reflexive response to modernity. He reacts rather than intervenes, reflects rather than interrogates, mirrors rather than interprets. He represents, in other words, the standard definition of modernism as the “style of an age,” expressing in his work the period’s particular emotions, subjectively experienced realities, and common metaphysical assumptions (Bradbury 24).

Of course, these critics are absolutely correct in their assessment, at least to an extent. For Eliot’s work certainly develops out of and responds to his sociocultural and literary matrix. He responds to the particularities of his cultural moment, and necessarily operates within a conceptual framework determined entirely by his historical placement. Not only does he dramatize then-contemporary social and cultural conditions in his work, both directly and indirectly, but he actively resists prior modes of representation as

aesthetically insufficient (e.g., his early resistance to romantic poetics). That is, the very form his poetry takes encodes his historical position. And indeed, many critics emphasize the degree to which Eliot's poems (as formal experiments) operate within a historical continuum.¹¹⁶

But I want to point out the insufficiency of seeing Eliot only as a poet of reaction, who merely embodies his historical moment and its cultural complexities. I want to resist seeing Eliot as a proto-existentialist, pseudo-nihilist (at least in his early work), or poet of "pessimistic recoil," as Raymond Williams puts it (43). I want to resist, too, seeing Eliot as simply setting out "to modernize literature in the English language," as Suman Gupta argues, as if he were trying solely to update nineteenth-century aesthetics for twentieth-century sensibilities (227). Worse yet, I want to avoid the all-too-easy division between "two Eliots, a liberal younger one and a conservative older one," for whom his early work "was indeed experimental, adventurous and anti-establishment in a manner that showed an open mind," while his older work reveals a more "rigid" aesthetic and ideological disposition (Gupta 272). While accurate to an extent, these descriptions tend to overly simplify Eliot, dissolving him neatly into his background, and thereby masking or distorting the distinctiveness of his project as well as his philosophical and aesthetic commitments. Instead, I want to emphasize the degree to which Eliot intervenes in his moment, interrogating received (Cartesian) metaphysics by questioning reigning

¹¹⁶ For instance, as Carol Christ argues, "Despite their anti-Victorianism, Modernist poets explore ways of objectifying poetry that show striking continuities with Victorian poetics" (3). In particular, she observes that "like the Victorians, [Eliot] uses the dramatic monologue extensively, and he seeks first in myth, then in orthodox Christianity, an objective means of structuring and evaluating the particulars of history," just as, say, Arnold and Tennyson "use myth and legend to attain a resonance and objectivity greater than mere personal emotion could offer" (3).

ontological, epistemological, and anthropological ideologies. That is to say, I want to reposition Eliot, stressing his singularity and the uniqueness of his mode of modernism.

For as I have argued throughout this project, Eliot disavows binary modes of thought in favor of an epistemological skepticism and metaphysical pragmatism (i.e., whatever theory works, works). His poetics and criticism stem directly from his philosophical orientation. To understand Eliot as dialectical poet means, then, to see him questioning inherited metaphysical dispositions in art and philosophy. It means seeing his mode of modernism as a critique of the modern project and the particular mode of aesthetics it supports (i.e., one reliant upon a conceptually inadequate binary metaphysics). It means seeing Eliot not as a poet of modern malaise, proto-existential angst, nihilistic despair, or supposed doctrinal quietism, but rather as a cultural interventionist and philosophical iconoclast (of sorts). Finally, it means reconsidering those definitions of modernism that present it solely as an existential response to the cultural and existential crisis of modernity. Such a definition suggests an acceptance of modernity's conceptual framework, in that it implicitly constructs individuals as passive subjects confronting a hostile, indifferent, bewildering object-world. It pits the inner against the outer, the self against the other. It suggests, too, a model of self that essentializes the self, construes it as an autonomous ontological given distinct from the world within which it moves and acts. As I have repeatedly sought to show, Eliot contests such binary formulations in his work.

Indeed, the philosophy he propounds in his graduate work or dramatizes in his poetry reflects in fact a profound epistemological skepticism more indicative of

postmodern than modernist thought.¹¹⁷ With Jean-Francois Lyotard, for instance, Eliot rejects meta-narratives (as seen in his rejection of various early twentieth-century totalizing anthropological theories). With Richard Rorty, he espouses a version of anti-essentialism or anti-foundationalism in favor of a thorough-going philosophical pragmatism. As he concludes on the final page of his dissertation, for instance, “an ‘objective’ truth is a relative truth: all that we care about is how it works; it makes no difference whether a thing really is green or blue, so long as everyone behaves towards it on the belief that it is green or blue” (169). With the deconstructionists he dismantles conceptual binaries and affirms the determining power of language to construct and delimit social and subjective reality (as seen in his refusal to ontologically differentiate objects from subjects or subject from objects). And with Lacan he understands subjectivity as dialectically grounded in an act of self-reflection (i.e., Lacan’s mirror stage). For Eliot as for Lacan, there is no essential, stable self.

What accounts for these apparent parallels between Eliot’s thought and late twentieth-century critical and social theory? I would suggest a shared philosophical provenance. As I have argued, Eliot descends from that tradition of thought, stemming largely from Hegel, which maintains that the fundamental structure of reality is dialectical (and thus unceasingly transitional). Indeed, as Jewel Spears Brooker notes, Bradley himself has often been called a “neo-Hegelian,” with his emphasis on the “Absolute” and on the dialectical relations that he feels constitute it (*Mastery* 176). As a

¹¹⁷ Although I lack the space here to unpack these correlations (to do so would require a book in itself), the few examples I provide should at least help support the general point.

student of Bradley, Eliot, too, emerges as a kind of neo-Hegelian, although, like Bradley, he propounds an epistemological skepticism utterly lacking in Hegel. All three figures, however, privilege dialectic. All three complicate all-too-easy binary distinctions. And in the end, all three affirm the unity of opposites as an axiomatic element of their philosophies. Eliot's proto-postmodernism, then, finds its source (I argue) in a dialectical conception of reality which for Eliot necessitates a rigorous epistemological suspicion of all essentializing ontological distinctions. Accordingly, to see Eliot as a poet rooted in the Hegelian tradition suggests not only a broader understanding of Eliot's work but a richer understanding of modernism itself, particularly given Eliot's standing in the period. For seen in this light, modernism entails not only a response to modernity as articulated within a largely uncontested Cartesian conceptual framework, but a challenge to that framework stemming from an alternate metaphysics.

Thus, Eliot emerges as a powerful intellectual skeptic who interrogates the metaphysical presuppositions of his age, even as he dramatizes its felt existential realities. Of course, Eliot was not alone in exploring the relation between the inner and the outer. Indeed, a number of Eliot's fellow modernists, too, dramatized this same binary in their work, although with certain key differences from Eliot. In order to better understand Eliot's project and his position in literary history as I am attempting to define it (i.e., Eliot as a dialectician), it becomes necessary to explore the ways his contemporaries approached this issue as well. Accordingly, in Chapter Six, I will offer brief readings of a number of modernist novelists and poets, and will suggest that each in varying ways

maintains the binary distinction between inner and outer that Eliot in his work labors to deconstruct.

CHAPTER VI
INTERIORITY AND EXTERIORITY IN
ELIOT'S MODERNIST CONTEMPORARIES

Throughout this study, I have argued against those critics who describe Eliot as a “poet of interiority.” A. David Moody, Lyndall Gordon, and J. Hillis Miller, for instance, all argue (with slight variations in emphasis) that Eliot’s poetry expresses his inner experience. For them, Eliot’s poetry functions as veiled autobiography, as a way of articulating his inmost emotions and self-perceptions. Eliot confesses himself, as it were, through his poems. As Gordon argues, “To know the man, we must follow the poem. . . . We must venture . . . into the morass of the manuscript to determine the chronology of accretions and then . . . we may perceive the shaping pattern of the private life” (147). To read the poems, then, is to read the man, just as to know the man is to read the poems. But this means, too, that the inward precedes its dramatic portrayal. Inwardness proves primary. Eliot only translates inner content into outward form. In making this assumption, these critics erect a binary that all-too-neatly divides the inner from the outer. They imply that individuals possess an ontologically stable and conceptually comprehensible core self that exists in itself apart from the world it encounters. The self (and its inner complexities) and the external world remain categorically distinct from one another. They exist on divergent planes.

But as I have argued, Eliot vigorously resists this view of the relation between inner and outer in both his prose and poetry. As I pointed out above, even as early as 1919's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot "struggles to attack . . . the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul" (42). Indeed, as he points out in that essay, his theory of impersonality itself derives from his refusal to affirm any such "unity."¹¹⁸ And of course, his graduate work involves an ongoing strenuous critique of binary conceptualizations of subject/object or inner/outer relations, whether in philosophy or anthropology. Nevertheless, critics such as Moody or Gordon (or Langbaum and Miller) continue to read Eliot as a dualist who affirms interiority as a stable, self-sustaining ontological reality. They see him as privileging inwardness and promoting an aesthetic vision that seeks to illuminate inner experience in stylistically novel ways. For these critics, Eliot participates in a literary cultural moment characterized by a general emphasis on interiority. That is, nothing distinguishes Eliot metaphysically from his contemporaries. Just as he prioritizes inner subjective realities, so, too, do they. For these critics, then, Eliot merely articulates in his own register the same concerns with inwardness or self-experience that marks the work of his fellow modernists.

Indeed, Langbaum states quite explicitly that the self has emerged as the primary focus of all post-Kantian thought. Kant severed the subjective from the objective, Langbaum points out, leaving in place of the previous unity "an abyss . . . the yawning question of whether things outside" the individual "were real" or simply the individual's

¹¹⁸ As he famously writes, "for my meaning is, that the poet has, not a personality to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways" (42).

own subjective construction (6). Miller, too, argues that modern art and philosophy generally emphasize a “spiritual power . . . within things and people,” rather than one external to them (11). He points to individuals’ “experience of existence” as modernity’s chief existential concern. He stresses the phenomenological over the ontological, the psychological over the externally objective. Dennis Brown, in *The Modernist Self*, makes much the same claim, when he suggests that modern literature remains concerned primarily with “new ways of representing self-experience” (1). In essence, each of these critics variously echoes cultural historian Erick Kahler, who argues in *The Inward Turn of Narrative* that modern Western literature and social thought share in general a commonly expressed “move inward” away from supposedly objective surface realities (227).¹¹⁹

These critics are right to note the increased emphasis on inwardness characteristic of much modern thought, even if, as I have sought to explain, they present an unproblematic notion of interiority. They are right, too, to implicitly posit as a feature of modernism a relational opposition between inwardness and exteriority (or subjects and objects), even if they do not perceive how Eliot contests this opposition. Building on these claims, then, I want to turn away from Eliot in this chapter in order to explore how his contemporaries present this binary. For just as Eliot works out of a philosophical and

¹¹⁹ Eliot himself makes a similar claim. In his 1926 Clark Lectures (later published in 1993 as *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*), he argues that a deep cultural shift occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the early modern period, Eliot suggests, “human inquiry” became less interested in ontological questions and more interested in psychological ones (79). For Eliot, the view of the world as consisting of real and existing outer objects gave way to a view of the world as produced by the mind alone. Eliot calls this the “true Copernican revolution,” and points to Descartes’ philosophical formulations as evidence (80). For Descartes, Eliot suggests, “what we know is not the world of objects, but our own ideas of these objects” (80). In contrast, as I argue, Eliot vehemently rejects this psychologizing of reality.

literary tradition that relies on inner/outer distinctions, so, too, do they. In Chapter Two, I provided brief discussions of a number of key nineteenth- and early twentieth-century figures whose understanding of interiority and exteriority provides the context for Eliot's own formulations. Similarly, this chapter will sketch out how certain early twentieth century novelists and poets treat this persistent binary. However, my ultimate goal is to demonstrate Eliot's fundamental difference from his literary contemporaries. For while Eliot shares a concern with this binary with them, he ultimately rejects their pervasive dualism and implicit ontological essentialisms. Eliot explores the binary in order to subvert it, whereas others affirm it as a metaphysical given (with variations in emphasis, of course). In short, I want to explore Eliot's contemporaries' treatment of this binary in order to illustrate what most distinguishes Eliot from them. I want to show how Eliot stands out, rather than blends in, despite any stylistic similarities, shared (social and aesthetic) iconoclastic impulses, or overlapping subject matter.

The first sections of this chapter examine those modernist writers who privilege interiority over exteriority. In section one, I explore the complexities of Virginia Woolf's understanding of human subjectivity, and I argue that while Woolf's work suggests the malleability and contingency of selfhood, she nonetheless affirms the existence of a definitive inviolable core self. Similarly, as I go on to argue, D.H. Lawrence also affirms a core "authentic" self, which he distinguishes from individuals' superficial social identities. Indeed, both Woolf and Lawrence reveal an epistemological confidence in the metaphysical notion of self in their work which Eliot would categorically reject. In contrast to both these novelists, however, Joseph Conrad denies the self originary

content. While Conrad continues to privilege the inner over the outer (consider his literary “impressionism”), he views the self (I argue) only as a void whose content derives from contingent conditions, but whose essence derives from the individual’s own self-referential self-experience.

Other writers of the period reject this emphasis on interiority. Instead, they consciously privilege surfaces, appearances, and concrete images. Despite their differences, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Wyndham Lewis all variously stress externality in their work. Each rejects as an unwanted vestige of romanticism and Victorianism any substantive emphasis on internality. Lewis, for instance, explicitly rejects the “naked pulsing and moving . . . soft inside of life,” as he puts it in *Tarr* (265). For Lewis, “good art must have no inside” (265). What matters is the image itself, an argument which Pound famously makes in his early Imagist work as well. Stein, too, I’ll argue, privileges externality through her emphasis on form and repetition. And Williams, I contend, offers an entire metaphysics in his poetry and criticism predicated on isolating objects as ontologically sufficient in themselves. Indeed, each of these writers implicitly advances a metaphysical project, whether they privilege internality or externality. And each of them, in one way or another, affirms the binary which I argue Eliot labors throughout his career to dissolve.

In short, to understand the particularity of Eliot’s position requires an examination of the ways in which other novelists and poets approach this binary. How novel is Eliot’s approach? To what extent does he differ from his contemporaries? To what extent do they differ from each other? I hope to offer in this chapter some tentative responses to

each of these questions. For I claim that Eliot differs from his contemporaries far more than they differ from one another, whatever side of the binary they affirm. However, in order to clarify and streamline my discussion, especially given my space constraints, I intend to focus less on Eliot in this chapter than on his contemporaries, a strategy I adopted in Chapter Two as well. Also, my discussion of each of these figures will necessarily be brief. However, I hope to demonstrate general tendencies in their thought and work and thus general tendencies in modernist poetry and prose as well. To grasp these tendencies, however tentatively, allows a better understanding of Eliot's own project and position in relation to his contemporaries.

Woolf and the Inviolable Inner Self

In his study of modernism, Peter Childs reiterates the truism that modernist novelists represent inner experience in ways (seemingly) far more complex than their Realist predecessors (3). The modernist novel, he notes, attempts "to represent consciousness, perception, emotion, meaning and the individual's relation to society" through relatively innovative techniques, such as "interior monologue, stream of consciousness, tunneling, defamiliarisation, rhythm, [and] irresolution" (3). Of course, since its emergence in the eighteenth century, the novel has always lent itself towards psychological portraiture. Indeed, Nancy Armstrong argues that the development of the novel helped to produce modern subjectivity itself. As she rather unambiguously puts it, "the history of the novel and the history of the modern subject are, quite literally, one and the same" (3). But the modernist novel intensifies its focus on the subject (however socially construed) by intensifying its focus on the subject's experience of her or his own

inner phenomenological realities. Consciousness as such becomes central. Inwardness assumes priority over mere surface externalities.

As John Fletcher and Malcolm Bradbury put it, modernist novelists sought “to probe more freely and intensely the fact of life and the orders of modern consciousness” (408). Indeed, they point to Virginia Woolf as the paradigmatic expression of this impulse, as revealed not only in her novels, but in her essays as well (408). For Fletcher and Bradbury, Woolf seeks to “situate fiction within the flow of human consciousness” and thus “escape the conventions of [mere] fact-giving and story-telling” (408). I agree and want to extend their argument. I want to claim that Woolf indeed privileges interiority, in particular by affirming the existence of a core self. She posits the self as the locus of meaning in her work, and often places that self in opposition to that which it perceives as external to itself. Thus I want to claim that Woolf constructs an inner/outer binary that prioritizes the inner over the outer, even as it reveals, too, a constructive tension between the two terms.

In “Modern Fiction” (1925), which Julia Briggs refers to as a “manifesto for modernism,” Woolf sets forth her vision of the novel (51).¹²⁰ She castigates those writers (e.g., H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy) who attempt to reproduce only the surface details of material reality. This “form of fiction,” she argues, in fact “more often misses than secures the thing we seek” (287). It insufficiently captures the complexity and nuance of human existence. “Life escapes,” as she puts it, for the “essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments”

¹²⁰ First published in 1919 as “Modern Novels” in the *Times Literary Supplement* (Leaska 283).

(286). Against these authors, Woolf privileges inner experiential reality over superficial material (or physical) details. In a sense, the novelists she critiques are not realist enough. They miss the human “essence” of that which they aim to represent. As she puts it in one of the most well-known passages from the essay, “Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being ‘like this.’ Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions. . . . From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old” (287). That is to say, Woolf suggests that human consciousness consists of its own incessant inner fluctuation, as experience impresses itself onto the individual in unceasingly diverse ways. Thus, those modes of representation which present the relation between individuals and their external realities as a mere accumulation of external details in fact misrepresent human subjective experience. For Woolf, experiential reality is far more complex and *inwardly* oriented than these writers suggest.

Indeed, in another passage from the same essay, Woolf writes, “Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged, but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end” (287-88). The true “task” of the novelist, she argues, is to “convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display” (288). Woolf, then, prioritizes consciousness itself as the proper subject of representation. External, merely quotidian details matter only inasmuch as they effect alterations in the perceiving mind; for Woolf seeks to delineate subjective effects much more so than objective causes.

“Let us trace the pattern,” Woolf declares, “however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness” (288). And she concludes that novelists should “draw upon” “every feeling, every thought, every quality of brain and spirit . . . no perception comes amiss” (291). Woolf thus decisively turns inward in her work. But the turn inwards implies, too, a turn away from the external. Indeed, it implies deemphasizing the external as a subject of representation in itself. The external exists only as construed through subjective representations of it. As such, in this pivotal essay, Woolf implicitly erects a binary in which the inner obtains primacy over the outer. While she never denies externality ontological reality, as might some Berkeleyan subjective idealist, she nonetheless subordinates it to its subjective effects. And in so doing, she creates the very tension which works to support and perpetuate the binary.

Woolf’s turn inwards implies a turn towards the self and thus a particular conceptualization of the self. Louise Poresky argues that the “heart of Virginia Woolf’s work is her search for the Self” (15). Indeed, in “Letter to a Young Poet” (1932),¹²¹ Woolf observes that the key “problem” is “to find the right relationship . . . between the self that you know and the world outside,” a problem which “no living poet has . . . altogether solved” (271). The self, she suggests, exists in tension with the world it confronts as external to itself. And this implies that the self possesses an ontological distinctness by which it distinguishes itself from the “world outside.” The “problem” she refers to is the gap that exists between the “self that sits alone in the room at night with

¹²¹ Woolf first published this “letter” in the *Yale Review* (Leaska 260).

the blinds drawn” immersed in its own “private universe” and that reality experienced as external to the self (269). “[H]ow are you going to get out,” she asks, “into the world of other people?” (271). How does one bridge the gap between the inner and the outer or the self and the other? But by posing the question like this (i.e., oppositionally), she acknowledges a particular conceptualization of the relation between the internal and the external. She constructs the two in binary opposition to one another, even as she suggests the necessity for overcoming that opposition (or at least attempting to overcome it).

Woolf’s emphasis on interiority in general and the self in particular permeates her work, as Poresky rightly suggests. In one way or another, each of her major novels focuses on the gap between the individual and the world that the individual perceives as external to itself, although she attempts to envision means by which individuals might (possibly) overcome that gap. In *To the Lighthouse* (1927), for example, Woolf offers a vision of the individual as largely self-circumscribed. In one of the novel’s most famous passages, Woolf describes Mrs. Ramsey’s sense of herself when alone: “To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk . . . to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others” (62). Woolf not only emphasizes a radically solitary notion of self-experience, but suggests that that self remains absolutely inaccessible to others. In themselves, individuals remain cut off from one another, isolated monads incapable of communicating their inmost self-essences. “Now and again,” she continues, “we rise to the surface and that is what you see us by,” but beneath the surface, individuals remain inviolably self-contained (62).

In another passage which further illuminates this particular monadic conceptualization of interiority and the self, Woolf presents Lily desiring complete union with Mrs. Ramsey. Remembering a moment when she had sat with her arms wrapped about Mrs. Ramsey's knees in an effort to feel as close as possible to her, Lily asks herself, "Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs. Ramsey one? for it was not knowledge but unity that she desired . . . intimacy itself, which is knowledge" (51). But as she sat there (in her memory), embracing Mrs. Ramsey, she lamented, "Nothing [had] happened, Nothing! Nothing! As she leant her head against Mrs. Ramsey's knee. . . . How then, she had asked herself, did one know one thing or another about people, sealed as they were?" (51). Desiring yet denied ontological union with the other, Lily also realizes the epistemological barriers that separate individuals from one another. She can neither blend into Mrs. Ramsey nor grasp her essence in its authentic native profundity. "Only like a bee," she tells herself, "ranging the wastes of the air . . . *alone*," scenting out hives, can individuals get a hint of the essence of the other (51, emphasis added).

To the Lighthouse repeatedly stages attempts like Lily's to overcome this gap between self and other (and thus between the inner and the outer). Indeed, it remains one of the novel's chief concerns. Mrs. Ramsey's dinner provides perhaps the most famous example. At the beginning of the dinner, a gulf seems to divide each of the guests from one another. Mrs. Ramsey senses the magnitude of that gulf, and laments, "Nothing seems to have merged. They all sat separate" (83). The first half of the dinner consists of her efforts to draw her guests out of their native isolation and into some self-transcendent spiritual communion with one another. She seeks through the aesthetic form of the dinner

party to overcome individuals' existential alienation. And by the time she lights the candles, she seems to have succeeded: "Now all the candles were lit up, and the faces on both sides of the table were brought nearer by the candlelight, and composed, as they had not been in the twilight, into a party round a table" (97). The candles unite the dinner guests in their glow, draws them out of their individual isolation, "shuts off" the "outside world" (97). "Some change went through them all," the narrator explains, and "they were all conscious of making a party together in a hollow, on an island; had their common cause against that fluidity out there" (97). Their sense of themselves as utterly self-enclosed, monadic individuals recedes. In its place, a new sense of communal identity emerges. No longer do they sit separate. They have now "merged" together. What Lily feels she could not accomplish on Mrs. Ramsey's knee, Mrs. Ramsey seems to have accomplished through her dinner.

Kristina Groover suggests that "Woolf's language" in this scene "signals a metamorphosis that surpasses mere social harmony" (221). Woolf portrays, she argues, a "transfiguration" of sorts, as she "break[s] down barriers between her characters" (222). Heidi Storl agrees, but goes further. For Storl, Woolf dramatizes in the candlelight scene the "collapse" of the subject/object distinction (306). She argues that "Woolf here characterizes the convergence of beings," rather than a "traditionally construed . . . collection of independently existing subjects and objects" (306). In other words, for both Groover and Storl, Woolf dissolves the distinctions between individuals, and thus the distinctions between the inner and the outer (or self and other). It would seem that, like Eliot, Woolf here manages not only to call into question the legitimacy of the

subject/object binary, but to dramatize its dissolution through its incorporation into a higher dialectical harmony. Subject/object distinctions exist, she suggests, only on lower planes of self conceptualization. Through the medium of cooperative aesthetic experience (i.e., the dinner), individuals can overcome their seemingly self-constitutive existential alienation from one another.

While Woolf certainly stages moments of apparent self-transcendence in which individuals step out of themselves as isolated subjects, these moments remain tenuous, temporary, and exceedingly rare. As such, they seem less authentically ontological in nature than emotional or psychological. Individuals may *feel* a sense of self-transcendent connection with others, but that does not necessarily make it so ontologically. Consider the end of the dinner. Watching Mrs. Ramsey leave the dining room, Lily reflects to herself “And directly she went a sort of disintegration set in; they [all] wavered about, went different ways” (112). They splinter off, retreat back into themselves. The moment has passed. Individuals remain constitutively individual, the novel implicitly suggests (perhaps despite itself). The dinner may have provided a reprieve of sorts, but it did not accomplish the mode of self-merging that Lily, for example, had sought. Indeed, Part III of the novel concerns itself largely with Lily’s feelings of alienation (in general) and separation from Mrs. Ramsey (in particular). However, more to the point, the novel stages the impressions generated during the dinner as subjectively oriented. That is to say, the dinner guests *feel* themselves harmonizing around the table. The text emphasizes the inner sensation characteristic of this brief moment of self-transcendence, as it dramatizes each characters’ self-awareness of their participation in the event (e.g., “they

were all conscious of making a party together”). Thus, rather than dissolving characters into each other, as Groover and Storl argue, Woolf sustains the notion of individuality even as she provides an image suggestive of its transcendence. She prioritizes inwardness even as she stages the complex ways inwardness can perceive itself in transcendent harmony with other selves.

Moreover, despite Storl’s claims to the contrary, the novel continues to maintain subject/object distinctions even at the very moment it would appear to undercut them. Specifically, during the dinner, the novel relies on binary language in order to present its vision of a non-binary transpersonal unity. The text contrasts the sense of unity developing within the room to the “fluidity” outside (97). “Inside the room,” the narrator observes, “seemed to be order and dry land; there, outside, a reflection in which things wavered and vanished, waterily” (97). Even as the narrator appears to break down the distinctions between subjects and objects (between the self and other), she erects a new enframing binary that contextualizes their collective experience. The dinner guests together comprise an “inside” constitutively opposed to the world “outside” their immediate shared intimacy. Thus the text does not dissolve binaries so much as simply alter their coordinates. Rather than erasing the distinction between the inner and the outer, it only expands (temporarily) what constitutes the inner (i.e., the dinner party). But the outer as such remains outer. Moreover, the world outside the dining room windows appears distorted to the guests, suggesting their own subjective epistemological limitations: “for the night was now shut off by panes of glass, which, far from giving any accurate view of the outside world, rippled it . . . strangely” (97). The guests may have

“common cause against that fluidity out there,” but the world “out there” remains existentially othered and ontologically inaccessible (97). Inwardness (however construed) remains primary, while the outward proves shadowy and insubstantial.

Thus Woolf dramatizes the tension between the inner and the outer. She portrays individuals as constitutively self-delineated, although desirous to surmount their own subjective horizons. Other novels reveal a similar metaphysic. Consider, for example, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). Sarah Hardy argues that Woolf presents in this novel a vision of self characterized less by existential isolation than transpersonal connection (402). Individuals, she suggests, possess “mysterious and permeable boundaries,” despite superficial divisions (403). And certainly, the novel would appear to support this argument. At the very beginning of the novel, as Clarissa walks the London streets, she ponders the extent to which she feels a “part” of her surroundings: “somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between people she knew best . . . spread ever so far, her life, herself” (8). Similarly, Septimus, sitting in the park, senses the very life in the trees around him, and feels “connected” to their leaves “by millions of fibres” (19). Both Clarissa and Septimus express a sense of profound union with the external world. Both turn themselves inside out, as it were. The subjective overlaps with the objective, as the inner and the outer appear to converge. Woolf would seem here to dissolve the distinctions between interiority and exteriority.

But the novel offers a counter-vision, too, repeatedly complicating this notion of self (i.e., self as diffuse or interconnected). Even as Septimus, for example, sits in his reverie on the park bench, an insuperable gulf divides his consciousness from Rezia's. His vision remains incommunicable and private. Similarly, Peter Walsh feels Clarissa is "impenetrable" (52). And indeed, Clarissa chose to marry Richard over Peter because she felt Richard respected the inviolability of her inmost private self (6-7). As she muses later, "there is a dignity in people; a solitude; even between husband and wife a gulf; and that one must respect" (101). Moreover, looking out her window at an old lady in an apartment opposite to hers, Clarissa contemplates the "privacy of the soul," and reflects on the "supreme mystery" of isolate consciousnesses and individual subjective self-presence: "here was one room; there another. Did religion solve that," she asks, "or love?" (108). Individuals remain mysteries to one another, she suggests. As Louise Poresky puts it, Clarissa desires people to "relate to her as a totality unto herself" (105). Later in the novel, Peter, too, reflects on "the truth about our soul . . . our self" (136). In a passage which directly anticipates Lucy Swithin's revelation in *Between the Acts*,¹²² Peter likens the self to a fish, which "inhabits deep seas and plies among obscurities threading her way between the boles of giant weeds, over sun-flickered spaces and on and on into gloom, cold, deep, inscrutable" (136). The self remains a mystery for itself, hidden from

¹²² One of the novel's last scenes involves Lucy's sense of individuals' inescapable interiority and private inviolability (which she celebrates). Walking past a pond of carp, Lucy watches the fish flicker around each other, "in and out between the stalks, silver; pink; gold; splashed; streaked; pied" (139). She reflects, too, on how "seldom" the "great carp himself . . . came to the surface" (139). And she goes on to liken individuals to these flitting, semi-secretive fish: "Ourselves, she murmured," looking at the fish, and saw "in that vision beauty, power, and glory" (139). She concludes her reverie with the realization that her brother (Bart) would never understand this insight, that it remains only her own "private vision" (139).

view, “obscure” and “inscrutable.” Even as the novel gestures towards moments of self-transcendence, it also suggests that an ontological and epistemological chasm divides individuals from one another. Indeed, I would argue that the novel prioritizes the gap that divides individuals over those tenuous moments of self-dissolution, inasmuch as it affirms the inviolable “dignity” of individuals *as* individuals.

As in “Letter to a Young Poet,” then, Woolf stages in both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* the “problem . . . between the self that you know and the world outside.” She dramatizes the tension between interiority and exteriority, positing the problematic distinction between these two terms as one of the chief concerns of her fiction. And in posing this tension, she implicitly essentializes the self. She suggests the self exists as an ontological given in contradistinction to an external reality which, too, remains an ontological given (i.e., a distinct essence in itself). Even in *Orlando*, where the self appears maximally fluid, it continues to function as the stable locus of subjective self-presence. The self, that is, possesses determinate form even if not determinate content. It remains a reality in itself, the “core or center of the human psyche,” as Poresky puts it (15). Woolf, then, demonstrates in her fiction an understanding of the self predicated on a binary metaphysics which distinguishes between the interior and the exterior. Even when the line between the two poles blurs, the subjective obtains primacy over the objective, in that she privileges inner sensation, impression, and response—what she calls in “Modern Fiction” that “pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness” (288).

Lawrence and the Subterranean Self

Woolf is not alone among her peers in privileging interiority (however construed), although she is perhaps one of its most articulate dramatists. Other modernist novelists, too, propound an interiorized (and essentialized) notion of self in their fiction in ways that both echo and contrast with Woolf's formulations. D.H. Lawrence, for instance, affirms a similar tension between interiority and exteriority in his work. For Lawrence, the "true" self lies not on the surface, not in an individual's quotidian identity or fleeting sensations and emotions, but somewhere in the depths below. Like Woolf, he affirms a core self, but he locates that self in a deeper substratum of consciousness. Like Woolf, Lawrence also relies upon an implicit inner/outer binary in his work that underlies his conceptualizations of human subjectivity. But unlike Woolf, Lawrence not only juxtaposes the self against those forces which the self identifies as external to itself, but also against perceived inauthentic versions of itself (i.e., what he deprecates as the common ego-self). In short, I want to argue that like Woolf, Lawrence promulgates an essentialist metaphysics which sees the self as ultimately self-grounded. I see Lawrence as a kind of philosophical dualist, whose vision of human subjectivity relies on a clearly evident affirmation of the binary relation between interiority and exteriority.

From early in his career, Lawrence promoted a particular notion of self that not only emphasized interiority as such but affirmed a bifurcated model of subjective self-experience. In a 1914 letter to Edward Garnett, Lawrence famously writes that "[you] mustn't look in my novel for the old stable ego of the character. There is another ego,

according to whose action the individual is unrecognisable” (78).¹²³ This other “ego” lies deeper within the individual than the transient, socially inflected surface-self, and it constitutes a more authentic identity. Indeed, Lawrence goes on to argue that the “ordinary novel . . . trace[s]” individuals’ superficial personalities. These novels posit a “diamond” core to individuals, and then plot out the history of its material development. Lawrence, however, seeks to dramatize the “carbon” beneath the diamond, the “single radically unchanged element” that persists beneath the flux of episodes and events that comprise any individual’s daily existence (78). In essence, he seeks to portray in his work the chthonic self that for Lawrence constitutes the source of individuals’ “authentic” being.

But as Richard Lehan rightly notes, Lawrence aligns his notion of the “inner self” with a particular understanding of human “sexual consciousness” (52). Self and sexuality overlap in that through sexual expression and experience the individual accesses or activates forces that precede normative social consciousness and self-identity. Authentic selfhood involves a particularized expression of universal (pro)creative energies which ruptures normative self-perceptions. In *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, Lawrence explains this notion of subjectivity by distinguishing between a “night-self” and a “day-self.” The

¹²³ Indeed, Lawrence places his understanding of the self in direct opposition to his literary contemporaries. Typical modern novels, for Lawrence, remain all too subjectively-oriented. They focus uselessly on characters’ ultimately meaningless (because utterly temporal) psychological impressions. Contra Woolf, Lawrence argues against “self-consciousness” in the novel (“Future” 143). Specifically critiquing Joyce and Richardson (but by extension Woolf), Lawrence claims that the “people in the serious novels are [too] absorbedly concerned with themselves and what they feel and don’t feel, and how they react to every mortal button” (143). He calls this mode of fiction “childish,” and strenuously attacks those novelists who spend “thousands and thousands of pages” obsessively analyzing characters’ “reactions” and “feelings” (143).

“night-self,” he asserts, “is the very basis of the dynamic self. The blood consciousness and the blood passion is the very source and origin of us” (210). In contrast, the “day-self” constitutes a kind of crust that encloses individuals, imprisons them within themselves, cutting them off from their own authentic source of self-being. The true self, for Lawrence, consists of those welling energies which disrupt the encrustations of quotidian consciousness. In drawing these distinctions, Lawrence relies on a binary surface/depth logic. The “true” self lies in the depths, and aligns with individuals’ deepest bodily instincts, whereas the “false” self functions only as an enclosing, life-diminishing shell.

Lawrence illustrates this highly binary conceptualization of human subjectivity as early as 1913’s *Sons and Lovers*, in his dramatization of Paul’s developing sexuality. Lawrence portrays Paul experiencing a gap between two opposed notions of self: the deep self of transcendent sexual energies and the ego-self of everyday social existence. In his interactions with Miriam, the sexual self (or deep self) remains largely subordinate to normative modes of consciousness and human relations. Miriam insists on the “littleness” of a “personal relationship” with Paul, which he resents (322). Instead, he seeks the dissolution of superficial identity (and the personal relations that entails) in the oceanic depths of sexual release, a goal he seemingly achieves with Clara. Late in the novel, for instance, Paul reflects that with Clara he “became, not a man with a mind, but a great instinct. His hands were like creatures, living; his limbs, his body, were all life and consciousness, subject to no will of his, but living in themselves” (410). He channels energies which he perceives as preceding social relational consciousness, and which he

experiences as shattering received modes of self-understanding. The passage concludes, “Just as he was, so it seemed the vigorous, wintry stars were strong also with life. He and they struck with the same pulse of fire. . . . It was as if he, and the stars . . . and Clara were licked up in an immense tongue of flame, which tore onwards and upwards” (410). He feels in the act of consummation that he expresses or participates even in the same energies that underlie and motivate the cosmos itself.

During these intimate moments, however transitory, Paul descends into himself (turning away from external quotidian realities) in order to transcend himself. He dissolves into that which he perceives as his essential being, indeed into what Lawrence goes on to present as the energies and forces of “life” itself. Of course, *Sons and Lovers* appears to portray this inner self merely as some transpersonal cosmic impulse which individuals participate in only at the expense of their own distinct individuality. Individuals, that is, lose themselves (as selves) in the cosmic flux of blind, impersonal impulse and instinct. In essence, Lawrence would seem to transcend any binary he initially constructs between inner and outer selves, as he dramatizes inwardness as union with external, trans-human life forces. And yet, in other contexts, the novel portrays Paul (and others, like Clara) repeatedly resisting any such mode of absolute dissolution. Indeed, at its most basic level, the novel plots out Paul’s attempts to carve out an identity for himself separate from that of others, particularly his mother (often despite himself).

Barbara Shapiro rightly observes that “Lawrence’s descriptions of Paul’s relationship with his mother reveals a merged identity, a lack of separation and individuation that extends well into Paul’s adolescence and adulthood” (350).

Throughout much of the novel, they remain tightly interwoven into one another's lives. Each constitutes the other's center of self. Each remains grounded in the life-experience of the other; twin stars in mutual orbit, as it were. And yet the novel goes on to portray Paul's ambivalent resistance to this dependent condition. His mother "loved him first," the narrator explains, even as "he loved her first. And yet it was not enough. His new young life . . . was urged to something else. It made him mad with restlessness. . . . He fought against his mother almost as he fought against Miriam" (253-54). Some inner consciousness within Paul makes him aware of the need to distance himself from his mother, to distinguish his life and identity from hers. As Shapiro again notes, "his mother is for him both the source of all reality, of meaning, and of a suffocating bondage" (350). And their distorted relationship distorts Paul's relationship with other women in his life, too, notably Miriam.

Indeed, more so than even with his mother, he resists what he perceives as Miriam's attempts to appropriate him. As Paul's mother complains, "She's not like an ordinary woman, who can leave me my share in him. She wants to absorb him. She wants to draw him out and absorb him till there is nothing left of him, even for himself" (221). And as Paul reflects, Miriam "did not want to meet him, so that there were two of them, man and woman together. She wanted to draw all of him into her" (222). He feels she seeks to appropriate him in his totality, rather than acknowledging the inviolability of his own self-essence. Paul feels the same at times with Clara, too. At one point he reflects, "She made him feel imprisoned when she was there, as if he could not get a free deep breath, as if there were something on top of him" (405). Thus, even as he seems at times

to embrace the experience of oceanic self-dissolution through sexual union, he nonetheless attempts to preserve some deep sense of autonomous individuality.

An apparent tension, then, emerges in Lawrence's formulations in which he seems to both affirm and contest binary notions of human subjectivity. On the one hand, he suggests the convergence of the inner and the outer in the convergence of the personal self (i.e., the "day-self") with impersonal cosmic forces (the "night-self"). When individuals give themselves over to these forces, they pierce the "crusts" of their own inauthentic social identities, transcending the limited ego-self for participation in the life forces that constitute the basis for their very being. On the other hand, Lawrence seeks to preserve space for the individual to exist as an individual distinct from others. Paul seeks his own self-possession in *Sons and Lovers*. He seeks to distinguish himself as a self, to define himself in contradistinction to others' attitudes towards him. Still, both of these models privilege interiority as such. Both affirm the priority of inner experiential realities over external. Even when Lawrence appears to dissolve the binary, he in fact reinforces it, insofar as he dramatizes oceanic consciousness as a turn inwards or downwards into the self. For the turn inwards necessarily suggests a turn away from the outer. Nor is this dynamic limited to *Sons and Lovers*. As Calvin Bedient argues, *Sons and Lovers* may be Lawrence's first novel, but it presents in nascent form his entire "aesthetic metaphysical vision" (118).

In 1915's *The Rainbow*, Lawrence extends and elaborates on this contradictory vision of self first presented in *Sons and Lovers*. As Kate Flint rightly argues, in *The Rainbow* Lawrence "dramatizes two conflicting, irresolvable human drives—on the one

hand towards merging with others, and on the other towards independence, towards the establishment of a belief in one's unique selfhood" (vii). He traces out the same tension, she suggests, between two seemingly incompatible modes of self (i.e., the oceanic versus the nodal or monadic). When Ursula, for instance, looks through her microscope in her botany classroom, she experiences a revelation concerning the nature of the self. "It was a consummation," she exclaimed, "a being infinite. Self was a oneness with the infinite. To be oneself was a supreme, gleaming triumph of infinity" (439). Ursula perceives the self as most itself when subjected to its own immediate dissolution. She draws an implicit distinction between the self as it appears (a concrete substance) and the self as it *is* (dissolved in the totality of some cosmic reality). And yet she also draws a distinction between her "everyday self" and some deeper, more authentic core self which remains inaccessible to others: "Her soul was sure and indifferent of the opinion of the world of artificial light. As they went up the steps of the foot-bridge over the railway, and met the train-passengers, she felt herself belonging to another world . . . a whole darkness dividing her from them" (450). Feeling herself "separate," she reflects that she "had never been more herself" (450). She affirms her "permanent self" here over her "temporal, social self," but this "permanent self" remains inviolably her own (450). It seems distinct both from her "social self" and the "cosmic self" which she had earlier affirmed.

In other words, in *The Rainbow* Lawrence constructs a binary in which the individual envisions herself in oppositional contrast to both external, social reality and (paradoxically) transpersonal cosmic energies. Ursula conceives of her essential self as a

substantive self which exists in contrast to “the world of artificial light.” And yet at the same time, she suggests the lack of any substantive self by affirming its fundamental ontological insubstantiality. Nevertheless, by positing a “permanent self” she positions herself in opposition to that very cosmic “infinity” which she also privileges. The two states stand irreconcilably logically opposed to one another. Of course, a number of scholars variously argue that Lawrence forwards a bifurcated model of self in his work. Richard Lehan, for instance, argues that “Two selves are always at work in Lawrence: an inner self [which] approximates the intuitional realm of Bergsonian being, and an external self [which] participates in mechanical relationships and the routine of everydayness” (53). Similarly, Calvin Bedient notes the “apparent contradiction” between Lawrence’s “insistence on being ‘single’ and ‘integral’ and, on the other hand, on ‘melting out’” (122). And Diane Bonds suggests, too, that Lawrence proffers two variant notions of self: the self as both a definitive “center of personal identity” as well as an “illusion, an effect or product of differentiating relations with the other” (21).

But I want to claim that Lawrence’s bifurcated model of self itself is predicated on a binary logic that none of these critics observe. Not only does Lawrence rely on a conceptual polarity in order to draw his distinction between the chthonic “night-self” and the “day-self” of ordinary ego-consciousness (or between the “carbon” and the “diamond”), but he implicitly relies on an inner/outer distinction as well. For Lawrence, the self (however defined) remains ever in tension with forces it perceives as external to itself. The split within the self (between the supposedly authentic “carbon” and the inauthentic “diamond”) in fact reflects a particular relation between the interior and the

exterior. The inauthentic self in Lawrence emerges as a self in contestation with an external environment which that self encounters as a hostile force but to which it capitulates. For instance, in her efforts at self-definition, Ursula struggles against the “old, hard barren form of bygone living” (493). She seeks to pierce the “husk of an old fruition” to better actualize the living energies of her own self-essence (492). Even when she seems to identify her struggle as a struggle towards transpersonal realities (the “Eternity to which she herself belonged”), she nonetheless perceives this as a struggle against deadening superficial externalities in favor of an openness to more authentic modes of self presence (492). As she reflects in the last pages of the novel, she looks forward to a time when individuals (herself included) “would cast off their horny covering of disintegration” so that “new, clean, naked bodies would issue to a new germination . . . a new growth, rising to the light and wind and the clean rain of heaven” (494). In a passage which itself relies on externalizing imagery, Ursula posits not the dissolution of the individual, but the emergence of a freshened self. That is, Lawrence dramatizes the individual inwardly resisting corrupting external realities.

And even when Lawrence presents individuals experiencing moments of apparent self-dissolution, he presents this, too, as a contrast between inner experiential realities and external, impersonal (or trans-human) realities. The internal encounters itself dissolved into a reality it perceives as external to itself, which is to say that the self nonetheless defines itself in contradistinction to those external realities. The self desires dissolution, a desire which in itself necessarily indicates an ontological distinction between the two modes of being (i.e., the substantive self versus the soluble self). As

Lawrence argues in “Morality and the Novel” (1925), “life *consists in* this achieving of a pure relationship between ourselves and the living universe” (174). But the effort to align “ourselves” (the inward) with the “living universe” (the outward) only underscores the gap between the two. Indeed, the very notion of a “relation” between the two terms (self and universe) suggests their ontological distinction from one another, a point that he seems to concede in his discussion of painting from the same essay: “When van Gogh paints sunflowers, he reveals, or achieves, the vivid relation between himself, as man, and the sunflower, as sunflower, at that quick moment of time. His painting does not represent the sunflower itself. We shall never know what the sunflower itself is” (173). In a rather Kantian formulation, Lawrence suggests that the sunflower as such remains ultimately inaccessible to the painter. Individuals may open themselves up to the phenomenological experience of the sunflower, but its noumenal essence eludes them. The two remain distinct substances in themselves, capable of relation, yes, but ultimately singularly self-unitive.

In other words, Lawrentian self-dissolution entails the self’s transcendence of itself for its own sake. Or, to draw from Lawrence’s own imagery, it entails a tunneling down to the carbon beneath the diamond, and thus an affirmation of a core inwardness that defies ultimate dissolution. In a 1914 letter to Edward Garnett regarding *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, Lawrence argues that he wants to dramatize “woman becoming individual, self-responsible, taking her own initiative” (165). That is, he intends to portray the process of individualization, of the individual coming into an awareness of herself as a distinct, autonomous self-knowing self. And this implies a

particular focus on the self *as* a self. Thus, even as he dramatizes the dissolution of binary distinctions, Lawrence paradoxically predicates his metaphysics on maintaining those distinctions. Like Woolf, then, he acknowledges certain ontological tensions between the inner and the outer (or the “self” and the “universe”), for like Woolf, he affirms a constitutive distinction between the two terms. Both writers affirm inwardness as such. They posit a self which exists substantively distinct from that which it identifies as external to itself. Such a self may undergo a great deal of alteration (consider Woolf’s Orlando or Ursula’s unfolding in *The Rainbow*), but ultimately this entails the unfolding of potentialities already implicit in the self.

Still, despite these similarities, both writers conceptualize the particular relation between the internal and external in unique ways. In a sense, Lawrence presents the two in vertical relation to one another, inasmuch as he presents the self as turning inwards and then tunneling downwards (to the carbon beneath the diamond). For Lawrence, the true self lies beneath surface realities, and individuation requires a kind of repudiation. Woolf, on the other hand, seems to envision a horizontal relation, in that she presents individuals who seek to overcome their isolate individuality through connection/unification with others. She portrays individuals who actively seek to bridge the gap that divides them from others (a horizontal movement), even as she affirms the self’s inviolable singularity. In contrast to both these pivotal figures stands Joseph Conrad, who forwards a model of interiority that denies the self any originary content or substantive essence, even as he continues to maintain the same binary logic that both Woolf and Lawrence employ.

Conrad and the Abyss of the Self

As a novelist, Conrad of course chronologically precedes both Woolf and Lawrence, but his concerns and interests foreshadow and mirror many of their own. Like his later contemporaries, Conrad remains focused on questions of narrative form and representational strategy. Like them, too, he emphasizes individual subjective experience. Yet Conrad's portrayal of subjectivity proves more radical than either Woolf or Lawrence's in that Conrad comes to question not only the intelligibility of the objective world beyond the individual but the substantiality of the self as such. For Conrad, I want to argue, individuals remains ontologically and epistemologically severed from external reality. The self perceives the "world" through its own cognitive and emotive apparatus, rather than perceiving the world in itself. But Conrad goes on to suggest that the self remains a fiction for itself as well, the self positing itself, as it were. Thus Conrad reduces the external to the internal, even as he negates the internal.

Conrad is often understood as a transitional figure, who drew on nineteenth-century aesthetic theory, while at the same time pointing forward to the experimental forms of early twentieth-century high modernist fiction. Richard Lehan makes the standard claim that early modernist writers (such as Conrad) attempted to move beyond nineteenth-century naturalism and realism in order to better "accommodate a modernist reality" (47). For Lehan, this "accommodation" involved an "inward turn" built in part on the "theory of [subjective] impressionism" stemming from Walter Pater (47). He goes on rightly to point to Conrad as one of the inaugural figures of this inward turn. Conrad, Lehan suggests, emphasizes "sensation" or impression in his work (23). He dramatizes

individuals' inner experience, prioritizing the subjective over the merely objective. Indeed, for Conrad, the objective exists only as an impression interpreted (or narrated) through the subjective. As Robert Baker puts it, Conrad's impressionism "was a technique that endeavored to fix and shape randomly flowing experience according to Jamesian formal standards . . . where scene and sensation were skillfully blended" (116). He sought to illuminate inner experience by developing a narrative structure or representational form that itself might express that experience.

Conrad laid forth this aesthetic project in his oft-referenced 1897 Preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* in which he claims that the "task" of the artist "is to hold up unquestioningly" a "passing phase of life . . . in the light of a sincere mood" (49). "Fiction," he declares, "appeals to temperament," and entails the artist's attempt to convey to the reader "a moment of vision" otherwise "obscured by mists" (48, 51, 50). Conrad describes the writer's project largely as a subjective endeavor. He highlights the importance of "mood," stresses "temperament," and affirms art as the revelation of a "vision." Art is less an ontological project, then, than an epistemological one. Artists attempt to make their readers see the reality that they (the authors) perceive. And indeed, in perhaps the Preface's most famous passage, Conrad declares that his "task . . . is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*. That—and no more, and it is everything" (49, emphasis in original). In other words, for Conrad, the artist endeavors to convey a particular set of perceptions to the reader, to unveil a palpably felt "vision" of reality.

He goes on to suggest that objective reality exists only as inflected through individuals' subjective dispositions. Art is an "appeal," he exclaims, "of one temperament to all the other innumerable temperaments whose subtle and resistless power endows passing events with their true meaning, and creates the moral, the emotional atmosphere of the place and time" (48). Conrad suggests that the "truth" art conveys remains bound up with the "temperament" of the individual dramatizing that truth. The "true meaning" of an event rests in the individual's particular perception of that meaning. As Michael Levenson rightly notes, the "central notion here is that of temperament 'endowing' events with their 'true meaning.' The implication, of course, is that such meaning is not intrinsic, that the significance of events remains incomplete without further adumbration" (2). External reality in itself proves inaccessible to human knowing for Conrad. Instead, individuals (or artists) translate external perceptions through the lens of their own emotive consciousnesses. The internal processes the external, so to speak, producing a particularized, contingent truth. As Conrad puts it at the beginning of the Preface, the individual (or artist) "descends within himself, and in that lonely region of stress and strife . . . finds the terms of his appeal" (47). Thus, Conrad positions the inwardly-oriented individual against an external reality which the individual proceeds to interpret. And for Conrad, both the individual and the external world remain ontologically distinct from one another. The world presses in upon the individual, and in turn, the individual subjectively structures those impressions via a descent into the self.

With few exceptions, Conrad avoided aesthetic/metaphysical manifestoes. As Ian Watt notes, other than the Preface, Conrad "wrote no other equally inward account of his

creative aspiration” (103). Indeed, on the whole, he doubted even “his capacity for writing literary criticism” (102). Still, his novels implicitly reveal his views, and in places explicitly restate them. In *Heart of Darkness* (1899), for instance, Conrad offers both an indirect dramatization of his binary ontology and skeptical epistemology as well as a series of direct statements that corroborate his views as expressed in the Preface.¹²⁴ Near the beginning of the novel, the initial narrator reflects on Marlow’s “inconclusive” mode of storytelling (8). For Marlow, the narrator explains, the “meaning of an episode” lies on the surface of an event rather than in its depths. Events in themselves lack any definitive essentialized core meaning. Their particular significance derives from the atmosphere lent it by the perceiver’s perspective. As the narrator puts it, “to him [Marlow] the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that, sometimes, are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine” (6). Marlow values impressions, sensations, and feeling. Mood trumps bare fact. Meaning lies not at the center of an event, but at its edges, in the way individuals perceive circumstances.¹²⁵ In short, the subjective experience of an “episode” matters more than the objective episode itself. As Marlow says, he cares more about conveying to his listeners “the effect of it on me” rather than a mere recitation of details (8).¹²⁶

¹²⁴ I want to focus on *Heart of Darkness* here because, as Kenneth Graham rightly notes, this novel “represents what is strongest and most characteristic in Conrad” (214).

¹²⁵ As Michael Levenson puts it, for Conrad, “the meaning of a phenomenon is its presence to a mind” (20).

¹²⁶ Compare with a similar reflection the narrator makes of Marlow in *Lord Jim*: “They wanted facts. Facts! They demanded facts of him, as if facts could explain anything!” (31).

To suggest that events derive their essential meaning solely from an observer's perspective implicitly suggests a monadic model of self. Individuals remain confined to their own impressionistic frames, and communication proves vexed if not impossible. At one point, for example, Marlow laments his inability to communicate the inner essence of his vision. He asks his listeners, "Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream—making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment" (32). He feels unable to adequately express the exact nature of his experience in the Congo. It remains an essentially private experience, ultimately (he fears) incommunicable. Indeed, immediately following these reflections, Marlow famously exclaims, "it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence. . . . We live, as we dream—alone" (33). The novel thus posits an ontological gap dividing individuals from one another. In contrast to relational or non-binary models of subjectivity, Conrad presents individuals as radically, almost solipsistically self-isolated.¹²⁷ In addition, then, to introducing a distinction between individual perceivers and the external world as it exists in itself, Conrad also postulates a constitutive gap between individuals. He presents a radically atomized world, composed of isolated subjective centers of consciousness.

¹²⁷ Consider, too, the presentation of social relations in *The Secret Agent*. Individuals remain cut off from one another as well as from any sense of coherent community.

In presenting a monadic model of subjectivity which privileges inwardness, Conrad at first glance might appear also to suggest that individuals possess some core authentic self definitively differentiating them from others. Levenson argues, for instance, that in Conrad “the sovereign subject has not disappeared; it has only retreated to safer, if more narrow, ground” (35). Conrad, he concludes, “shares [Walter] Pater’s conviction that [individual] consciousness is the source of meaning and value” (35). After all, as Conrad himself puts it in the Preface, the artist must “descend within himself” in order to uncover the truth of “his” vision (47). And to descend within the self implies the existence of some core, essential self. Yet Conrad goes on to challenge this formulation. In *Heart of Darkness*, for example, Conrad presents human subjectivity ultimately as an empty abyss, devoid of content or substantive ontological grounding. Consider Marlow’s epistemological uncertainties.¹²⁸ Not only does he lament the difficulty he has communicating his vision, but he also remains unclear as to the nature of his experience. As they head up river, shortly before encountering the dense fog, Marlow declares that the “essentials of this affair lay deep under the surface, beyond my reach, and beyond my power of meddling” (47). The fog that subsequently engulfs the steamer only reiterates Marlow’s observation. Its density and impenetrability mirrors his own experience of reality. Indeed, he presents nature in itself as “hopeless,” “dark,” and “impenetrable to human thought,” a surface masking inaccessible depths (69). And of course, the narrative as a whole consists of Marlow’s attempt to “account to myself for—for—Mr. Kurtz—for

¹²⁸ Kenneth Graham observes that “the epistemological ambiguity of ‘Heart of Darkness’” remains one of the novels most distinctive elements (213).

the shade of Mr. Kurtz” (61). His tale reflects his attempt to interpret his experience, an experience whose ultimate essence he fears eludes him. In other words, Conrad presents Marlow as a figure dangling in space, grounded neither in some mutually constitutive dialectical relation with his external environment, nor grounded in himself as a figure whose own self-substantiality provides ontological or existential fixity. Certainties elude him. Uncertainties define him.

Conrad’s portrayal of Kurtz only reinforces this model of self. The novel presents Kurtz as a self without a center, an unfathomable void or negation. Trying to make sense of Kurtz, Marlow reflects, “I think it [the wilderness] had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know . . . and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core” (72).¹²⁹ Marlow suggests that Kurtz lacked any substantive, core self capable of preserving itself (as a self) when separated from familiarizing cultural supports. Thus, Conrad offers in Kurtz a representation of self devoid of any essentialized, self-authenticating kernel. Beneath the veneer lies only the titular “darkness,” and the self experiences itself severed from any sense of fixed identity or self-substantiality. Kenneth Graham argues that Kurtz functions as Marlow’s double, his “unacknowledged other self” (211). And indeed, like Marlow, Kurtz dangles in midair, but in a much more radicalized sense. As Marlow puts it, “There was nothing either above or below him. . . . He had kicked himself loose of the earth”

¹²⁹ Compare, too, with Marlow’s description of Kurtz as the pilgrims carry him to the steamer: “I saw him open his mouth wide—it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him” (74). Kurtz’ yawning mouth and “voracious aspect” reveal Kurtz as a kind of human black hole, a singularity lacking positive substance, consisting instead of an all-consuming vacancy.

(82). In Kurtz, Marlow “saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear” (83). But in Kurtz, Marlow also saw “[a]ll Europe,” and by extrapolation, then, a universal notion of self (61). Thus, even as he unambiguously privileges interiority, Conrad denies the self ontological actuality or epistemological certainty.

Nor does Conrad limit this vision of the self to *Heart of Darkness*. In an 1896 letter to Edward Garnett, Conrad writes that “one’s own personality is only a ridiculous and aimless masquerade of something hopelessly unknown” (Garnett 45). Individuals’ relation to themselves remain characterized by their own self-ignorance. Lacking knowledge of themselves, they consequently lack grounding *in* themselves, dangling, like Kurtz or Marlow, in midair. In *The Secret Agent* (1907), too, Conrad portrays individuals as isolated monads, blind to themselves as well as to others. He presents London as anonymous, fragmented, and labyrinthine, rather than as a community of mutually reciprocating, constitutively interconnected individuals (231).¹³⁰ He portrays the revolutionaries as self-deluded ideologues (or clowns), while at the same time satirizing bourgeois self-complacency. In doing so, he suggests that identity inevitably reduces to pretension. As the novel’s “professor” puts it, “character is built upon conventional morality. It leans on the social order,” an argument he applies both to the bourgeoisie and the revolutionaries (51, 52). Without realizing it, individuals lack any substantive identity. They exist simply as social cyphers, hollow, like Kurtz. John Lyon rightly

¹³⁰ In his “Author’s Note” to the novel, he writes that he saw London as a “monstrous town . . . a cruel devourer of the world’s light. . . . darkness enough to bury five millions of lives” (231).

argues that “This is a novel of fools . . . a novel that sees folly as a defining characteristic of humanity” (xiii). And indeed, the individuals in the novel know neither themselves (in themselves) nor their neighbors. As in *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad denies individuals both definitive ontological self-substantiality and epistemological clarity.

In short, Conrad offers a model of subjectivity that prioritizes inner experience. He privileges the self and its perspectival impressions over the concrete material realities that otherwise contextualize the self. Consequently, he suggests an oppositional relation between the two terms (inner and outer), in that neither derives from the other. The inward exists in itself for itself, even as the external remains inaccessible to human knowing. Contra Eliot, then, Conrad denies individuals and their worlds any mutually constitutive relational ontology. Rather, like Woolf and Lawrence, he affirms a binary metaphysics (however implicit). Yet at the same time, Conrad evacuates inwardness of definitive content. Unlike Woolf or Lawrence, Conrad affirms no self-authenticating core self, nor a self that evolves from one mode of self-presence to another (which, as in Woolf, remains nonetheless predicated on an underlying stability). Instead, Conrad presents subjectivity as an undifferentiated inwardness, a void ultimately devoid of delineation or unitive coherence. In a sense, in place of the self, he substitutes primordial will.

Still, a slight counter impulse exists in Conrad, which lends some tension to this formulation. While Conrad (I argue) unambiguously privileges subjectivity, he also emphasizes the importance of surface sensory impressions. Recall the key line from his Preface, “My task which I am trying to achieve is . . . to make you hear, to make you

feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*” (49). In other words, Conrad seeks to appeal to his readers’ senses in his narratives. He wants his readers to “hear,” “feel,” and “see” the subtle (subjectively inflected) realities he seeks to convey.¹³¹ This minor tension in Conrad marks a major tension running through modernist aesthetics in general. While writers such as Woolf, Lawrence, and Conrad focus primarily on inner subjective realities (however variously), others, such as Gertrude Stein, the early Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and William Carlos Williams emphasize external, objective, material reality. Broadly understood, these two sets of writers demonstrate in their work an opposed metaphysical understanding of the relation between the internal and the external. Whereas the first set largely privilege interiority and subordinate the external, the second set largely prioritize the external and subordinate the internal. The first locate meaning on the inside, as it were, the second on the outside. However, both groups I argue maintain the essential binary distinction between the two terms. Both groups privilege one term over the other, rather than unambiguously dissolving the binary. In the following sections, I want to focus on those modernists who emphasize surfaces. I want to argue that these writers in various ways offer a metaphysics that assumes the transparent self-appearance of the external world as a given. I want to argue as well, that each of these writers implicitly affirms a self-substantiating “I” that defines itself in opposition to that external reality.

¹³¹ Michael Levenson traces out this tension between subjectivism and sensory materiality, or the conflict between the “registering of fact and the recording of consciousness, physis and psyche,” as he puts it (35).

Prioritizing the External

Discussing the modernist novel, John Fletcher and Malcolm Bradbury make the familiar observation that modernism involves a “crisis of presentation” (395). They argue that modernism consists of a self-reflexive aesthetics that mirrors artists’ increasing impatience with inherited representational forms and narratological techniques (394). Writers became ever more “concerned with . . . texture and form,” Fletcher and Bradbury suggest, such that the novel transitioned from “an art of adventures” “into an art of figures” (394, 396).¹³² In other words, a new aesthetic emerged in the early twentieth century in which artists self-consciously accentuated formal elements (such as “language and design”) rather than unconsciously assuming a simplistic correspondence between content and form (i.e., the represented and the representation itself) (394). In a sense, then, many writers began quite consciously privileging surfaces, whether linguistic or structural, over representational content as such. The aesthetic exterior came to matter at least as much as the “reality” under representation. Indeed, as then contemporary philosopher José Ortega y Gasset observes, such writers “dehumanize” art (i.e., strip it of its quotidian referential function). Form itself matters more than the correspondence between form and human phenomenological realities. The “modern artist,” Ortega claims, seeks “to paint a man who resembles a man as little as possible; a house that preserves of a house exactly what is needed to reveal the metamorphosis [of house to abstract shape]” (23). He concludes that for modern artists “aesthetic pleasure derives from . . . a triumph over human matter,” or what he later calls the “will to style” (23, 25).

¹³² Fletcher and Bradbury gloss Ortega y Gasset here. See Ortega’s “Notes on the Novel” (67).

In short, inasmuch as modernism entails an inward turn (as seen in Woolf, Lawrence, Conrad, etc.), so, too, it would seem to entail a turn outwards, towards surfaces.

Ezra Pound and Imagism

What Fletcher and Bradbury argue of the novel applies equally as well to certain poetry of the period. The Imagists, for instance, while their “movement” lasted, almost uniformly privileged materially substantive concrete images in their work. Famously, Ezra Pound (with F.S. Flint) formulated in 1913 a creedal affirmation of Imagist aesthetics. Pound calls for the “Direct treatment” of objects of representation, the use of words that specifically “contribute to the presentation” of those objects, and the use of a more organic rhythm that presumably would capture the contours of the object in a less artificial manner (“Imagisme” 209-210). But beneath these general guidelines lies a particular ontology and epistemology, as Pound both prioritizes exteriority and essentializes objects (or “things,” as he calls them). In so doing, Pound erects and affirms a subject/object and inner/outer binary that underlies his work and thought.

Pound grounds his early aesthetics (1913) in a “certain ‘Doctrine of the Image,’ as he calls it in “Imagisme” (210). For Pound, the image “is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (“Retrospect” 253). The image, that is, exists in isolation from the mind observing it. The mind arrests the image (or “complex”) and attempts to freeze it in language, thus implicitly positing itself in oppositional relation to the image. Indeed, Pound distinguishes between presentation and representation in his theory. Imagists present images in their putative manifest substantiality rather than as objects subject to rhetorical embellishment or imaginative

reconstitution. As he argues in 1914's "Vorticism," the "'image' is the furthest possible remove from rhetoric" (280). Referencing Aristotle, Pound notes that rhetoric entails "dressing up some unimportant matter so as to fool the audience for the time being," whereas Imagism provides an "examination of truth" (280). In other words, the image marks an objective reality distinct from the poet's own subjectively grounded perspective, yet which the poet can nonetheless perceive and translate into language. The poet stands apart from the image, even as the image stands apart from the poet.

But Pound goes further. He likens the "image" to a mathematical formula, drawing an exact analogy between Imagist poetry and analytical geometry. Both entail novel methods of "dealing with form," and the difference between the two "is the difference of subject-matter only" ("Vorticism" 289). Whereas analytical equations concern the relationship between particular variables and corresponding geometrical forms, so, too, do images involve the relation between particular (yet variable) emotions and corresponding visual forms. Both conflate content with form. Both align variables and their relations with certain determining forms. Pound argues, "By the 'image' I mean such an equation; not an equation of mathematics, not something about *a*, *b*, and *c*, having something to do with form, but about *sea*, *cliffs*, *night*, having something to do with mood" (289). Image equates with mood inasmuch as a particular mood equates with a particular image. Pound affirms a shared identity between the two elements. As he asserts elsewhere in the essay, "Every concept, every emotion, presents itself to the vivid consciousness in some primary form" (285). Nor, Pound insists, is the "image" an "ornament," a superfluous addition to the poem, but rather the "speech" itself (285). The

“image” is what the poem *says*; it “is the word beyond formulated language” (285). It is a thing-in-itself, an exact presentation of an objective reality. As Frank Kermode rightly notes, “For Pound, the problem begins and ends with the establishing of the genuine thing-ness of the image; he wants *things*, not ideas” (161). Or, as Rebecca Beasley puts it, Pound insists on the “primacy of ‘the real’” (51).

Pound thus implicitly affirms an essentialist ontology, in that he posits the substantiality of image-objects as objects in themselves, independent of the poet’s own subjective relation to them. The poet seizes upon an image that adequately corresponds to a perceived emotional state, then attempts to chisel that image into words. The poet, that is, works upon the image, uses it as a kind of language by which to convey an objective aesthetic impression. “The image is the poet’s pigment,” Pound claims in 1914’s “Vorticism” (283). It is an object over which the poet exercises control. But again this lends the image-object an ontological reality distinct from the poet’s own subjective reality. Like the mathematician, the poet discovers image correspondences (i.e., correspondences between the image and the emotion or energy implied in the image). They exist independently of the poet, even as the poet exists independently of them.

In affirming objects, Pound privileges the surfaces that constitute the material presence of those objects. Supplementing his original definition of the image, Pound argues in 1915’s “Affirmations” that images consist of formal manifestations of “energy or emotion” which often “find adequate expression in words” (rather than a static “complex” frozen in an “instant of time”) (295). The poet’s task entails properly channeling the image into a corresponding linguistic medium without compromising the

ontological integrity of the image itself. Strong poems possess the capacity to accurately convey the “energy or emotion” inherent in the image. “The better the [poem] machinery,” Pound concludes, “the more precise, the stronger, the more exact will be the record of the voltage and of the various currents which have passed through it” (295). That is to say, the more precise the material presentation of the image, the more precise the relation of the emotion or idea embedded in the image. Thus, Pound affirms the co-inherence of form and content. But the communicability of content necessarily remains subordinate to the proper presentation of the image. As such, Pound implicitly subordinates content to form. He privileges the image over that which the image potentially signifies. Surfaces matter most. Or, to put it another way, meaning inheres in the surface. And for Pound, those surfaces must consist of concrete, clearly delineated images in order to best channel the image’s inherent significance. In short, for the image to function properly (i.e., for it to adequately convey a particular “energy or emotion”), the poet must present it with precision and clarity.¹³³

Thus, Pound affirms subject/object binary relations. For in prioritizing exteriority (i.e., image as surface), Pound implicitly advances a metaphysics characterized by the ontological irreducibility of both subject and object. Moreover, he assumes a stable subject capable of knowing and translating existent image objects. For Pound, the subject perceives an image and then proceeds to translate that image into an appropriate

¹³³ Pound generally affirms a poetics of precision. In 1918’s “A Retrospect,” Pound famously complains that the nineteenth century proved a “blurry, messy sort of a period, a rather sentimentalistic, mannerish sort of period” (262). He found nineteenth-century writers too linguistically ornamental, mawkishly emotional, and didactic. They lacked “precision” or “explicit rendering, be it of external nature, or of emotion” (261). In contrast, Pound affirms a poetics of “granite” (262). The new poetry’s power “lie[s] in its truth,” he claims (262). It is “austere, direct, [and] free from emotional slither” (262).

linguistic register. While the crafting of the poem may prove difficult (thus Pound's aesthetic guidelines), the perception of the image in itself does not. As he argues in "Vorticism," the "image . . . is real because we know it directly" (283). In its essence, it remains "beyond formulated language" (285).

T.E. Hulme and the Poetics of Objectivity

Pound's views grew out of matrix of contending perspectives and schools (Impressionists, Symbolists, Futurists, Cubists, etc.), new philosophies (notably Bergson, however derivatively), and a semi-reactionary anti-Victorianism. Still, he does serve as a representative figure for this period, particularly given the extent to which many of his contemporaries shared his emphasis on exteriority. T.E. Hulme, for instance, whose aesthetic formulations influenced both Pound and Eliot, also developed a theory of the image.¹³⁴ Indeed, Leigh Wilson notes that "Hulme's theories provided Pound with a solid foundation from which to launch his own assault on [contemporary, derivative] 'dead poetry'" (103).¹³⁵ Both writers famously rejected what they perceived as Victorian and romantic excesses. And just as famously, both championed a new poetics of precision. In the well-known lecture/essay "Romanticism and Classicism" (1911-12), Hulme predicts the coming arrival of "a period of dry, hard, classical verse" (79). This new verse will supplant inherited forms of "romantic" poetry. Rather than obsessing with "infinity . . .

¹³⁴ Regarding Hulme's influence on other writers of the period Patrick McGuinness writes, "Depending on where one derives one's information, depending on whose narrative of Modernism one is reading, and on which Modernism(s) are being written about, the image of Hulme—the idea of Hulme—shuttles back and forth along the same line, between the same points: was he modernism's back-seat driver, or its noisiest passenger?" (viii).

¹³⁵ Still, Wilson reminds her readers that while Hulme influenced Pound, Pound nonetheless "was already thinking along the same lines" as Hulme prior to their first meeting in 1909 (103).

mystery or . . . emotions” (as Hulme claims romantic poets and their inheritors do), the new poetry will concern itself with “small, dry things” (78). In “Modern Art and its Philosophy” (1914), Hulme argues further that the emerging “new art is geometrical in character,” classifying it as “austere, mechanical, clear cut, and bare” (95, 105). He observes in the “new art” a “striving towards structure . . . away from the [supposedly romantic] messiness and confusion of nature and natural things” (106). In other words, like Pound, Hulme stresses the significance of concrete exterior aesthetic form.

Indeed, like Pound, Hulme grounds this new “austere” poetics on a particular theory of the image.¹³⁶ As Frank Kermode rightly notes, for Hulme, “precision” in poetry entails primarily “the recording of images,” which Kermode calls the “core” aspect of “Hulmian aesthetics” (150). In “Romanticism and Classicism,” Hulme famously argues that “Images in verse are not mere decoration, but the very essence of an intuitive language” (80). As Pound similarly suggests, Hulme argues that images constitute a language “beyond formulated language” (in Pound’s words). They comprise a “visual concrete” language which delivers to readers a sensuous experience virtually immediately (i.e., it avoids the conceptually mediating abstractions of prose) (80). He goes on to argue that “Plain speech is essentially inaccurate. It is only by new metaphors [or images] . . . that it can be made precise” (81). But to emphasize the image is to emphasize as well the materially concrete nature of the image. As Kermode puts it, the image “is concrete, because [it] can be represented only as concrete, and [is] entirely devoid of discursive

¹³⁶ However, Patrick McGuinness points out that Pound later sought to distance himself from Hulme. In 1939, McGuinness notes, Pound “claimed that Ford Maddox Ford rather than Hulme had been the motivating force behind his own Imagist enterprise (and by implication therefore, behind Imagism)” (ix-x).

meanings and appeals to the intellect” (151). The meaning of the image exists solely on the surface of the image. It lacks any inward, “discursive” segmentation, constituting rather a “direct representation” (Kermode 151). Accordingly, it affects its audience intuitively, Hulme suggests, by circumventing individuals’ analytical faculties (80). Thus it constitutes a more epistemologically “authentic” mode of communication, translating experience directly, as it were, into a language of immediate perception. The poet perceives and communicates a materially concrete reality, which the audience receives and intuitively understands.¹³⁷

Like Pound, then, Hulme, too, emphasizes surfaces. And like Pound, Hulme’s aesthetics necessarily imply a particular metaphysics. Wallace Martin rightly argues that “Imagism, rather than transmitting an etiolated romanticism, initiated a new movement towards objectification, toward ‘presentation’” (204). And indeed, both Pound and Hulme offer a poetics of objective presentation. For both, images constitute objects ontologically distinct from the individual who presents the image. Properly construed, the image captures and conveys the poet’s intuition of an objective reality. It is a presentation of that objective reality, rather than a subjective construction of it. In other words, both Hulme and Pound expound and practice a kind of empiricist poetics. The poet observes and records images as they transparently (non-conceptually) present themselves to the poet. Thus, both writers express an epistemological faith in the capacity of the poet to

¹³⁷ In “A Lecture on Modern Poetry,” Hulme argues that “there are, roughly speaking, two methods of communication, a direct, and a conventional language. The direct language is poetry, it is direct because it deals in images. The indirect language is prose, because it uses images that have died and become figures of speech. The difference between the two is . . . this: that while one arrests your mind all the time with a picture, the other allows the mind to run along with the least possible effort to a conclusion” (65).

objectively perceive reality as it materially manifests itself. As Sanford Schwartz rightly argues, for Hulme the “artist recovers not the individual’s unique stream of consciousness, but a publically identifiable element of experience that others have simply failed to notice” (53). Rather than offering some private subjective interpretation of reality, the poet instead presents some overlooked element in a mutually perceived, mutually accessible objective reality.

As Kermode notes, both Pound and Hulme “wish that poetry could be written with something other than words” (161).¹³⁸ Both sought to transcend the limitations of conceptual language by affirming the immediacy of the image. Both advance a poetics that favors the “direct treatment of the ‘thing’” over abstraction-laden ruminative verse. And as such, both propound an empiricist ontology that affirms the distinction between subject and object, in that they affirm the distinct reality of the “thing” perceived. Pound and Hulme, then, each embrace a subject/object binary as a foundational element of their thought. In affirming this binary, they also necessarily affirm an inner/outer binary. For they predicate their (implicit) empiricist ontology on a poetics of exteriority which values image surfaces. Rather than focusing on subjective inner experience (as do Woolf, Lawrence, and Conrad), they advocate the direct material presentation of a mutually experienced, objectively real psychological, social, or material reality. In short, Pound and Hulme help further exemplify a modernism at variance with itself. Like Woolf, Lawrence, and Conrad, their work relies on both a subject/object and inner/outer binary

¹³⁸ Martin, too, writes that both Hulme and Pound “emphasize a mode of creation that eschews explicit conceptual content” (204).

metaphysics. However, unlike them, they largely prioritize objectivity and exteriority in their work rather than subjectivity and interiority.

This is not to say, of course, that Woolf, Lawrence, and Conrad do not value form. Indeed, Woolf's formalist experimentations remain central to her project (consider *The Waves*, for instance). The issue involves the ends to which these writers subject their formalist experiments. Woolf and Conrad, for instance, employ form as a means for conveying inner states of consciousness. Form remains a means to an end, and for these writers, that end involves an affective rendering of human phenomenological reality. Rather than ontologically correlating with the object of representation, form instead serves as a means for revealing the object of representation. Stream of consciousness, divergent points of view, temporal disjunction, narrative fragmentation (for example), all function as tools by which the writer communicates their particular notion of human experience. Pound and Hulme, on the other hand, view form (construed as image) as a presentational language in itself. The image correlates precisely with that which it presents. It constitutes its own representation, and thus remains an end in itself rather than a means to an end. To put it another way, the image reflects its own surface. It means that which it presents, and presents that which it already is. It points to itself as its own ontological reality. Thus, despite a broadly shared interest in form as such, these two sets of modernists view its function in philosophically divergent ways.

Gertrude Stein and the Word as Object

Gertrude Stein serves as a useful counterpoint to both Pound and Hulme, affirming their essentialist metaphysics and prioritization of exteriority even as she

challenges their poetics. Like both of her contemporaries, Stein practiced and promoted novel forms of poetry (in addition to novel forms of prose). And like them, she drew on recent developments in visual art in formulating her own aesthetic theory.¹³⁹ But most importantly, like Pound and Hulme, Stein privileges exteriority over interiority. She emphasizes linguistic surfaces in her work, and draws attention, too, to the constructedness of her texts through her use of repetition and syntactical, grammatical, and punctuation irregularities. Words matter more to her than narratological coherence or conceptual clarity. Indeed, by so radically emphasizing form, she challenges normative notions of coherence and clarity. Reflecting on *Tender Buttons*, for instance, Paul Peppis argues that Stein seems “more concerned to analyse the linguistic medium than to ‘describe’ the things it allegedly represents” (38). *Tender Buttons*, he continues, “relentlessly interrogates language and its conventions, tinkering with sentences, violating grammatical rules, playing with sound” (38). Or, as William Carlos Williams notes in a 1930 essay on Stein, she “completely unlink[s]” words “from their former relationships in the sentence” (349). To concentrate on form as such is to sever (or at least attenuate) the connection between words in themselves from words in their referential capacity.

Consider, for example, this passage from her 1912 “portrait” of Picasso: “One whom some were certainly following was one who was completely charming. One whom

¹³⁹ In *Blast*, for instance, Pound claimed Picasso and Kandinski as the “father and mother” of Vorticism (154). And Hulme’s theories touch on all expression of modern art, not just poetry. Indeed, in “A Lecture on Modern Art,” he directly links visual and literary art, arguing that the “new verse resembles sculpture rather than music; it appeals to the eye rather than to the ear. It has to mould images, a kind of spiritual clay, into definite shapes” (66).

some were certainly following was one who was charming. One whom some were following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were following was one who was certainly completely charming” (333). The representational content of the passage recedes behind the linguistic façade. Repetition, syntactic variation, and a metrically suggestive rhythm contribute to an overall aesthetic impression rather than a representational one.¹⁴⁰ Language (as such) and aesthetic structure supersede referentiality, as Stein challenges her readers’ conventional expectations for a biographical sketch. Her putative subject (Picasso) matters less than do the words Stein chooses to employ in representing her subject.

Consider, too, 1914’s *Tender Buttons*, in which Stein offers a series of what seem at first to be still-lives. Very quickly, readers discover a representational gap between the object she ostensibly describes and the description she gives of it. For instance, in her portrait of “An Umbrella” she writes, “Coloring high means that the strange reason is in front not more in front behind. Not more in front in peace of the dot” (471). And in “A Handkerchief” she writes, “A winning of all the blessings, a sample not a sample because there is no worry” (472). These are not anomalous examples. Both capture the formal pattern characteristic of the other “still-lives” Stein produces in the collection. In these as in the others, she presents descriptions that appear to lack any representationally transparent correspondence with the items they supposedly describe. Peter Howarth argues that these “prose-poems” consist of “sliced-up sentences whose pattern and

¹⁴⁰ Carl Van Vechten notes that the editor of *Camera Work* (in which this piece was first published) “accepted [it] . . . principally because he did not immediately understand” it (328).

meaning seem to be generated spontaneously in the writing” (153). Certainly, “pattern and meaning” here appear to derive from the deliberate arrangement of the formal elements rather than from the inner content to which those elements might otherwise refer.

Thus, as with Pound and Hulme, Stein presents an aesthetics that prioritizes the “stylistic surface” of language (Kley 519). She views language as an object distinct in itself and capable of structural or formal manipulation. She appears to value the “play” of language over its referential capacities. William Carlos Williams rightly points out that “Stein’s theme is writing,” and that she “has placed writing on a plane where it may deal unhampered with its own affairs” (note the exteriorizing spatial metaphor “plane”) (349). For Stein, language exists substantively in itself, possessing an objective materiality independent of its normative functioning. And indeed, she desires precisely to undermine the normative function of language in her work. As Antje Kely points out, in “place of the tired dream of exact mimetic representation, Stein’s prose poems support the pursuit of an intimate comprehension of both the limiting and enabling laws of language” (523).

Still, Stein’s aesthetics differ from her literary contemporaries in a number of significant ways. For instance, unlike Pound and Hulme, Stein does not value the “direct” use of words nor the clear delineation of images (or at least defines such usage differently). Indeed, despite consisting (ostensibly) of a series of still-lives, *Tender Button* refuses to present objects using normative representational strategies. Rather than presenting portraiture, Stein presents instead word manipulations. She values repetition, semantic and syntactic disjunction, and juxtaposition. She works to disrupt the process of

representationally coherent image formation. Instead of precision, Stein offers repetition. Instead of semantic and syntactic specificity, she offers novel juxtapositions of verbs, nouns, and prepositional phrases.¹⁴¹ She seeks to distance herself from what she terms in a poem of the same name “Patriarchal Poetry.” In that 1927 poem she declares, “Patriarchal Poetry not to try. Patriarchal poetry and lullaby. Patriarchal Poetry not to try Patriarchal poetry at once” (242). Neil Schmitz notes that “Patriarchal Poetry” “exactly measures [Stein’s] distance from the canon,” that is, from normative representational and formalist strategies (126). But it measures her distance from Pound and Hulme, too, in that taken altogether the poem exhibits the same stylistic features found in her earlier work (i.e., the use of repetition, syntactical variation, etc.).

Thus, unlike Pound and Hulme (or even Woolf, Lawrence, or Conrad), Stein values language for language’s sake, and as such would seem to sever language from the reality it purports to represent. However, Stein goes on to argue that she seeks in fact a more exact representation of reality through her aesthetic experimentation than so-called “patriarchal poetry” allows (and that her own prose-poetry at first suggests). That is to say, rather than driving a wedge between language and its referential meaning, she seeks to intensify the connection. In *Lectures in America* (1935), for instance, Stein affirms that “the problem of poetry was and it began with Tender Buttons [sic] to constantly realize the thing anything so that I could recreate that thing. I struggled desperately with the recreation and the avoidance of nouns as nouns” (238). She sought to “recreate” the

¹⁴¹ Consider the first two lines of her portrait of “Sugar”: “A violent luck and a whole sample and even then quiet. Water is squeezing, water is almost squeezing on lard” (485).

observed “thing” in her poetry in a way she felt more accurately captured the essence of the object. She drew inspiration from the visual arts, notably cubism, but also the cinema: “I was doing what the cinema was doing, I was making a continuous succession of the statement of what that person was until I had not many things but one thing” (176-77). Repetition with variation served to draw out the complex layers of being embedded in the object of representation. A simple statement of description for Stein in fact entails a distortion, since it flattens the object along a single representational axis. She sought, like the Cubists, to multiply the planes of representation, so as to capture the object as it exists in its greater complexity.¹⁴² Her “portrait” of Picasso, then, entails for Stein a more accurate portrayal of Picasso than any normative biographical description, in that she uses repetition and subtle variation to capture representational nuances unavailable to more prosaic character sketches. Although her “Cubist” efforts appear to accentuate formal elements over representational, her ultimate goal entails heightened attention to the objects of representation. It entails, too, belief in and attention to real objects capable of objective depiction. In essence, she intends a kind of hyper-realism in her art.

Like Pound and Hulme, then, Stein emphasizes exteriority, both in her aesthetics and in her affirmation of objective reality (i.e., that real objects exist and are subject to representational embodiment, however complex or non-normative). She affirms the material objectivity of language, and thus implicitly posits the mind as that which freely apprehends and manipulates it. And she also promulgates a belief in the power of

¹⁴² For a discussion of Stein’s relation to Cubism, see Antje Kley’s “‘keeping pace with the visual revolution’: Intermediary Reference in Gertrude Stein’s Prose Poems *Tender Buttons* and Wyndham Lewis’ Novel *Tarr*.” See, too, Paul Peppis’ “Schools, movements, manifestoes” chapter in the *Cambridge Companion to Modernist Poetry* (28-50).

language to capture complex objective realities. In affirming the existence of an objective reality ontologically distinct from the subjective observer, Stein reveals a metaphysics characterized by the same subject/object binary that underlies Pound and Hulme's work. And in privileging exteriority, she affirms the same inner/outer binary they propound as well. Thus, despite her superficial differences from these two seminal figures, she implicitly affirms many of the same philosophical positions exhibited in their work and theory. In various ways, each presumes from the outset a constitutive distinction between autonomous subjects and authentically self-present (and self-presenting) objects.

Wyndham Lewis: "Good art must have no inside"

Like Eliot, each of these three figures reacts against previous modes of representation. Each sees normative nineteenth-century realism and traditionalist verse as insufficiently theorized and thus misrepresentative of social and material reality. Indeed, in their work, they each point beyond themselves towards the crisis of representation that famously affects all the arts of the period, not just poetry. In *Reconfiguring Modernism*, for instance, Daniel Schwarz argues that the "experiments in technique and theme" of modernist writers such as Woolf, Conrad, and Joyce "parallel[s] the challenges to mimesis" seen in the work of early twentieth-century painters such as Matisse, Picasso, and Paul Klee (1). He adds that these painters' "experiments in color, line, space, and abandonment of representation provided a model for writers, who challenged traditional narrative linearity" (1). The same can be said, too, of Pound, Hulme, and Stein. To varying degrees each of these three figures draws on then-contemporary visual arts for confirmation and inspiration. As noted above in a footnote, Pound drew on Picasso and

Wassily Kandinski (again, claiming them as the father and mother of Vorticism), while Stein looked to Paul Cezanne, going so far as to claim that she “began to write *Three Lives*,” her earliest published work (1909), under his influence (502).¹⁴³ Hulme went further, perceiving a common impulse underlying all modern art, which he termed the “tendency to abstraction,” most notably expressed in Cubism and the post-impressionism of Cezanne, but also in the new kinds of verse he both prophesied and championed (109). Hulme characterizes this “tendency to abstraction” as a renewed interest in structural form or surfaces. The new art, he argues in 1914’s “Modern Art and Its Philosophy,” “will culminate not so much in the simple geometrical forms found in archaic art, but in the more complicated ones associated in our minds with the idea of machinery” (110). He suggests, for instance, that Picasso’s paintings “at bottom” function as “studies of a special kind of machinery” (111).

Painter, novelist, and co-founder of Vorticism Wyndham Lewis makes a nearly identical claim in the July, 1914 volume of the Vorticist manifesto *Blast*. “Most of Picasso’s latest work,” he asserts, “is a sort of machinery. Yet these machines neither propel nor make any known thing: they are machines without a purpose” (140). And he says in 1914’s “The Cubist Room” that “all revolutionary painting to-day has in common the rigid reflections of steel and stone . . . that desire for stability as though a machine were being built to fly or kill with” (201). Like Hulme, Pound, and Stein (in her commitment to form), Lewis affirms this new “tendency to [geometric] abstraction” in

¹⁴³ Stein was frank about these influences. For instance, in a 1946 interview, Stein noted that “everything” she has ever “done has been influenced by Flaubert and Cezanne” (502).

both the visual arts and literature. Like them, he prioritizes the material surface of language, pigment, and of form as such. And like them, he affirms an objectivist metaphysics that presupposes the ontological self-substantiality of objects in the world. But Lewis articulates this new aesthetic with a vehemence and clarity that his contemporaries lack, and as such a brief glance at his formulations might prove useful.

In 1918's *Tarr*, for example, Lewis' eponymous anti-hero argues that only geometrically "dead" things constitute true art. A "statue is art," Frederick Tarr claims, because it "is a dead thing, a lump of stone or wood. Its lines and proportions are its soul. Anything living, quick and changing is bad art always; naked men and women are the worst art of all" (264). In fact, for Tarr (and I would claim, too, for Lewis) "deadness is the first condition of art," followed by the "absence of soul" (265).¹⁴⁴ In other words, Lewis values the objective over the subjective, surface over depth, the outward over the inward. Indeed, not only does he subordinate the inward to the outward, but he empties it of any determinate conceptual content whatsoever. Whereas Pound, say, collapses the inner onto the outer, thereby privileging the outer as the primary locus of meaning, for Lewis, the "true" work of art literally "has *no inside*" (265, emphasis in original). Its outer form constitutes its sole and singular essence. It is its own exteriority: "With the statue [for example] its lines and masses are its soul, no restless inflammable ego is imagined for its interior" (265).

¹⁴⁴ As Scott Klein argues, "Many of Tarr's ideas are identifiably the same as those of the Blast manifestos: his programmatic and egoistic opposition to the conflation of 'art' and 'life', his vaunting of paradox above consistency, and his preference for art that emphasized exteriors and stable objects rather than interiors and the behavior of objects in time" (xix-xx).

If “good art” consists only in the presentation of exteriority, then the artist becomes a kind of engineer, manipulating surface features so as to obtain the proper aesthetic effect. As Lewis writes in the first volume of *Blast*, as art develops in the future, “Engineer or artist might conceivably become transposable terms, or one, at least imply the other” (135). No longer the romantic or Victorian subjectivist, the new engineer-artist instead (for Lewis) embodies an objectivist aesthetic that values objects over emotions, details over impressions, and structure over function. Rather than subordinating form to teleology, Lewis makes form an end in itself, and in so doing elevates the static over the dynamic, or fixity over flux. As Lewis puts it in *Tarr*, he values the “armoured hide of the hippopotamus, the shell of the tortoise, feathers and machinery” over the “naked pulsing and moving of the soft inside of life—along with elasticity or movement and consciousness” (265).¹⁴⁵ But this means, too, that Lewis opposes the observer against the observed. The two (subject and object) exist in diametric tension with one another, each self-existent in itself, but each confronting the other as exterior surface. As Geoffrey Wagner argues, Lewis affirms “that the artistic apprehension of reality is best accomplished by the intellect, working from outside on a field of static matter” (1). The artist-engineer stands outside that which she or he “apprehends,” confronts it as an object external to the self, yet nonetheless subject to manipulation.

Thus, Lewis amplifies Pound, Hulme, and Stein, affirming their essential aesthetics and underlying metaphysics, yet doing so with a sharpness and vehemence

¹⁴⁵ Indeed, compare Lewis’ condemnation of the “naked pulsing and moving of the soft inside of life” with Lawrence’s contrary view. Lawrence seeks to reproduce in his work “the shimmering protoplasm in the leaves and everywhere, and not the stiffness of the shape.” Mere exteriority “seems dead” to him. “Only this shimmeriness is the real living. The shape is a dead crust. The shimmer is inside really” (176).

they lack, despite Pound's oftentimes assertive polemics or Hulme's influential talks. These figures stand in direct opposition to Woolf, Lawrence, and Conrad, who in their work emphasize precisely that "soft inside of life—along with . . . movement and consciousness" which Lewis so forcefully rejects. And of course, each of these figures stands in opposition to Eliot (as I've presented him throughout this dissertation). Eliot rejects the binaries these authors variously erect, strenuously arguing against the very legitimacy of the metaphysics these authors affirm in their work and theory. However, none of these authors directly (or publically) grapples with Eliot's aesthetics. Not one engages him in any extended critique, excepting Pound, who praises his work, writing in a 1917 review of *Prufrock and Other Observations* that "it is a comfort to come upon complete art, naïve despite its intellectual subtlety, lacking all pretence [sic]" (418).¹⁴⁶ The other figures here mention Eliot only in passing or not at all. Woolf seems to indicate her respect for his work and opinions, but only in her diary, recounting, for example, their engaging discussions over Joyce's *Ulysses* (a novel she disliked immensely) (49). Hulme, of course, died too early to comment on Eliot. Lawrence mentions him in his letters only to reflect on Eliot's own dislike of him.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, Stein mentions Eliot briefly in *The*

¹⁴⁶ Pound concludes, Eliot's "book is the best thing in poetry since . . . (for the sake of peace I will leave that date to the imagination)" (422).

¹⁴⁷ In a May 20, 1929 letter to John Middleton Murry, Lawrence writes, "the animal that I am you instinctively dislike—just as all the Lynds and Squires and Eliots and Goulds instinctively dislike it" (451). Michael Herbert notes that Eliot "is in many ways the polar opposite of Lawrence as both critic and artist. Eliot is formal, impersonal, and grandly authoritative where Lawrence is informal, personal, passionate, and very ungrand, though he can be assertive, even dogmatic" (ix).

Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, but only apparently to suggest her utter lack of interest in him or his work.¹⁴⁸ William Carlos Williams, however, proves a notable exception.

William Carlos Williams: The World as Ontological Given

Williams makes numerous references to Eliot throughout his work, most of it highly negative. In Prologue to *Kora in Hell* (1920), Williams blasts Eliot as a derivative, imitative poet, whose work remains slavishly indebted to his predecessors. Eliot's most "exquisite work is rehash, repetition in another way of Verlaine, Baudelaire, Maeterlinck—conscious or unconscious" (21). Eliot contributes nothing new, Williams asserts. He merely copies and then rearranges what has come before. For Williams, Eliot "is a subtle conformist," an "archbishop of procurers to a lecherous antiquity" (21). Williams maintains this complaint against Eliot throughout his career, arguing as late as 1948's "The Poem as a Field of Action," that Eliot's "rehash of rehash of hash of rehash is *not* the business" of poetry (291). In a highly ironic passage from the same essay, Williams observes that Eliot has produced "a few poems beautifully phrased—in his longest effort thirty-five quotations in seven languages" (285). Williams disliked Eliot so much that in 1940's "A Letter," he declares that the "concepts that walk around as T.S. Eliot . . . are completely worthless" (237). For Williams, Eliot is less a person than a desiccated compendium of useless theories ("concepts") and borrowed phrases.

¹⁴⁸ Stein writes (in the voice of Toklas), "Gertrude Stein was not particularly anxious to go to Lady Rothermere's and meet T.S. Eliot, but we all insisted she should, and she gave a doubtful yes." Once there, "Eliot and Gertrude Stein had a solemn conversation, mostly about split infinitives and other grammatical solecisms and why Gertrude Stein used them" (189).

Of course, Williams's distaste for Eliot is well known. Lisa Steinman, for instance, notes (rather mildly) that Williams "generally took issue" with Eliot (163), while Stephen Fredman more forthrightly calls them "arch-rivals" (241). For Williams, ultimately, Eliot exemplifies certain aesthetic and philosophical positions that he found both demoralizing and regressive.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, in his autobiography, Williams famously writes that Eliot had set him (and modern poetry in general) "back twenty years." He felt that Eliot had "returned us to the classroom just at the moment when [Williams] felt we were on the point of an escape to matters much closer to the essence of a new art form" (174). Williams sought to establish a poetics "rooted in the locality which would give it fruit," a poetics of place and particularity, and thus of a perpetual newness (174). Eliot, on the other hand, merely paraphrases his predecessors, and offers no new ways of seeing the world or the objects that populate it. "At most," Williams confesses in a 1930 essay, "we can admire Eliot's distinguished use of sentences and words and the tenor of his mind, but as for substance—he is for us a cipher" ("Caviar" 103). In short, Eliot only repeats where Williams seeks to renew.

It seems, then, that Williams resists what he perceives in Eliot as a fundamentally different notion of poetry (i.e., its purpose, scope, and essence). And of course, he is correct, for the two poets practice a profoundly divergent poetics. But the differences between Eliot and Williams stem primarily from their opposed philosophical positions.¹⁵⁰ Unlike Eliot, but like Pound, Hulme, or Stein, Williams implicitly affirms an objectivist

¹⁴⁹ Williams sees Eliot as a kind of traitor. "He might have become our adviser, even our hero," he confesses, but instead "turned his back" on the mode of poetics Williams sought to inaugurate (174).

¹⁵⁰ Ironically, Williams once remarked (in 1944) that the "arts have nothing to do" with philosophy: "Let the metaphysical take care of itself," he declares ("Author's" 256).

metaphysics in his poetry and prose. He posits a self-subsisting world of material objects that exist substantively in themselves. As such, he affirms, too, the same essential subject/object or inner/outer binary that these other figures articulate in their work, both implicitly and explicitly (recall Lewis). For like them, Williams privileges surface over depth, the outward over the inward, and the object over the subject. Unlike them, however, he consciously positions his project in direct opposition to Eliot's own, thereby clarifying the distinctions that separate Eliot from each of these figures.

Williams states his position most clearly in Book I of *Paterson* (1946), where he exclaims, "no ideas but in things— / nothing but the blank faces of the houses / and cylindrical trees" (6). For Williams, meaning resides in the "things" themselves rather than in the idiosyncratic meaning that the poet imposes on the "thing." That is, Williams sees meaning as intrinsic to the object, independent of the perceiving (or projecting) subject. Objects possess their own distinguishing and distinctive realities, which the poet reveals. As he argues in Prologue to *Kora in Hell*, the "true value is that peculiarity which gives an object a character by itself. The associational or sentimental value is the false" (11). Accordingly, poets should resist foisting emotional connotations on objects, and instead allow those objects to manifest through their poems in all their singular particularity. Thus Williams resists traditional symbolism, since it artificially connects and thus distorts what otherwise remains ontologically distinct (e.g., individual objects, emotions, ideas, themes). As he puts it in 1923's *Spring and All*, "Crude symbolism is to associate emotions with natural phenomena such as anger with lightning, flowers with love. . . . Such work is empty" (100).

Even similes and metaphors (and other tropes of comparative relation) distort the objects they relate. Rather, the poet should present the object as it exists putatively in itself, without disruptive conceptual mediation. Again, as he puts it in Prologue to *Kora in Hell*, “this loose linking of one thing with another has effects of a destructive power little to be guessed at: all manner of things are thrown out of key so that it approaches the impossible to arrive at an understanding of anything” (16). To understand an object as it exists in itself requires observing that object in its own supposed self-substantiating isolation rather than juxtaposing it against some other object. Comparative juxtapositions confuse rather than clarify, obscure rather than illuminate. In *Spring and All*, he offers a fragment of verse as an illustration: “and the late, high growing red rose / it is their time / of a small garden.” Pointing to these lines, he argues that “poetry should strive for nothing else, [but] this vividness alone, *per se*, for itself. The realization of this [i.e., the image in the poem] has its own internal fire that is ‘like’ nothing. Therefore the bastardy of the simile. . . . There is no need to explain or compare” (247). For Williams, then, poetry should affirm objects rather than interfere with them. In this sense, poets should efface themselves from their poems, allowing objects to emerge as they transparently present themselves to the observer. As J. Hillis Miller puts it, the “aim of the poem” for Williams “is to make it [the object] stand there for the reader in its separateness, as the words of the poem stand on the page” (307).

Williams thus propounds an objectivist ontology according to which objects exist as singular self-totalities. They exist independently from other objects, requiring neither relation nor observation for their substantiation. Poets merely affirm or freshen. As Peter

Howarth puts it, Williams “encouraged his readers to see him as a poet committed to objects, and to a form which would present things directly without tidying them up or smearing them with emotional jam” (110-111). For Williams, poetry (re)presents reality, and the poet simply assumes the existence of a concrete, material world towards which the poem gestures. In a review of a collection of Charles Henri Ford’s verse Williams remarks, the “effect [of Ford’s poems] is to revive the senses and force them to re-see, re-hear, re-taste, re-smell and generally revalue all that it was believed had been seen, heard, smelled and generally valued. By this means poetry has always in the past put a finger upon reality” (235). And of course, if poetry illuminates reality, then the poet necessarily possesses the capacity to perceive social and material reality objectively, independent of her or his own subjective position. This suggests that for Williams, the world *is* its surface appearance. Objects *are* as they transparently present themselves. This suggests, too, that Williams thinks in terms of theoretical binaries: objects versus subjects, surfaces versus depths. The poet stands apart from that which she or he objectively observes, conceptually masters it, and then translates it into word images.

Like Pound, Hulme, or Stein, Williams privileges exteriorities. He privileges concrete details, material images, and appearances in themselves, at least in his mature poetry. For instance, Williams’ famous “red wheelbarrow” (from *Spring and All*), presents itself to the reader as it is in itself: a simple red wheelbarrow extracted from the panoply of other potential objects of attention. Consider, too, “The Pot of Flowers” (from the same collection), in which Williams attends closely to the flowers’ color, surface designs, and particular arrangement: “red where in whorls / petal lays its glow upon petal

/ round flamegreen throats” (40). As with the wheelbarrow, he presents this pot of flowers as an object complete in itself, a manifestation of its own distinct self-presence. It *is* as it appears; its value rooted precisely in its surface materiality. In this sense, Williams follows in the imagist tradition of Pound and Hulme. Indeed, as is well-known, he knew and worked with Pound.¹⁵¹

Thus Williams aligns himself with Pound, Hulme, and Stein (and against Woolf, Lawrence, and Conrad) in his general adherence to an essentialist ontology and prioritization of exteriority. They each share certain core philosophical assumptions, however implicitly. As Williams argues in *Spring and All*, “reality needs no personal support but exists free from human action” (an assertion entirely alien to Eliot’s thought) (150). The world as such exists apart from human perception. It possesses its own internal coherence and facticity. Williams, like these other writers, conceives subjects and objects as constitutively opposed. Objects exist, as do perceiving subjects, but the two remain ontologically distinct from one another. Indeed, he presupposes, too, the possibility of unproblematically apprehending objects of perception. Subjects perceive objects as if they were transparently intelligible (a pot of flowers, a wheelbarrow, etc.). That is, he propounds a kind of epistemological positivism, where what subjects perceive (or presume to know) reflects what in fact exists (or can be positively known). Again, the world is as it appears, and can be known in itself as its own appearance. Poetry, as he

¹⁵¹ As Christopher Beach notes that Williams “was receptive to the ideas of the Imagist movement,” and that indeed Pound helped publish Williams’ second volume of poetry (*The Tempers*) in 1913, despite the somewhat derivative nature of these early poems (95). Reflecting on these early poems, Williams later remarked that he “should have written about things around me . . . but I just didn’t know how” at the time (Beach 95).

argues in *Spring and All*, “affirms reality” as it appears to the perceiver (149).¹⁵² Or, as he puts it in 1941’s “Midas: A Proposal for a Magazine,” the “poem alone focuses the world” (242). The point is this: Williams presumes an independent world which the poet independently knows. In making this assumption, Williams implicitly endorses the same subject/object or inner/outer binary that characterizes the work of so many of his contemporaries, and which Eliot so strenuously resisted.

Conclusion

From Woolf to Williams, then, each of these figures (all pivotal to the period) in one way or another relies on a shared set of binaries that shapes their thought and work. Each of these writers affirms a conceptual distinction between subjects and objects. Each, too, distinguishes between the internal and the external, privileging either one or the other depending upon their philosophical predispositions. Woolf, Lawrence, and Conrad, for instance, in various, differing ways prioritize interiority. For Woolf and Lawrence, interiority exists substantively in itself. They posit an inner self, whose essence consists in its own ontological differentiation from an objectively existing external reality. Woolf emphasizes individuals’ subjectively-inflected self-experience, while Lawrence stresses the existence of a self beneath the self, a core self whose value lies in its transgressive authenticity. On the other hand, Conrad suggests that the self as such lacks definitive content. It exists, but only as a medium of expression. Still, for each, the self exists in

¹⁵² As Mark Scroggins argues, “Williams . . . celebrates the power of the imagination to effect a spring-like resurrection, to bring the *particulars of existence*, like Demeter bringing Persephone (Kora) out of Hades, out of the hell of muteness” (183, emphasis added).

itself distinct from its contexts. It remains ontologically inviolable, an essence in itself. Thus, Woolf, Lawrence, and Conrad each propound a metaphysical dualism ultimately rooted in a Cartesian model of human subjectivity. They erect a stable (though varyingly complex) binary between the self and the world, subjects and objects, the inner and the outer.

These three authors stand in contrast to those modernists who minimize interiority in favor of an emphasis on exteriority. Pound, Hulme, Stein, Lewis, and Williams each in various ways stress the need for a meticulous representational objectivity in their work. Each advocates a kind of de-subjectification or depersonalization of art. Rather than representing objects as subjectively (and thus idiosyncratically) perceived, they seek an ontological exactitude in their work. In other words, they reverse the binary that Woolf, Lawrence, and Conrad propound. Rather than the interior, they privilege the exterior. And rather than the subject (or subjective), they privilege the object (or objective). Pound and Hulme, for instance, in their theories of the image, offer a poetics of empirical precision. The image should present that which the image in itself constitutively (and transparently) is. But this presumes an intelligible, stable, mutually perceived objective reality, which the poet unproblematically renders into objectively precise verse. Stein also presumes an objectively existing external reality (whether of language or things-in-themselves), despite her differences from Pound and Hulme. Indeed, all three affirm external object reality over any mode of semi-solipsistic subjectivism. Of course, so, too, does Williams, who affirms in his work a real world of distinct self-substantiating objects, which exists independently of the individuals' subjective reality. But of all these

figures, Lewis perhaps provides the clearest (or at least sharpest) articulation of the binary underlying their shared metaphysics. As *Tarr* puts it, “The armoured hide of the hippopotamus, the shell of the tortoise . . . you may put in one camp; naked pulsing and moving of the soft inside of life—along with elasticity of movement and consciousness—that goes in the opposite camp” (265). In short, Lewis directly juxtaposes an aesthetics of exteriority against an aesthetics of interiority, privileging the former over the latter, and thereby conceptually codifying the binary.

Thus, despite their many, often subtle differences, each of the authors in this chapter accepts and presents the same set of binaries in their work, regardless of which term they prioritize. In various ways, they each pit the inward against the outward, always emphasizing one or the other. Each assumes a constitutive gap dividing subject and object, and each assumes, too, the existence of ontological essences (whether the inner self itself or individual objects within an external objective material reality). In other words, each of these authors variously endorses a metaphysical dualism. Each of them advocates (however implicitly) a metaphysics which assumes a stable reality amenable to representation (whether from the outside or the inside). Accordingly, at the most fundamental level, much more unites these writers than separates them. They each conceptualize reality through a shared metaphysical lens, rooted, as noted above, in the Cartesian vision of the relation between subjects and objects. Emphases may differ and practices diverge, but each of these authors situates their work within the same philosophical framework. They share a common conceptual horizon. If, as Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane argue, modernism constitutes a response to the “crisis”

of modernity, then each of these authors offers a response predicated on a shared set of assumptions, despite the profound differences that mark their individual projects (27).

I want to make the bold claim that Eliot differs from every one of these writers. I want to claim that far more connects them together as individual authors than connects him to any one of them, despite his early connection with Pound, his friendship with Woolf, or his praise for Lewis, and despite the typically modernist stylistic similarities that he shares with many of these figures (e.g., the use of disjunction, juxtaposition, montage, intertextuality, irony, associative logic, etc.).¹⁵³ In short, I claim that Eliot's motivating ontology and epistemology stem from a singularly unique philosophical perspective which ultimately separates his work from that of his literary contemporaries. Whereas these other authors affirm an essentially dualist metaphysics, rooted in a traditional binary understanding of the relationship between subjects and objects, Eliot offers a dialectical metaphysics which denies originary content to either subjects or objects. For Eliot, subjects and objects exist in a mutually constitutive dialectical relation. Neither of the terms obtains priority over the other. Indeed, taken in isolation, each term in effect constitutes a conceptual fiction. As Eliot succinctly puts it in his dissertation, the "object *qua* object would not exist without this bundle of [subjective] experiences, but the bundle would not be a bundle unless it were held together by the moment of objectivity" (133). As I argued in Chapter Three, for Eliot, each of these two term implies the other; neither exists in isolation from the other. The subjective and the objective (or the inner

¹⁵³ In his 1918 second review of *Tarr*, for instance, Eliot reflects that Lewis "is a magician who compels our interest in himself; he is the most fascinating personality of our time" ("Tarr" 747).

and the outer) constitute two modes of the same unified experiential moment, abstracted only after the fact as distinct conceptions or ontological essences. In other words, for Eliot, there is no inner or outer, self or object, knower or known. There is only the comprehensive trans-conceptual situation, at least from an ontological perspective.

Thus, Eliot denies the existence of any authentic self-substantiating inner self, as well as the existence of “objects qua objects” independent of the subjective (and thus objectifying) gaze. In fact, as delineated in Chapter Three, Eliot goes so far as to argue against the “assumption that there is one world of external reality which is consistent and complete” (112). For Eliot, “reality” consists of mutually self-constituting relations. Objects do not exist in ontological isolation as objects in themselves, but only within a weave of ever-shifting contexts. For Eliot, there is only relationality (rather than stable substances). Contrast this with Williams, for instance, who affirms (with Pound, etc.) the existence of a stable self-constituting world of external objects. As a consequence of his metaphysical position, Williams goes on to reject the use of comparative analogies, emotional association, and “crude” symbolism in his work, whereas Eliot does not. For whereas Eliot locates “truth” in associations and relations, Williams locates it in the putatively individually existing objects themselves. Thus his distaste for Eliot’s poetry, which he views only as a “re-inflation” of the past and therefore a distortion of the immediately present (“Caviar” 103).

Eliot, then, forwards a mode of modernism unique to himself. He stands apart not only from Williams, but from each of these figures inasmuch as they promote what Eliot would consider an insufficiently developed metaphysics. He offers a model of human

subjectivity based on a dialectical notion of the relation between the inward and the outward, subjects and objects. Just as for Williams (or any of these figures) aesthetic follows metaphysics, so, too, for Eliot. Convergences in technique prove ultimately superficial, given the opposed visions these authors advance. For Eliot offers a vision of human experience grounded in a neo-Hegelian dialectic which understands subjective and objective realities as relationally constituted. His literary peers, on the other hand, perceive subjects and objects as more or less distinct realities in themselves. As I have sought to affirm throughout this project, Eliot is neither a poet of interiority nor exteriority, but rather a strenuous opponent of all dualistic modes of thought and aesthetics. He challenges inherited literary practices not so much as an iconoclast, but as a kind of metaphysician concerned to correct what he perceives as flawed representational strategies. To understand Eliot in these terms is to understand him in an alternate relation to his contemporaries. For whereas they, too, challenge accepted representational norms, they do so in a way that tends to reinforce a traditionalist, Cartesian metaphysics. They draw on the same set of binaries that informs not only their literary predecessors, but the philosophers, anthropologists, and psychologists who provide the intellect impetus for much of their work (e.g., Bergson, Frazer, Freud). In contrast, Eliot challenges not only inherited aesthetics, but also the philosophical foundations on which they rely for their coherence.

In short, Eliot emerges as a singular figure in the history of modernism, more so than previous estimations of him allow. He represents an alternative intellectual trajectory, rooted in part in Bradley, but stemming ultimately from Hegel (recall

Bradley's reputation as a neo-Hegelian). He is a dialectician rather than a dualist, an epistemological skeptic rather than an objectivist. He resists definitive ontological claims and conceptual categories, as well as theoretical schemas and untenable philosophical suppositions. He questions the existence of the self in itself every bit as much as he questions the existence of objects in themselves. Accordingly, the modernism he embodies contrasts with those alternate modes exemplified by his various literary contemporaries. Indeed, Pound himself early on seemed to recognize Eliot's uniqueness.¹⁵⁴ To understand Eliot's difference from his contemporaries provides a more nuanced understanding not only of Eliot but of his contemporaries as well. In a sense, he serves as a kind of foil: by offering an alternative metaphysics, he demonstrates the underlying ontological and epistemological agreement that links together their varied projects. Perceiving these broad convergences (due to Eliot's universal divergence) allows new constellations of authors to emerge (i.e., those who privilege interiority versus those who privilege exteriority), which productively supplements preexisting alternative groupings (i.e., groupings via schools, regions, ideological dispositions, aesthetic techniques, etc.). Thus, to better understand Eliot is to better understand his contemporaries, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of modernism itself. For inasmuch as modernism constitutes an aesthetic, social, political, and ideological phenomenon, it also entails a philosophical project, however implicit.

¹⁵⁴ In a 1914 letter to Harriet Monroe, he famously affirmed that Eliot had "actually trained . . . and modernized himself on his own" (Paige 80).

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