

Preserving Old Possum: T. S. Eliot and the Making of Reputation



Nicholas Smart

DPhil

New College
Faculty of English

Trinity 2024

Abstract

Over the last decade, the work of T. S. Eliot has undergone an editorial revolution. With over ten times the amount of primary material now available in collected editions than in equivalent volumes published before the death of his widow-cum-executor in 2012, the task of revealing Hugh Kenner's once 'invisible poet' seems more achievable than ever. By making use of these newly collected poems, essays, and letters, this thesis unpicks Eliot's attempts to control his literary reputation. As the publisher of his own work and a fierce protector of his private life, these texts offer an invaluable insight into an unauthorised Eliot, the architect of a career that saw him become the most famous living cultural figure. But Eliot was not just an effective marketer, he also engaged in a great deal of critical self-reflection about both his writing and his reputation as objects of public consumption. Questions of self-fashioning are central to Eliot's work; while *Prufrock* equivocates with debilitating repetitiveness over the smallest articles of appearance, Lord Claverton regrets his inability to be honest with his family about the past. Until now, critical studies have been unable to fully connect this lifelong creative interest to Eliot's anxieties about his own personal and professional goals. For the first time, then, this thesis reads the poems and Eliot's strategies for promoting them as inextricably bound together, the former often rehearsing and criticising the issues attendant upon the latter. Progressing chronologically, each of the four chapters, 'Littleness', 'Seriousness', 'Badness', and 'Lastness', harnesses a single word as a point of contact between matters of style, marketing, and reputation, providing new readings of Eliot's major works in the process. Preoccupied with ideas of appearance and reality, sincerity, and the mediation of the self to an audience, Eliot's poems functioned as sites on which to stage private processes of self-understanding, many of which – as he well knew – would one day be accessible to the public.

Contents

Acknowledgements	iv
Note on References	v
Introduction	1
I. Littleness	26
Burying the <i>Treasury</i> : Eliot's Early Tools	32
The Problem with Hardy	41
Eliot and the Composition Class	45
Learning to be Little: Harvard Excision	54
<i>Poems Written in Early Youth</i>	59
'very little but very good': The Economics of Littleness	63
Swelling the Progress: Synecdochic Logic in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'	72
II. Seriousness	84
Light Verse Mechanics	95
<i>The Waste Land</i> 's Incongruities	101
Serious Laughter in <i>The Sacred Wood</i>	111
The All Souls Application	118
Scholarship and Recreation: Eliot's Academic Grudge	124
Serious Annotations: <i>The Waste Land</i> and <i>Queen Mab</i>	130
III. Badness	141
The Fight over <i>Four Quartets</i>	147
Sincerity, Parody, and Bathos in <i>Four Quartets</i> and 'The Thorn'	153
'Impulse' vs. 'Impetus': The Contradictory Revision of <i>Four Quartets</i>	166
Stylistic Middleness	178
Social Middleness	185
IV. Lastness	197
'Labour of Penelope': Revision and Development in the Post- <i>Quartets</i> Prose	205
Repetition and Closure in <i>The Cocktail Party</i> and <i>The Confidential Clerk</i>	216
The Stylistics of Retirement in the Post- <i>Quartets</i> Poetry	230
Things that Last: Permanence in <i>The Elder Statesman</i> and Eliot's Memorial Writing	243
Conclusion: The End of the Line	253
Epilogue: The T. S. Eliot Estate	256
Bibliography	274

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been completed without the support of a number of individuals and organisations. To Dr Hannah Sullivan I express a profound gratitude, not only for the conversations which drove this research, but also for her advice, her candour, her scrupulousness, and her tireless encouragement. I am grateful to Professor Michael Whitworth and to Professor Dirk Van Hulle for their feedback which pushed the thesis forward at various stages. Thank you, also, to colleagues at New College, Oxford, especially Dr William Poole and Dr Mark Griffith, for the trust which enabled me to finish this thesis within the first year of my election to a Junior Research Fellowship.

I am immensely grateful to the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Clarendon Fund, and All Souls College, Oxford for the financial support without which this research would not have been possible. I am thankful, too, for the additional funding from the AHRC OOC DTP, the Maxwell and Meyerstein Fund at the English Faculty, and New College, Oxford which facilitated a research trip to the United States in 2023. The trip would have been infinitely less successful without the help of librarians and archivists at various institutions, and I wish to acknowledge the staff at the Houghton Library, Harvard University, especially Zoë Hill, the staff at the Firestone Library, Princeton University, especially Emma Sarconi, and the staff at the Boston Athenaeum for their help. In the UK, I am grateful to Patricia McGuire and Tom Davies at King's College, Cambridge, and to Nathalie Belkin at the London Library. I also wish to thank the Institute of English Studies at the University of London for the scholarships which allowed me to attend the T. S. Eliot International Summer School and two Winter Schools. Above all, I am indebted to the staff at the Bodleian Libraries for all of their work, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

I dedicate this thesis to my parents with thanks for their unconditional love, support, and much-needed oases during times of stress. I also wish to thank my brothers, Andy and Rob, for keeping my feet on the ground. To my second family, Dom, Ellana, Kat, Sam, and Winston, thank you for three years of domestic bliss. Thank you to Imogen and Luke for ushering me over the finish line, and for help unpicking the legal tangles of the epilogue. Thanks to Charlotte, Ríona, and Claire for all the pit-stops along the way. I am grateful, finally, to Natasha Bharucha and to Kieran Brown for their patience and their willingness to listen to complaints, a debt so sizeable I stand no hope of repaying.

Note on References

All references to Eliot's poems are taken from *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue, 2 vols (London: Faber & Faber, 2015). After an initial footnoted reference to a poem in this edition, subsequent references to the same poem in each chapter cite line numbers in parentheses in the body of the thesis immediately following quotation.

References to *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Ronald Schuchard and others, 8 vols (Online: Johns Hopkins University Press and Faber & Faber, 2014-2019) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/primary/eliot/>>, are given in footnotes in abbreviated form as follows: '[Essay Title], *Complete Prose*, [volume number], [extent within volume], [(page number)].' For instance, 'Speech at dinner of the Alliance française', *Complete Prose*, VII, 313-17 (314).

References to *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Valerie Eliot (vols 1-9), Hugh Haughton (vols 1-2), John Haffenden (vols 3-9), 9 vols (London: Faber & Faber, 1988-), are given in footnotes in abbreviated form as follows: '[Addressee, date of composition], *Letters*, [volume number], [page number].'

For instance, 'To Harry Brown, 24 June 1938', *Letters*, VIII, 902.

For all other references, full details of the source are given in a footnote upon its first citation in each chapter, followed by an abbreviated reference for all successive citations in the form: '[author's surname], [abbreviated title], [page number]' as per *MHRA Style Guide*, 3rd ed. (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2013).

Introduction

For a Possum who dresses in Style
Is certain to be observed;
And everyone said: 'What a Charming Smile!
And isn't he Well Preserved!'¹

T. S. Eliot was born in an archive. Out of 'filial piety', his parents refused to move out of the house at 2635 Locust Street built by his grandfather, and 'so it came to be', Eliot wrote in 1959, 'that we lived on in a neighbourhood which had become shabby to a degree approaching slumminess, after all our friends and acquaintances had moved further west.'² For all intents and purposes, time had stopped there in January 1887: 'I never knew my grandfather: he died a year before my birth. But I was brought up to be very much aware of him: so much so, that as a child I thought of him as still the head of the family.'³ It must have been difficult to forget him; for the first sixteen years of his life, Eliot watched as his mother assembled documents for a biography she was writing of her late father-in-law, *William Greenleaf Eliot: Minister, Educator, Philanthropist* (1904). Almost anything in the house could have been of archival importance, and rooms at Locust Street must have overflowed with paper, as Charlotte 'ransacked' 'boxes and boxes' of letters, and filled scrapbooks with clippings of lectures, articles, and sermons.⁴ Eliot later told his friend Emily Hale that he had grown up 'under the shadow of that powerful personality, my paternal grandfather'.⁵ It was a personality that

¹ 'A Practical Possum', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 299-301.

² 'The Influence of Landscape upon the Poet', *Complete Prose*, VIII, 387-390 (388).

³ 'American Literature and the American Language', *Complete Prose*, VII, 792-810 (792).

⁴ 'To Henry Eliot, 19 January 1930', *Letters*, V, 43-44; see also Henry Eliot's inventory of his mother's scrapbooks which contained 'a number of newspaper clippings of his sermons' and 'a note-book into which my mother has copied what appears to be some civil war correspondence of W.G.E.', in 'To Oscar C. Orman, 4 March 1946' and 'To Oscar C. Orman, 5 March 1946', in 'Correspondence concerning the donation of family materials to various libraries', Henry Ware Eliot T. S. Eliot Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University (MS Am 2560 (39)). Henry arranged for these materials to be sent to Washington University in St. Louis, see 'William Greenleaf Eliot Personal Papers', Washington University in St. Louis, (WUA-03-wua00068).

⁵ 'To Emily Hale, 14 June 1932', *Eliot-Hale Letters*, ed. John Haffenden (Online: T. S. Eliot Estate, 2023) <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/1145>.

founded a major university, one of the largest churches in St. Louis, and, according to James K. Hosmer, had the ear of President Lincoln.⁶ But it was a shadow preserved chiefly – in Eliot’s eyes – by his parents’ devotion, not least in the form of his mother’s archival research, which nurtured the reputation of the ‘Saint of the West’ that would earn him a star on the St. Louis Walk of Fame as late as 2003.⁷

T. S. Eliot was born in an archive, and he died in one, too. To this day, the flat at 3 Kensington Court Gardens, where Eliot and Valerie lived together after their secret wedding in 1957 until his death in 1965, provides the offices for the T. S. Eliot Foundation and a home for the collection of the Eliot Estate. This private archive – complete with its own archivist – contains the material collected by Valerie Eliot in the nearly five decades she spent as the world’s most famous literary executor. Like the house at Locust Street, the flat has become something of a museum. With the couple’s furniture still in its place, framed photographs on mantelpieces, books and trinkets on shelves, time has frozen here so that Eliot, like his grandfather before him, still seems strangely alive.⁸

Eliot lived his life with an uncanny awareness that his textual materials would be preserved for posterity. Charlotte and Valerie Eliot were not even the most obsessive collectors in the family; Henry Eliot made enquiries about establishing an archive of his younger brother’s work at Harvard as early as 1932.⁹ John Hayward, Eliot’s friend and housemate from 1946-1957, styled himself as ‘Keeper of the Archive’, and the long list of items he bequeathed to King’s College, Cambridge after his death does not include the many volumes of Eliot’s

⁶ James K. Hosmer, ‘Introduction’, in Charlotte C. Eliot, *William Greenleaf Eliot: Minister, Educator, Philanthropist* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1904), xv-xix (xvi).

⁷ So named by Ralph Waldo Emerson, see *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Volume 4: 1848-1855*, ed. Ralph L. Rusk (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 338; See <stlouiswalkoffame.org/inductee/william-greenleaf-eliot/>.

⁸ Observed during my own visit to the flat.

⁹ See ‘Henry Ware Eliot to Harry Scott, 17 April 1932’, in ‘Henry Ware Eliot Correspondence concerning the Eliot Collection’, Henry Ware Eliot T. S. Eliot Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard (BMS Am 2560 (27)).

published work that he also left to the college.¹⁰ Even those who hardly knew Eliot could not resist accumulating his work. Donald Gallup built up the collection at Yale by acquiring material through auctions, including clutches of Eliot's letters.¹¹ Eliot never fully understood the compulsion for others to collect his writing. He told Emily Hale that Gallup's exhibition of manuscripts in 1937 had given him 'the creeps – almost as bad as having a Portrait Effigy at Tussaud's, which please God I shall never have.'¹² And yet, there was also an element of boasting in Eliot's disavowal of his 'pathetic' collector.¹³ Over the course of his three-decades-long correspondence with Hale, he enclosed three hundred and fifty textual items within his letters, including fan mail, award announcements, and invitations to dinners held in his honour.¹⁴ Given the sheer number of enclosures – only a handful of which are included in the online edition of his letters – one cannot help but sense the irony in Eliot asking Hale: 'what do you mean by saying long ago I made you feel the necessity of regarding me as a Public Figure? I certainly hope that I do not see myself as a Public Figure!'¹⁵

Metaphors of paper and collage were always tempting analogies for the self in Eliot's creative work. At the age of twenty-three, he conceived of his life in scrapbook terms: 'I am put together with a pot and scissors / Out of old clippings / No one took the trouble to make an article'.¹⁶ Later, in 'Animula' (1929), the 'simple soul' of a young boy is 'Irresolute and selfish, misshapen, lame', and leaves 'disordered papers in a dusty room'.¹⁷ But while Eliot understood that textual remains facilitated access to the individual that produced them, he was also anxious

¹⁰ John Smart, *Tarantula's Web: John Hayward, T. S. Eliot and their Circle* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 2013), 132-33. Hayward's copies of Eliot's books are noted in the copy of Donald Gallup's *Bibliography* in the King's College, Cambridge Archive Centre.

¹¹ See 'Donald Clifford Gallup Papers', Beinecke Library, Yale University (YCAL MSS 838), and 'T. S. Eliot Collection', Beinecke Library, Yale University YCAL MSS 523.

¹² 'To Emily Hale, 31 March 1937', *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/1546>.

¹³ 'To Emily Hale, 19 February 1937', *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/1541>.

¹⁴ The enclosures are currently filed alongside the letters with which they were originally sent, see 'Emily Hale Letters from T. S. Eliot, 1895-1965', Firestone Library, Princeton University (C0686).

¹⁵ 'To Emily Hale, 27 October 1956', *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/11202>.

¹⁶ 'He said: this universe is very clever', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 259-60.

¹⁷ 'Animula', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 105.

that they would be unable to represent the person in their entirety. In *The Waste Land* (1922), it is not ‘our obituaries’ or the writing kept ‘under seals broken by the lean solicitor’ by which ‘we have existed’, but the ‘awful daring of a moment’s surrender’, something that leaves no textual trace.¹⁸ His 1941 obituary for Virginia Woolf similarly asserted that some things ‘cannot be preserved’, and sought to remind those interested in her life that ‘there is something they do not know, in spite of all their documents, even if we cannot tell them what.’¹⁹ By *The Elder Statesman* (1959), his last major work, Eliot had hardened his view about the impossibility of recovering an individual by the papers they leave behind: ‘I used to jot down notes of what I had to say to people: / Now I’ve no more to say, and no one to say it to. / I’ve been wondering... how many more empty pages?’²⁰

This thesis serves to provide two primary functions. The first is to offer an evaluation of Eliot’s attempts to control his reputation through various extra-textual and bibliographic strategies. Selection of texts, place of publication, permission for republication and quotation, and comments in newspapers and interviews were all tools used by Eliot to manage the public’s impression of his qualities as a writer. The second objective of this thesis is to explore the anxieties expressed in the texts themselves about matters of self-presentation. Each of his major works thinks in various ways about the separation between appearance and reality, sincerity, and the mediation of the self to an audience. From his earliest surviving compositions in the classroom to his final ‘Dedication to My Wife’ (1963), Eliot was preoccupied not only with how he appeared to others, but how closely that character resembled his own idea of himself. This thesis reads the texts and Eliot’s strategies for promoting them as closely bound together, the former often rehearsing and enacting the issues attendant upon the latter. In doing so, it proposes a re-evaluation not only of our understanding of Eliot as a major writer, publisher,

¹⁸ *The Waste Land, Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 1, 70.

¹⁹ ‘Virginia Woolf’, *Complete Prose*, vi, 169-72 (169).

²⁰ *The Elder Statesman*, in T. S. Eliot, *Collected Plays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1962), 293-355 (302).

and cultural marketer, but also of the critical methodologies which have for so long allowed him to resemble a caricature of himself.

That ‘T. S. Eliot’ was composed of multiple, often contradictory, personae has long proved a boon to the imaginations of those interested in his work. V. S. Pritchett memorably called him ‘a company of actors inside one suit, each twitting the others’, while W. H. Auden imagined him not as ‘a single figure but a household’ with ‘three permanent residents’: the ‘archdeacon’, the ‘old peasant grandmother’, and a ‘young boy’.²¹ Auden’s partitioning of Eliot into three categories offers one way of grouping the many nicknames he acquired over the years. There was ‘Mr. Eliot’, whose authority on cultural matters spawned a number of sub-characters, including ‘Captain Eliot’²², the ‘Gauleiter of Emperor’s Gate’²³, and the ‘Tsetse’²⁴, a bloodsucking fly. Eliot’s supposedly impervious solemnity also defined approaches to his poetry; multiple figures arrived separately at the nickname ‘Tears Eliot’.²⁵ The seriousness of ‘Mr. Eliot’ found its foil in Eliot’s second main persona, ‘Old Possum’.²⁶ His lighter side produced a number of variants of the name, particularly in the letters to his godchildren; ‘Uncle Tom’²⁷ and ‘Tom Possum’²⁸ wrote to the Faber, Morley, and Tandy families from the 1930s

²¹ V. S. Pritchett, “‘Our Mr. Eliot’ Grows Younger”, *New York Times Magazine* (21 September 1958), 15; 72-73 (73); W. H. Auden, ‘Port and Nuts with the Eliots’, in *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden, Prose, Volume III: 1949-1955*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 97-101 (97).

²² See Ann Pasternak Slater, *The Fall of a Sparrow: Vivien Eliot’s Life and Writings* (London: Faber & Faber, 2020), 163-65.

²³ ‘To John Hayward, 23 June 1940’, *Letters*, ix, 568.

²⁴ See the character based on Eliot in Conrad Aiken’s *Ushant: An Essay* (London: W. H. Allen, 1963).

²⁵ John Peale Bishop, quoted in Elizabeth Carroll Spindler, *John Peale Bishop: A Biography* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Library Press, 1980), 80, and E. E. Cummings, ‘To Sir Solly Zuckerman, 1 June 1947’, in *Selected Letters of E. E. Cummings*, ed. F. W. Bupee and George Stade (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), 145.

²⁶ Both Virginia Woolf and Ezra Pound claimed to have coined the nickname. See ‘Virginia Woolf to T. S. Eliot, 7 October 1939’: ‘Cant I claim the immortality of having christened you Old P?’, enclosed in a letter ‘To Emily Hale, 2 November 1939’, ‘Emily Hale Letters from T. S. Eliot, 1895-1965’, Firestone Library, Princeton University C0686, Box 10, Folder 4. The first recorded use of ‘Old Possum’ in correspondence with Pound seems to be ‘To Ezra Pound, 19 July 1922’, *Letters*, i, 708. Its first public use by Eliot was “‘The Use of Poetry’: To the Editor of *The New English Weekly*”, *Complete Prose*, v, 96-98.

²⁷ See, for instance, ‘To Tom Faber, 16 December 1930’, *Letters*, v, 433.

²⁸ See Judith Chernaik, ‘T. S. Eliot as “Tom Possum”: The “good grey Poet” and the Tandy family’, *Times Literary Supplement* Iss. 4622 (1991), 13-14.

onwards. To Ezra Pound, he was also ‘Uncle Tom’, though for a different reason, borrowing the name from an enslaved man in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852).²⁹ To the group of colleagues that shared occasional verse at Hayward’s Chelsea flat, he was ‘The Elephant’, so named for his ears, his enviable memory, and for the word’s similarities to his family name.³⁰ Others took notice of his jocular side; dancing with Valerie at a Boston ball, Robert Lowell christened him ‘Elbows Eliot’.³¹ Nevertheless, Eliot’s religion proved by far the richest trait for inspiring nicknames. His third character, ‘The Pope of Russell Square’³² was known by a number of aliases, including ‘The Deacon’³³, ‘the Rt. And Rev. Prelate’³⁴, and the ‘Frozen Rev. T. S. Eliot’³⁵. E. E. Cummings referred to the Faber editor as ‘Doubtless Thomas’.³⁶ Disentangling these three characters has proved the objective of much criticism of Eliot’s life and work; for Pound, as for Auden, they cohabited the same body with a degree of comic chaos: ‘the Rt/ Rev/ bro/ in Xt/ T.S. the Possum of Eliot’.³⁷

Eliot often encouraged such nicknames, and indeed invented many of them himself. There were his journalistic pseudonyms, ‘Apteryx’³⁸, ‘Enrique Gomez’³⁹, ‘Crites’⁴⁰, ‘Metoikos’⁴¹, and others used for early poems, ‘Gus Krutzsch’⁴² and ‘Paul Palavier’⁴³. But the

²⁹ See ‘To Ezra Pound, 2 December 1919’, *Letters*, I, 421.

³⁰ See ‘The Whale and the Elephant: A Fable’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, II, 217.

³¹ Robert Lowell, ‘To Elizabeth Bishop, 21 June 1958’, in *The Letters of Robert Lowell*, ed. Saskia Hamilton (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 324.

³² The title of Mary Trevelyan’s unpublished memoir, reportedly held at the Bodleian Library, although difficult to trace. See Mary Trevelyan and Erica Wagner, *Mary & Mr Eliot: A Sort of Love Story* (London: Faber & Faber, 2022), 7-10.

³³ Ezra Pound, quoted in *Letters*, VI, 622n.

³⁴ ‘Frank Morley to Ezra Pound, 8 December 1933’, quoted in *Letters*, VI, 705n.

³⁵ ‘Ottoline Morrell to Virginia Woolf, 5 December 1933’, quoted in *Letters*, VI, 771n.

³⁶ E. E. Cummings, ‘To Ezra Pound, 9 February 1953’, in *Selected Letters of E. E. Cummings*, 221.

³⁷ ‘Ezra Pound to Marianne Moore, 3 February 1934’, quoted in Linda Leavell, *Holding On Upside Down: The Life and Work of Marianne Moore* (London: Faber & Faber, 2013), 270.

³⁸ ‘Verse Pleasant and Unpleasant’, *Complete Prose*, I, 679-85; ‘Professional, or...’, *Complete Prose*, I, 698-701; ‘Observations’, *Complete Prose*, I, 710-15.

³⁹ ‘The Two Unfinished Novels’, *Complete Prose*, I, 653-56.

⁴⁰ See ‘A Commentary (Apr 1924)’ *Complete Prose*, II, 521-28; ‘A Commentary (July 1924)’, *Complete Prose*, II, 529-35; ‘A Commentary (October 1924)’, *Complete Prose*, II, 539-545; ‘A Commentary (January 1925)’, *Complete Prose*, II, 567-71; ‘A Commentary (April 1925)’, *Complete Prose*, II, 576-80.

⁴¹ ‘Full Employment and the Responsibility of Christians’, *Complete Prose*, VI, 595-602.

⁴² See ‘Song (“The golden foot I may not kiss or clutch”)', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 1183.

⁴³ See ‘Fireside: A Weekly Magazine’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, II, 150.

majority appeared in letters, published incrementally over the last three decades. Epistolary parody was one of Eliot's favourite activities, and among his many costumes there were vicars: 'Revd. John McHaigh LL.D., B.Sc.', and 'Charles James Grimble', schoolmasters: 'J. A. D. Spence', Conservative politicians, 'Charles Augustus Conybeare', and suburban and provincial ladies: 'Muriel A. Schwarz' and 'Helen B. Trundlett'.⁴⁴ It was a practise he had instituted at a young age; in his childhood magazine, he adopted the pose of 'Jones M. Brown' from 'Kentuckyville Arazona [sic]'.⁴⁵ However, what stands out in a brief survey of Eliot's nicknames is how many of these characters represented exaggerated versions of traits he actually possessed. Self-parody was a crucial coping mechanism for Eliot as he acquired greater public recognition, but it also provides a problem for scholars seeking to ascertain where the characters ended and the real man began.

Eliot's talent for impersonation has led to a longstanding hesitation, indeed a suspicion, concerning his motivations for writing certain pieces of work. Among those who doubted the communication of his true thoughts and feelings were the people closest to him. Henry Eliot was convinced that his younger brother's creative development was predicated on a desire to please the public: 'You have to be as sensitive to the changing moods of this audience and as quick to meet them as an actor is to change his "stuff" when a "line" does not get over.'⁴⁶ But this demanding 'audience', Henry inferred, was also the director: 'The T. S. Eliot of those days, as I believe, was a figure created in their own image by the *arbitres elegantiae* of the literary press (perhaps, as we say nowadays, a "wish-fulfilment" of theirs.)'⁴⁷ Even Eliot's status as a 'literary Bolshevik', whose avant-garde credentials had never been in doubt, was to be viewed

⁴⁴ McHaigh appeared in a letter 'To Geoffrey Faber, 28 February 1950', quoted in Toby Faber, *Faber & Faber: The Untold Story* (London: Faber & Faber, 2019), 195-96. Grimble, Spence, Conybeare, Schwarz, and Trundlett were all names used by Eliot in 'Pseudonymous Letters for *The Egoist*', *Complete Prose*, I, 613-14.

⁴⁵ See Jayme Stayer, *Becoming T. S. Eliot: The Rhetoric of Voice and Audience in 'Inventions of the March Hare'* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021), 17-18. The *Fireside* pieces are yet to be added to the *Complete Prose*.

⁴⁶ 'From Henry Eliot, 12 September 1935', *Letters*, VII, 752.

⁴⁷ 'From Henry Eliot, 12 September 1935', 749.

as part of this script: ‘You lead, but (like all but the very greatest leaders, rare in history) you have to lead in the direction in which you sense that your followers want to go.’⁴⁸

Henry was not the only person to harbour suspicions about Eliot’s literary motivations. What drove his first wife, Vivien, to some of her most memorable outbursts was his habit of confessing an opinion in private only to contradict it in public. She interrupted a meal with friends after Eliot asserted that there was ‘no such thing’ as ‘pure intellect’: ‘Why don’t be absurd—you know perfectly well that *every* night you tell me that there *is* such a thing: and what’s more, that *you* have it, and that nobody *else* has it.’⁴⁹ In the early days of their friendship, Virginia Woolf confronted Eliot for similar behaviour. When she accompanied the poet to a production of *King Lear* in 1924, they both ‘jeered’, but when Eliot called the performance ‘almost flawless’ in his published review of the performance, Woolf challenged his duplicity:

I taxed him, lightly with this: he sat tight & said that he meant what he wrote: then what does he mean by what he says? God knows. There’s something hole & cornerish, biting in the back, suspicious, elaborate, uneasy, about him: much would be liberated by a douche of pure praise, which he can scarcely hope to get.⁵⁰

Woolf was, of course, later to sympathise with Eliot’s ‘great yellow bronze mask all draped upon an iron framework’; at the time, however, her allusion to ‘Prufrock’ (‘It is impossible to say just what I mean!’) brings Eliot’s poetic style under the shade of his insincerity.⁵¹ Like Henry, she implied a key motivation of his writing to be the satisfaction of his audience, rather than the expression of his own views.

This idea has long coloured critical interpretations of Eliot’s life and work. Although reliably met with defences of the poet, there have been persistent attempts to undermine his

⁴⁸ ‘From Henry Eliot, 12 September 1935’, 752. On Eliot as ‘Bolshevik’, see ‘To Walter de la Mare, 6 January 1930’, *Letters*, v, 16;

⁴⁹ Vivien quoted in ‘Conrad Aiken to Theodore Spencer, 31 October 1930’, quoted in Ronald Bush, *T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 102.

⁵⁰ ‘To Virginia Woolf, 17 March 1924’, *Letters*, II, 342; ‘A Commentary (April 1924)’, *Complete Prose*, II, 521–28 (525); Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, 5 vols (London: Granta, 2023), II, 378.

⁵¹ Woolf, *Diary*, v, 355; ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 8.

literary achievements by branding them shallow, invoking an ostensibly relentless desire to acquire a certain kind of reputation. In *Stepping Heavenward* (1931), Richard Aldington's satirical portrait of Eliot hinges on artifice: 'Everything he said and did bore the mark of careful premeditation. He left nothing to chance, never abandoned himself to any of those spontaneous impulses which, once yielded to, leave a lifetime of regret.'⁵² Similarly, Edmund Wilson allied personality to poetic style: 'the kind of dramatic resonance he has is one of the things that has made his stuff carry so. He gives you the creeps a little at first because he is such a completely artificial, or rather, self-invented character'.⁵³ Wilson preferred Eliot when he was drunk, 'as the million snobberies, poses and prejudices which he thinks he has to cultivate then drop off.'⁵⁴ Long after Eliot's death, suspicions about his motivations have persisted in affecting judgements of his work. In studies by Cynthia Ozick, Anthony Julius, and Carole Seymour-Jones, Eliot's ruthless pursuit of public acclaim is charted through the individuals and groups that he is seen to have exploited to get there.⁵⁵ To Julius, Eliot's expressions of anti-Semitic rhetoric in his prose and poems were genuine, but they were also designed to appeal to a sentiment in his audience: 'the disparaging of "free-thinking Jews" has tactical value, establishing Eliot's credentials as an intellectual with an audience that otherwise might be suspicious of him.'⁵⁶ However, others have questioned the sincerity of Eliot's anti-Semitism. Among his many attempts to rescue the poet's reputation, Craig Raine advocated for 'mitigation' in our attitude, claiming that many of the instances cited in Julius's account were misreadings of 'interior monologue': 'we have not an anti-Semitic poem, but a poem about anti-

⁵² Richard Aldington, 'Stepping Heavenward: A Record', in *Soft Answers* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press; London: Feffer & Simons, 1967), 167-210 (172).

⁵³ Edmund Wilson, 'To John Dos Passos, 11 May 1933', in *Letters on Literature and Politics, 1912-1972* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 230.

⁵⁴ Edmund Wilson, 'To Louise Bogan, 19 July 1933', quoted in Jeffrey Meyers, *Edmund Wilson: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 157.

⁵⁵ See Cynthia Ozick, 'T. S. Eliot at 101: "The man who suffers and the mind which creates"', in *Fame and Folly: Essays* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1996), 3-49; Anthony Julius, *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Carole Seymour-Jones, *Painted Shadow: A Life of Vivienne Eliot* (London: Constable, 2001).

⁵⁶ Julius, *Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form*, 25.

Semitism.⁵⁷ No matter how persuasive we find Raine's explanations, the slipperiness of attempts to resolve, contextualise, or even to apologise for Eliot's anti-Semitism is part of a much broader debate concerning his supposedly innate desire to indulge his audience. Did T. S. Eliot ever mean what he said?

One further question that remains unanswered, though, is to what extent Eliot had already internalised these suspicions; indeed, that they make his creative and critical works what they are. Eliot was certainly aware of the charge of insincerity. It touches, most obviously, Prufrock's social anxiety, but it also defines his other writing, from the early lyric, 'Do I know how I feel? Do I know what I think?', to the self-questioning asides of *Four Quartets* (1943): 'You say I am repeating / Something I have said before. I shall say it again. / Shall I say it again?'⁵⁸ In his essay on '*In Memoriam*' (1936), Eliot indirectly addressed his brother's critique about the relationship between poetic style and public demand:

It happens now and then that a poet by some strange accident expresses the mood of his generation, at the same time that he is expressing a mood of his own which is quite remote from that of his generation. This is not a question of insincerity: there is an amalgam of yielding and opposition below the level of consciousness.⁵⁹

Eliot was anxious to argue that a poet's success with audiences could be coincidental, 'some strange accident', rather than the product of various effective costume changes. And yet, he was also willing to acknowledge the pressure to write in a certain way. In the early 1930s, Eliot complained about 'the public role' he assumed for the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, 'which sits uncomfortably on me', as well as 'the sort of reputation I have gained' in London, which 'involved being asked to do all sorts of worthy things'.⁶⁰ Similarly, to Emily Hale, he often meditated on the sincere credentials of others. Discussing John Middleton Murry, Eliot

⁵⁷ Craig Raine, 'In Defence of T. S. Eliot', in *In Defence of T. S. Eliot* (London: Picador, 2000), 320-32 (328ff.). In this collection, see also 'The *Collected Poems of T. S. Eliot*', 315-19, and 'Evidence in the Eliot Case', 333-42.

⁵⁸ 'Do I know how I feel?', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 269; 'East Coker', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 189.

⁵⁹ '*In Memoriam*', *Complete Prose*, V, 323-36 (327).

⁶⁰ 'To Henry Eliot, 8 July 1933', *Letters*, VI, 600; 'To Henry Eliot, 9 January 1935', *Letters*, VII, 459.

suggested that ‘He is a strange mixture of sincerity and insincerity, of consciousness and unconsciousness, of humility and inferiority, of envy and hero-worship.’⁶¹ Eliot was conscious that he was writing to Hale in confidence, and would never confront Middleton Murry – as Woolf had – with his suspicions of insincerity. Somewhat ironically, then, such words as ‘sincerity’ saturate his secret correspondence with Hale. In one of many gossipy letters, he advises that politeness leaves her open to contradiction: ‘You are so conscientious about people, that it leads almost to a kind of hypocrisy: you are sometimes ashamed of your genuine feelings, and are harassed by what you think you *ought* to feel.’⁶² All the while, Eliot claimed that his private letters to Hale were the only place where his true feelings were on show: ‘is it not natural, when one has had to live in a mask all one’s life, to be able to hope that some day people can know the truth, if they want it[?]’⁶³

To reconcile Eliot’s different characters and to uncover what the ‘real’ man thought, some have suggested that the only solution is to compare every piece of his writing that has been preserved. As Christopher Ricks argued twenty years ago, ‘To understand Eliot you must read the whole of Eliot. [...] Which includes the scraps, and the more than scraps, that he came to scrap.’⁶⁴ As far as this theory is concerned, this thesis appears at a pivotal moment in the criticism of Eliot’s work. Of all major twentieth-century writers – perhaps of any major writer in any period – Eliot has had the most eventful last decade. When his widow, Valerie, died just over ten years ago, the criticism anticipated a revolution in studies of her husband’s writing, now that the ‘flame-breathing dragon guarding the treasure’ had finally departed the cave.⁶⁵ For decades, Acknowledgements pages in critical studies were characterised either by elaborate gestures of

⁶¹ ‘To Emily Hale, 24 September 1931’, *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/178>.

⁶² ‘To Emily Hale, 31 August 1935’, *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/1409>.

⁶³ ‘To Emily Hale, 19 February 1932’, *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/1114>.

⁶⁴ Christopher Ricks, *Decisions and Revisions in T. S. Eliot* (London: British Library, 2003), 36.

⁶⁵ Sandra Barwick, ‘That’s no dragon, that’s his wife’, *Independent* (22 January 1994) <independent.co.uk/voices/that-s-no-dragon-that-s-his-wife-1408513.html> [accessed 08/01/23].

thanks to Valerie, or by resentment for refusing permission to quote from her husband's work.⁶⁶ In Valerie's defence, we may suggest that she was merely following her husband's instructions, and in his invaluable essay on her executorship, John Haffenden reminds us that she considered her refusal to release much of his unpublished writing as a personal – as much as a legal – duty.⁶⁷

Despite much scholarly anger being directed towards Valerie, the truth was that she had been planning to expand the tours of Eliot's cave for some time.⁶⁸ Her own projects, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile* (1971) and the first two volumes of the *Letters of T. S. Eliot* (1988; 2009) – which she persuaded her husband to endorse, against his instincts – gave us a wealth of invaluable material. So, too, did her commissioning of Helen Gardner's *Composition of 'Four Quartets'* (1978), Ronald Schuchard's *Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry* (1993), and Christopher Ricks' *Inventions of the March Hare* (1996), all of which demonstrated her willingness to offer trusted scholarly friends a role in 'putting Tom together again'.⁶⁹ In her final years, she gave Ricks and Schuchard permission to complete larger projects which she felt obliged (by love and by law) not to carry out herself. In 2015, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot* appeared, which more than tripled the number of poems published in its ironically-named predecessor, *The Complete Poems and Plays* (1969), and in 2019, Schuchard finished editing the eight-volume *Complete Prose*. With Eliot's essays formerly available only in single-text volumes, smaller, out-of-print collections, and, eventually, Frank Kermode's (very) *Selected*

⁶⁶ One might compare the acknowledgements in Peter Ackroyd's *T. S. Eliot* (London: Hamish Hamilton: 1984) with those of Helen Gardner's *The Composition of 'Four Quartets'* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), or E. Martin Browne's *The Making of T. S. Eliot's Plays* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), both of whom confess their 'greatest debt' to Valerie. In *The Fall of a Sparrow: Vivien Eliot's Life and Writings* (London: Faber & Faber, 2020), Ann Pasternak Slater refers to the 'comforting shade' of Valerie Eliot, an especially curious acknowledgement given the subject of the book.

⁶⁷ John Haffenden, 'Valerie Eliot: Editing the Letters,' in *Letters*, v, xix-xxxvii (xxxiii-xxxiv). See the 'Epilogue' of this thesis for further discussion.

⁶⁸ See, for instance, the arguments in the *Times Literary Supplement* in the Winter of 1984: 'T. S. Eliot', *Times Literary Supplement* Iss. 4219 (10 February 1984), 139; Iss. 4220 (17 February 1984), 165; Iss. 4221 (24 February 1984), 191; Iss. 4222 (2 March 1984), 219.

⁶⁹ Valerie Eliot quoted in Ronald Schuchard, 'Valerie Eliot and the State of Eliot Studies', opening address, T. S. Eliot International Summer School, (London, 6 July 2013).

Prose (1975), the ratio of material collected before and after Valerie Eliot's death is stark. John Haffenden's progress (in seven further volumes) to 1942 in the *Letters of T. S. Eliot*, his edition of the *Eliot-Hale Letters* (2023) and the prospect of a *Complete Drama* in the coming years all promise the enlargement of the 'T. S. Eliot Editorial Project' to formidable proportions.

Now that we have (almost) all of Eliot, the question remains as to what should be done next; what kind of writer have we been left with? Reviews of the *Poems*, *Prose*, and *Letters* made a number of predictions about the changes which the new material may enact upon the landscape of Eliot criticism. While one reviewer argued that the 'unspoken backdrop to [Ricks and McCue's *Poems*] is the need for a salvage job on Eliot's reputation after the sustained assaults it has suffered in recent decades', a majority signal that the new texts do not necessarily improve our impression of the poet.⁷⁰ When Christopher Ricks was asked whether the addition of previously unpublished poems would have a negative impact on Eliot's reputation, he replied:

I don't myself doubt that for a reputation the right thing – and not just right as borne out by the judgment and wishes of Eliot's widow, or by invoking *the long run* – is the full and open acknowledgement of just what someone (in this case) wrote. Any single one of the charges, the contested matters (Eliot as misogynist or snob or reactionary or anti-Semite or – save the mark – *Christian*) is worthy of, and indeed demands, profoundly well-informed and imaginative attention. Eliot has been, but should not have been, protected at certain points and at certain times by the withholding of evidence.⁷¹

Unsurprisingly, then, many reviewers have concentrated on the evidence for Eliot's 'contested' views in the fresh material. Lachlan Mackinnon, for one, surveyed Eliot's remarks on Jews in

⁷⁰ David Wheatley, 'The Poems of T. S. Eliot, A review', *Guardian* (13 November 2015) <theguardian.com/books/2015/nov/13/the-poems-of-ts-eliot-annotated-text-christopher-ricks-jim-mccue-review> [accessed 30/03/2024].

⁷¹ Anthony Wallace and Christopher Ricks, 'Book Interview: Christopher Ricks on *The Poems of T. S. Eliot, The Annotated Text*', *The Arts Fuse* (18 May 2016) <artsfuse.org/145296/fuse-book-interview-christopher-ricks-on-the-poems-of-t-s-eliot-the-annotated-text/> [accessed 30/03/2024].

previously unknown essays.⁷² More broadly, though, it is the less selected, less airbrushed, less *public* Eliot that was seen as being on offer in these editions. For Daniel Swift, it is an ‘unbuttoned Eliot’, one whose private personality shines through in occasional verse.⁷³ Nevertheless, many reviewers referred to the way in which these ‘complete’ volumes undo much of Eliot’s meticulous editorial work: ‘One thing we do know about Eliot, and obviously not emphasised in this edition, is the likelihood that he would have been horrified by it.’⁷⁴ Reviews of the *Complete Prose* in particular note the lack of hierarchy between the pieces Eliot collected and polished for re-publication and those which he did not: ‘a critical refusal of the death-of-the-author ethos, in pursuit of authorial totality.’⁷⁵ Without Eliot’s final intentions to arrange the material, the contradictoriness of his multiple personalities seems to be amplified, rather than resolved.

Although the material has not been available for long – and, in the case of the *Letters*, is still being released – literary critics are already making use of it.⁷⁶ The foundation of the *T. S. Eliot Studies Annual* in 2017 created a home for interest in this work, citing its mission purpose as being to ‘draw on newly available primary materials to revise longstanding critical narratives, to place Eliot’s work in fuller historical contexts, and to ensure his enduring presence in the new modernist studies.’⁷⁷ The *Annual* has duly featured analyses of Eliot’s student lecture notes, annotations to books from his library, and even a summary of the archive

⁷² Lachlan Mackinnon, ‘Aesthetic Certainty: A full exploration of Eliot’s critical opinions’, *Times Literary Supplement* Iss. 6096 (31 January 2020) [accessed online].

⁷³ Daniel Swift, ‘Casual, funny, flirtatious, severe: *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*’, *Spectator* (12 September 2015) <spectator.co.uk/article/casual-funny-flirtatious-severe/> [accessed 30/03/2024].

⁷⁴ Steve Ellis, ‘*The Poems of T. S. Eliot*’, *Modernist Cultures* 12.3 (2017), 463-68 (465).

⁷⁵ Don James McLaughlin, ‘Eliot, All in Prose’, *Journal of Modern Literature* 39.3 (2016), 117-122 (121).

⁷⁶ In addition to those listed, see Jayme Stayer’s *Becoming T. S. Eliot: The Rhetoric of Voice and Audience in ‘Inventions of the March Hare’* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021); Sarah Kennedy, *T. S. Eliot and the Dynamic Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Jewel Spears Brooker, *T. S. Eliot’s Dialectical Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018); Rick de Villiers, *Eliot and Beckett’s Low Modernism: Humility and Humiliation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022); *Eliot Now*, ed. Megan Quigley and David Chinitz (London: Bloomsbury, 2024 [forthcoming]).

⁷⁷ John D. Morgenstern, ‘General Editor’s Note’, in *The T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, Vol. 2, ed. John D. Morgenstern (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), 1-2 (1).

of the Hydraulic Press Brick Company, the business managed by Eliot's father.⁷⁸ Among these studies, though, is an awareness of an altered conformity between the old and the new. Anthony Cuda argues that rather than considering the new material as being 'more important than the canonical', it should be used 'to introduce just enough doubt and uncertainty to render us, even specialists, skeptical about the Eliot whom we think we know.'⁷⁹ Two new student *Companion* volumes pitched themselves as agitators of the 'Eliot whom we think we know.' In his introduction to *The Edinburgh Companion to T. S. Eliot and the Arts* (2017), Ronald Schuchard argued that 'The lifting of restrictions on these several genres now provides scholarly access to Eliot's lifetime engagement with the arts in both popular and high culture, showing him to be far removed from tired allegations of cultural elitism'.⁸⁰ However, in his introduction to the *New Cambridge Companion* (2017), Jason Harding reminds us that no matter how 'unbuttoned' Eliot appears, he is still wearing clothes: 'Eliot's letters must be interpreted with tact; they are no less rhetorical constructions than his other writings and cannot be straightforward evidence of the poet's personal experience.'⁸¹ It may remind us of Edmund Wilson's remark in 1957: 'In private, [Eliot] is humorous and disarming about his reputation, but the performance still goes on.'⁸² Harding offered a timely warning that 'as further tranches of archival material are released into the embattled arena of Eliot studies, admirers and detractors alike will interpret them in the light of pre-existing arguments about his life and

⁷⁸ See Jewel Spears Brooker, "'Slip-slidin' away": Metamorphosis and Loss in Eliot's Philosophical Papers', in *Eliot Studies Annual*, Vol. 2, 109-14; Jamie Callison, 'Transmuting F. H. Bradley: T. S. Eliot's Notes Towards a Theory of Poetry', in *The T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, Vol. 1, ed. John D. Morgenstern (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 99-113; April Pierce, 'T. S. Eliot, Phenomenologist', in *Eliot Studies Annual*, Vol. 1, 114-130; Frances Dickey, "'Hydraulic": The Company and its Archive', in *The T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, Vol. 3, ed. John D. Morgenstern, Julia E. Daniel, Frances Dickey (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021), 235-40.

⁷⁹ Anthony Cuda, 'What Happened to "Modern Tendencies in Poetry"', in *Eliot Studies Annual*, Vol. 2, 115-120 (120).

⁸⁰ Ronald Schuchard, 'Preface', in *The Edinburgh Companion to T. S. Eliot and the Arts*, ed. Frances Dickey and John D. Morgenstern (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), xi-xvii (xi).

⁸¹ Jason Harding, 'Unravelling Eliot', in *The New Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. Jason Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1-25 (2).

⁸² Wilson, 'To Van Wyck Brooks, 6 October 1957', in *Letters on Literature and Politics*, 548.

work', with Schuchard's issue of 'cultural elitism' constituting one such 'arena'.⁸³ By all accounts, the new material seems to offer far less in the way of 'chang[ing] the course of Eliot studies' than many might initially have hoped.⁸⁴

The belatedness of the publication of Eliot's work has, then, also summoned a somewhat jaded critical term closely related to the act of 'unbuttoning', a term of fundamental importance to this thesis. In 2005, Stephen Greenblatt recounted the inspiration behind his seminal 1980 book on Renaissance 'self-fashioning' with a surprise reference to Eliot: 'I had been struck by what seemed to me an eerie resemblance between Raleigh's poem, with its tormented sense of a world and a self in pieces, and Eliot's *Waste Land*.'⁸⁵ Greenblatt's methodological terms seemed particularly attractive for a poet whose personality shifted according to context: 'the power to impose a shape upon oneself is an aspect of the more general power to control identity – that of others at least as often as one's own.'⁸⁶ Indeed, Eliot proved a productive subject for New Historicism. Studies by Erik Svarny, Stanley Sultan, and Louis Menand – to name only three – all revealed the ways in which Eliot's poems could not have been written without the demands of the contemporary moment.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, these studies were careful to assert that it was the *moment* that was important, rather than an overarching scheme:

When Eliot built a poem from a series of literary allusions, or when he maintained that the artist must be a professional, or when he proposed to consider poetry as poetry and not another thing, or even when he championed the virtues of tradition, he was not, in my view, formulating a coherent cultural program; he was exploiting a contemporary cultural condition.⁸⁸

⁸³ Harding, 'Unravelling Eliot', 23.

⁸⁴ On this subject, see Ronald Bush, "'An Easy Commerce of the Old and New'": Recent Eliot Scholarship', *Modernism/modernity* 17.3 (2010), 677-81.

⁸⁵ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), xii.

⁸⁶ Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning*, 1.

⁸⁷ See Erik Svarny, *The Men of 1914: T. S. Eliot and Early Modernism* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988); Stanley Sultan, *Eliot, Joyce and Company* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Louis Menand, *Discovering Modernism: T. S. Eliot and his Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁸⁸ Menand, *Discovering Modernism*, 6.

Similarly, in his contribution to *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History* (1991), Ronald Bush decried a tendency to view Eliot as ‘in practice and theory monolithic’.⁸⁹ The New Critical and poststructuralist urge to flatten the poet, Bush claimed, ignored the ‘philosophical, formal, and psychological disjunctions’ between Eliot’s early poetics and his ‘later political and philosophical positions.’⁹⁰ In response, Bush sought to keep the ‘internal contradictions of man and poet in focus and make it harder to fall prey to the reductions of either right or left.’⁹¹

For the New Historicists, then, Eliot’s work was certainly directed by the pressures of context, but that did not preclude his capacity for impulsiveness, contradiction, and unpredictability, it facilitated it. By 2005, though, Greenblatt noted that his radical study had been subsumed under charges of determinism: ‘*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* has often been characterized as a grimly pessimistic account of the containment of subversion, a sour recognition that what looks like free choice is actually institutionally determined, a disenchanted acknowledgement of the impossibility of apocalyptic change.’⁹² Indeed, much has altered in modernist studies since Greenblatt first coined the term ‘self-fashioning’, with particular relevance to the charge of ‘determinism’. Many of these changes have significant repercussions for the kind of work that this thesis undertakes, and, as such, are worth outlining.

The sense of lack which pervaded an understanding of Eliot’s work between 1965 and 2012 stood in direct contrast to the aim of the dominant mode of scholarship of twentieth-century literature over the last three decades. In 2008, Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz looked back on ten years since the foundation of the Modernist Studies Association and spoke of the new critical impulse towards ‘expansion’.⁹³ Moving outwards in ‘temporal, spatial, and vertical directions’, they isolated within the ‘New Modernist Studies’ an increasing affiliation

⁸⁹ Ronald Bush, ‘T. S. Eliot and Modernism at the Present Time: A Provocation’, in *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History*, ed. Ronald Bush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 191-204 (197).

⁹⁰ Bush, ‘Eliot and Modernism at the Present Time’, 196.

⁹¹ Bush, ‘Eliot and Modernism at the Present Time’, 201.

⁹² Greenblatt, ‘Preface’, in *Renaissance Self-fashioning*, xvi.

⁹³ Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, ‘The New Modernist Studies’, *PMLA* 123.3 (2008), 737-748 (737).

with sociological investigation: ‘No less significant, as a context for the recent inquiry into propaganda and new media, is now the substantial body of work on what we may call the marketing of modernism – a topic that has engaged some of the finest scholars in the field for over a decade’.⁹⁴ Although they acknowledged some complaints about this form of ‘expansion’ as ‘abetting a general devaluation of the specifically literary qualities of literature’, they argue that ‘this work’s truer import lies in showing in new ways how the imaginative exhilaration we draw from literary texts can be rooted in the nonimaginary world.’⁹⁵ In 2021, Mao looked back on that process of ‘root[ing]’ the criticism of literary appreciation within the ‘nonimaginary’ in a canonising collection of essays, *The New Modernist Studies*. The enlargement of the critical ‘toolkit’, he suggested, helped to make the New Modernist Studies ‘legible almost as an application or subdomain of cultural studies’.⁹⁶ Its ‘expansion’ into different disciplines was what made it so productive in enhancing our understanding of ‘modernity’ and the literature it produced.

And yet, there are extensive limitations to the increased reliance on sociology in modernist studies, limitations which Mao alluded to when he recognised that the future of criticism ‘would benefit from a greater willingness [...] to embrace work more weighted to elucidation of how textual elements conspire to produce meaning – toward, in other words, the art of close reading, which sometimes looks in danger of being lost’.⁹⁷ Those limitations are most helpfully expressed in critiques of the theorist that has driven much of the ‘rooting’ of literary study in sociology since Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. Pierre Bourdieu is the figure who lies, often unmentioned, behind many investigations into the marketing of modernist literature. James English, for one, sees Bourdieu’s influence in the work of Richard

⁹⁴ Mao and Walkowitz, ‘New Modernist Studies’, 744.

⁹⁵ Mao and Walkowitz, ‘New Modernist Studies’, 744.

⁹⁶ Douglas Mao, ‘Introduction’, in *The New Modernist Studies*, ed. Douglas Mao (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 1-22, (3).

⁹⁷ Mao, ‘Introduction’, in *The New Modernist Studies*, 15.

Ohmann, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, and Lawrence Rainey, among others.⁹⁸ But Bourdieu's assertion that every linguistic act was conceived within, engages with, and is circumscribed by, its movement within distinct 'cultural fields', has significant repercussions for an understanding of a poet like Eliot.⁹⁹ Specifically, it is the 'determinism' of Bourdieu's sociology – the trait against which Greenblatt, Bush and Menand all warned – that has been considered its fundamental flaw. John Guillory's exploration of the incompatibility of Bourdieu with the American academy is useful in this regard, isolating as problematic Bourdieu's 'reduction of social action to self-interest, in the form of the accumulation of "capital," and further, his implicit foreclosure of any action that transcends individual interest or has progressive social change as its end.'¹⁰⁰ Creative goals are dissolved in the pursuit of reputational acclaim, and there is a resultant flattening of an artist's capacity for critical self-reflection as being themselves an object of commodification.

So, why might the lure of Bourdieusian sociology be especially tempting and yet troublesome for a figure like Eliot? The primary reason is because it offers a convenient catch-all solution to the contradictions that are rife in Eliot's life and writing. His decision to embrace Anglo-Catholicism in 1927, the expression of conservative views from a man once called a 'literary Bolshevik', and the drastic stylistic shifts from 'Prufrock' to *The Waste Land*, to *Ash-Wednesday*, and *Four Quartets* have long posed problems for scholars studying Eliot's development.¹⁰¹ These contradictions raise a number of profound questions about how we approach the work of writers that are inherently discontinuous, questions that have also proved

⁹⁸ James F. English, 'Everywhere and Nowhere: The Sociology of Literature After "The Sociology of Literature"', *New Literary History* 41.2 (2010), v-xxiii (xiv).

⁹⁹ See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) and Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

¹⁰⁰ John Guillory, 'Bourdieu's Refusal', *Modern Language Quarterly* 58.4 (1997), 367-98 (368).

¹⁰¹ See, for instance, Paul Elmer More, 'The Cleft Eliot', *Saturday Review* 9 (12 November 1932), 233; 235.

obstructive in studies of similarly ‘inconsistent’ poets like Wordsworth and Auden.¹⁰² One reason that this is such a difficult task in the cases of all three poets is that the melioristic argument cannot be followed through; each of them made personal, ideological, and stylistic decisions which are usually seen to have produced worse poems than those of their early careers. Rather than hold the poems up to examination, however, relying exclusively on Bourdieusian sociology would offer a short-cut, by-passing concerns about notions of artistic contradiction and making it all seem part of an elaborate, predetermined plan for reputational adjustment.

Eliot has proved particularly amenable to the lures of determinism. In *To Criticize the Critic* (1961), his final collection of essays, he voiced exasperation at deterministic accounts of his writing life: ‘One very intelligent expositor of my work [...] discussed my critical writings some years ago as if I had, at the outset of my career as a literary critic, sketched out the design for a massive critical structure, and spent the rest of my life filling in the details.’¹⁰³ For many, this plea fell on deaf ears. Just after his death in 1965, Philip Toynbee argued that Eliot ‘conformed to the pattern of Wordsworth: the revolutionary who becomes a reactionary, disappointing his followers’.¹⁰⁴ Against such a claim, Stephen Spender defended his former mentor’s right to his own narrative: ‘I think there is a danger of people interpreting the whole of Eliot’s development as the unfolding of a predetermined pattern.’¹⁰⁵ Even Cynthia Ozick, for all her resentment towards the poet, admits that ‘Eliot’s extreme self-alterations should not be dismissed as ordinary humbug, particularly not on the religious side; there is a difference between impersonation and conversion.’¹⁰⁶ Despite repeated warnings over the years about

¹⁰² See, for instance, Edward Mendelson, *Early Auden, Later Auden: A Critical Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Joshua Wilner, ‘Autobiography’, in *William Wordsworth in Context*, ed. Andrew Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 145-51.

¹⁰³ ‘To Criticize the Critic’, *Complete Prose*, VIII, 456-474 (458-59).

¹⁰⁴ Philip Toynbee, ‘T. S. Eliot: An appreciation of his work and influence’, *Observer* (19 January 1965), 26.

¹⁰⁵ Stephen Spender, ‘Remembering Eliot’, *Sewanee Review* 74.1 (1966), 58-84 (59).

¹⁰⁶ Ozick, ‘Eliot at 101’, 8.

determinism, the tendency has persisted. Lyndall Gordon, in her 1988 study of Eliot's spiritual development, wrote how 'Much had to be discarded to make his life conform to the pilgrim pattern. His early years turned on his acceptance of this pattern, his later years on the question of its fulfilment.'¹⁰⁷ It is a 'pattern' she resurrected as recently as 2022, into which were slotted the revelations of Eliot's letters to Emily Hale: 'His lifelong venture was to fit a flawed self – in need of remaking – to the model of saints and seekers who perfect their souls'.¹⁰⁸ Eliot's reputation had all been planned out at the start, Gordon infers, and all that remained was to 'fill in the details'.

This study seeks to resist the allure of deterministic thinking for Eliot's work by suggesting that his creative writing was fundamentally in touch with (and sometimes critical of) the extra-textual strategies used to promote it. Each of the four chapters harnesses a single word as a point of contact between issues of style, marketing, and self-fashioning at specific moments in Eliot's literary career. Progressing chronologically, the chapters argue that Eliot thought with a great deal of self-awareness about the kinds of impressions that his work was generating for readers, but that the poems ultimately remained sites on which to stage private processes of self-understanding.

The opening chapter, 'Littleness', takes as its focus the period up to and including the publication of *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917). Using Ezra Pound's famous assertion that Eliot had 'trained himself *and* modernized himself *on his own*', it investigates the importance of the balance between 'genius' and 'technique' in Eliot's successful self-insertion into London literary circles.¹⁰⁹ The chapter begins by reconstructing the method by which Eliot composed his earliest published poems in the magazine of his prep school. A comparison with

¹⁰⁷ Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), 268.

¹⁰⁸ Lyndall Gordon, *The Hyacinth Girl: T. S. Eliot's Hidden Muse* (London: Virago, 2022), 397.

¹⁰⁹ Ezra Pound, 'To Harriet Monroe, 30 September 1914', in *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941* ed. D. D. Paige (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), 80.

Thomas Hardy, however, reveals a far more laboured process than has been argued previously, a process that Eliot sought to conceal with comments which revised the narrative of his early development. Next, it offers the first account of Eliot's attendance at a Harvard composition class and the impact it had on the writing of his juvenile poems. A typical trait of such composition classes is the production of a large amount of writing, and by comparing Eliot's slender published output with the mass of poems written into his notebook, the chapter probes the association between amateurism, professionalism, and overproduction. Turning to Eliot's later occupation as a publisher at Faber & Faber, it surveys his tactics for constricting the output of young poets on his list in order to emphasise certain qualities about the poems they produced, putting him in touch with an 'economics of littleness' advocated by Ezra Pound. Using this new research, the chapter concludes with a re-evaluation of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', arguing that at the centre of the poem is a debate concerning the validity of judging a whole by a smaller part. Prufrock's recourse to the logic of synecdoche offers one way of approaching Eliot's early writing as a whole, which has necessitated frequent readjustments since his death through the introduction of more unpublished material to a set of poems once thought to be perfect in their 'littleness'.

The second chapter, 'Seriousness', foregrounds a quality of Eliot's personality that has long caused issues for his critics, with reference to the period in which such issues are at their most complex. For decades *The Waste Land* has provoked questions about Eliot's intentions; while some early readers asserted that there was 'no doubt in my mind as to Mr. Eliot's absorbed seriousness', others would continue to ask Eliot whether he 'mean[t] that poem seriously?'¹¹⁰ This chapter probes what it is about Eliot's most famous poem which has enabled it to be taken both as a statement of his dour sense of scholarly seriousness, and also as a parody

¹¹⁰ Elinor Wylie, 'Mr. Eliot's Slug Horn', in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 95-96 (95); William Force Stead, 'Some Personal Impressions of T. S. Eliot (1965)', in *Alumnae Journal of Trinity College*, quoted in *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 568.

of that same quality. By sensing an allegiance between Eliot's sense of humour as demonstrated in his light verse, and the theory of poetics that he outlined in the essays of *The Sacred Wood* (1920), I argue that an understanding of *The Waste Land* is incomplete without a willingness to consider his ostensibly paradoxical ideas about what it meant to be taken 'seriously'. As part of that investigation, the chapter pays close attention to Eliot's dealings with academics, offering the first comprehensive account of his failed application for a Research Fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford, and the longstanding scholarly grudge which followed it. It then turns to the text that has caused the most problems for an understanding of Eliot's 'seriousness': the 'Notes' to *The Waste Land*. A comparison with Percy Shelley's *Queen Mab*, a text to which Eliot often referred in discussions of his own annotative procedures, reveals how his 'Notes' function not as scholarly parody, but as an extension of the incongruous logic of the poem itself.

The third chapter, 'Badness', wrestles with the stark differences in critical opinion about the success of *Four Quartets*. It asks why so many critics have sought to contain the poems' perceived 'badness' within schemes of intentionality, either as 'parody', '*via negativa*' mysticism, or as 'nonsense verse'.¹¹¹ Learning from Keston Sutherland's theory of Romantic 'Wrong Poetry', this chapter argues that the poems are designed to invite such frameworks by consciously playing on the type of poetry that readers expected from Eliot.¹¹² It proceeds by using Eliot's letters to Emily Hale to ask why the fidelity to original experience became a new priority of his poetics, even while his approach to writing made the poems appear increasingly overwrought. A comparison with Henry James reveals the contradiction in Eliot's pursuit of compositional 'impetus' in the meticulous process of revision, while also prioritising the

¹¹¹ See Donald Davie, 'T. S. Eliot: The End of an Era', in *T. S. Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Hugh Kenner (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 192-205; Kathleen Raine, 'Points of View: Another Reading', *Contemporary Reviews*, 455-58; Ronald Bush, *T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 202.

¹¹² Keston Sutherland, 'Wrong Poetry', *Textual Practice* 24.4 (2010), 765-782.

‘original impulse’ of personal experience. The result, I argue, is a series of poems whose mixed motives can be read as a symptom of ‘bad style’. The chapter concludes by investigating the utility of the terms ‘mid-life’ and ‘middlebrow’ in resolving the problematic position of *Four Quartets* within Eliot’s oeuvre. Coinciding with the mid-point of the century, the preoccupation with expanding the reach of culture after the Second World War is read as crucial context for Eliot’s anxieties about the role of his own writing as he approached his sixties.

The final chapter, ‘Lastness’, engages with the much-neglected work produced after *Four Quartets*. Its primary objective is to show how Eliot’s writing of this final period was as much a private pursuit of wholeness as it was an attempt to create a sense of stylistic development that would qualify him for the status of ‘major poet’ after his death.¹¹³ By suggesting a new framework for thinking through Eliot’s post-*Quartets* work – using ‘last’ instead of ‘late’ – I suggest that Eliot’s departure from the usual characteristics of ‘lateness’ outlined by Adorno and Edward Said justifies a new way of approaching questions of end-of-life style. The chapter begins with two specific events, Vivien Eliot’s death in January 1947 and the awarding of the Nobel Prize in November 1948, which I argue provoked a crisis of ‘lastness’ for Eliot in personal and stylistic terms. Turning first to his critical prose, I show how Eliot sacrificed his lifelong pursuit of unrelenting creative progress in favour of an attitude of reflection. Next, an examination of the remarkably little amount of verse that Eliot produced in these final two decades is performed through the notion of ‘retirement stylistics’, shown to consist of an oscillation between ideas of obligation and self-indulgence, with special attention to self-parody and the ending of Eliot’s verse line. Primarily, though, this chapter thinks in depth about the plays, *The Cocktail Party*, *The Confidential Clerk*, and *The Elder Statesman*, comparing the latter with the large corpus of Eliot’s memorial writings to examine how they

¹¹³ See ‘What is Minor Poetry?’, *Complete Prose*, VI, 566-80 (574).

trouble questions of repetition, closure, and permanence. It is a closure that terminates three distinct timelines that are often tangled up in the criticism: Eliot's personal life, his literary development, and the cultural movement which had seemed – by 1965 – to have already ended.

For a project that is acutely interested – especially in 'Lastness' – in the consequences of dividing Eliot's writing life into sections, this arrangement of chapters is conscious that any act of structuring leaves itself open to the critique of determinism that the thesis as a whole seeks to undermine. And yet, as this study shows, Eliot was also fascinated by the notion of 'phases' of development, and he saw his creative life as separating fairly easily into distinct periods, each terminating with a major work. While these four chapters engage with debates about individual texts in a way which requires a degree of isolation, each successive chapter is designed to continue the thinking of that which it follows.

The thesis concludes by meditating on the fate of Eliot's reputation after his death through a previously undocumented narrative of the formation of the T. S. Eliot Estate. Assembling information that has not yet been considered together, it offers the first account of the legal structures put in place by Eliot to ensure his executors were able to maintain control over his writing. Following this outline, it recounts the actions of Valerie Eliot and the trustees she appointed before her death in 2012, assessing the precarious position of Eliot's creative writing when held up against social views that prove increasingly off-putting to twenty-first-century readers.

Littleness

Introduction

Readers will struggle to locate a study of Eliot's early development which fails to quote Ezra Pound's giddy report to Harriet Monroe about his discovery in September 1914: 'He has actually trained himself *and* modernized himself *on his own*.'¹ It has pride of place in every biography of Eliot ever published, and was considered so accurate by Lyndall Gordon and Robert Crawford that it even ceased to need its quotation marks: 'Pound was amazed to come across a young American who had trained and modernized himself entirely on his own'.² For decades, the sentence has acted as critical shorthand for the manner in which Eliot burst onto the literary scene, when he presented Pound with 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1915) – already fully formed and in need of no revision – as a miracle they hoped wasn't too good to be true: 'PRAY GOD IT BE NOT A SINGLE AND UNIQUE SUCCESS.'³ Although both Eliot and his poem seemed to have appeared as if from nowhere, Pound understood that much must have happened for 'Prufrock' to have been possible. His letter to Monroe proclaimed Eliot as

¹ Ezra Pound, 'To Harriet Monroe, 30 September 1914', in *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), 80.

² Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot's Early Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 23; Robert Crawford, *Young Eliot: from St. Louis to 'The Waste Land'* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2015), 208. See T. S. Matthews, *Great Tom: Notes Towards the Definition of T. S. Eliot* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974), 39; Peter Ackroyd, *T. S. Eliot*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984), 56; Michael Grant, 'Introduction', in *T. S. Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Michael Grant, 2 vols (Abingdon: Routledge, 1982), I, 1-65 (5); James E. Miller, *T. S. Eliot: The Making of an American Poet, 1888-1922* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2005), 199.

³ Pound, 'To Harriet Monroe, 30 September 1914', 80.

the only American I know of who has made what I can call adequate preparation for writing. He has actually trained himself *and* modernized himself *on his own*. The rest of the *promising young* have done one or the other but never both (most of the swine have done neither). It is such a comfort to meet a man and not have to tell him to wash his face, wipe his feet, and remember the date (1914) on the calendar.

Marketing Eliot to the respectable editor of *Poetry*, Pound purposefully talks up his ‘preparation’, that he had mastered the essentials of his craft before embarking on something more ambitious. The closing metaphors seem tied to Eliot’s appearance, too, as they imagine his presentation of ‘Prufrock’ as a job interview for which he came thoroughly equipped, with all the necessary qualifications. Yet what strikes us most about the quotation is Pound’s astonishment, a tone which makes the entire account seem rather implausible. Although the logical consequence of Eliot’s ‘train[ing]’ is apparently to have arrived at ‘Prufrock’, his having undergone that process in the correct way – and, crucially for Pound, without his guidance – provokes incredulity. There is, as a result, a tension of competing narratives at play, that of the inevitability of Eliot’s early development, but, equally, of its miraculousness.

It is a tension that Eliot worked hard throughout his career to maintain. While Pound’s letter to Monroe was being printed in *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941* (1951) by Faber & Faber, Eliot sought to keep the number of people with access to the evidence of his improbable ‘training’ at a minimum. He had authorised a secret volume, *Poems Written in Early Youth* (1950) through his Swedish publisher, Bonniers, the previous year.⁴ Containing poems written predominantly while he was an undergraduate at Harvard, but some written while he was still at prep school, the volume only hints at the voice that was to astonish Pound in 1914. Nevertheless, the myth of his miraculous development depended on their concealment, and the twelve-copy run of the *Early Youth* volume was designed solely to retain the copyright over a set of poems which had recently appeared in a pirated pamphlet, *The Undergraduate*

⁴ See the section in this chapter on *Poems Written in Early Youth*.

Poems of T. S. Eliot (1948). Another set of poems which revealed the seeds of ‘Prufrock’ more clearly is also extant, and Eliot similarly wanted to keep the audience of his *Inventions of the March Hare* as restricted as possible. Upon gifting the notebook to John Quinn, Eliot implored his patron: ‘I beg you fervently to keep them to yourself and see that they never are printed.’⁵ Even more so than *Poems Written in Early Youth*, later re-published in a trade edition by Valerie Eliot in 1967, the publication of the *March Hare* in 1996 stimulated studies with the express purpose of demystifying Pound’s quotation; just how did T. S. Eliot ‘train’ and ‘modernize’ himself ‘on his own’?⁶ However, after more than two decades with both juvenile collections in our possession, fascination with the question has yet to abate, with researchers unearthing increasing amounts of information in pursuit of an answer. There have been, in the last decade alone, at least four studies with a variation of the title ‘Becoming T. S. Eliot’.⁷ When compared with the dearth of scholarly study of the eighteen years after *Four Quartets*, the fascination with Eliot’s youth borders on the obsessive. As a result, the field requires a shift of focus, beyond *how did Eliot do it?* and towards a much broader issue: why is it that, after so long, we still find ourselves captivated by the question?

It is not only the drip-feeding of new poems that has fostered critical interest in Eliot’s adolescence. Indeed, the scarcity of biographical documents relating to this period – including the destruction of letters to his family – enabled Eliot to cultivate a lasting, and increasingly marketable, interest in the mystery of genius.⁸ It was, as May Sinclair wrote in her review of

⁵ ‘To John Quinn, 21 September 1922’, *Letters*, I, 749.

⁶ Among the first studies to make use of *The Inventions of the March Hare* were Ronald Schuchard’s *Eliot’s Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), Lyndall Gordon, *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* (London: Virago, 1998), and the essays of John Xiros Cooper, *T. S. Eliot’s Orchestra: Critical Essays on Poetry and Music* (New York; London: Garland, 2000), especially David Chinitz, ‘A Jazz-Banjo, Not a Lute’, 3-24 and Jonathan Gill, ‘Protective Coloring: Modernism and Blackface Minstrelsy in the Bolo Poems’, 65-84.

⁷ See Jayme Stayer, *Becoming T. S. Eliot: The Rhetoric of Voice and Audience in ‘Inventions of the March Hare’* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021); Louis Menand, ‘Practical Cat: How T. S. Eliot became T. S. Eliot’ *The New Yorker* (19/09/2011) <newyorker.com/magazine/2011/09/19/practical-cat> [accessed 01/06/2022]; Joseph Maddy, *The Making of T. S. Eliot: A Study of the Literary Influences* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2009); Miller, *The Making of an American Poet*.

⁸ See Valerie Eliot, ‘Introduction’, *Letters*, I, xvii-xix (xvii).

Prufrock and Other Observations, a ‘genius’ which was ‘elusive; it is difficult; it demands a distinct effort of attention.’⁹ It was also, as Leo Braudy has suggested, an interest that originated in the Romantic period: ‘as the new literary fame became more inescapably visible and public, so genius was being forced into postures of social usefulness’.¹⁰ Indeed, the tension that underlies Pound’s report between ‘training’ and ‘miracle’ summons a binary more familiar to us than we might expect, that existing in Coleridge’s Lectures between the ‘creative Life-power of inspired Genius’ and the ‘Shaping skill of mechanical Talent’.¹¹ That this opposition between *ingenium* and *ars* has a distinct advertising appeal is apparent in the way that literary magazines of Coleridge’s era pitched their contributors to readers: ‘the essence of genius’, David Higgins writes, ‘is its claim to distinctiveness – it stands out from the crowd – and it was offered to consumers by publishers, critics, and authors as a mark of quality at a time of increased literary production’.¹² Higgins’s discussion of size, that ‘genius’ was valuable during a ‘time of increased literary production’, is of fundamental importance. In periods where the market for writing is particularly swollen, we infer something attractive about authors who resist the urge to proliferate. Like Pound’s prayer to Monroe, ‘genius’ was enticing precisely because it constituted a ‘single and unique success’.

As the above survey of his early writing indicates, Eliot’s youth has historically been defined by a sense of lack, be it in terms of biographical information or of the amount of his work that was readily available. In its examination of Eliot’s writing up to and including ‘Prufrock’, this chapter examines the motivations and the consequences of this lack, with close attention to one word in particular: ‘little’. ‘Littleness’ has always had an important role to play

⁹ May Sinclair, ‘*Prufrock and Other Observations*: A Criticism’, in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 10-13 (11).

¹⁰ Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and its History* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 418.

¹¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Lecture 2: *Romeo and Juliet*’, in *Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), II, 362.

¹² David Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity, Politics* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 8.

in modernist poetics. The 1910s, first and foremost, was the decade in which ‘little’ poems appeared in the pages of ‘little magazines’. Allowing matters of stylistics and publishing to share an adjective has long proved convenient to scholars, although many have warned against the misleading potential of such convenience. The first comprehensive study of *The Little Magazine* (1946) by Frederick Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn Ulrich spoke of unrest among editors that ‘little’ was no longer an appropriate word:

Coming into use during the First World War, ‘little’ did not refer to the size of the magazines, nor to their literary contents, nor to the fact that they usually did not pay for contributions. What the word designated above everything else was a limited group of intelligent readers: [...] In a sense, therefore, the word ‘little’ is vague and even unfairly derogatory.¹³

As the word came to act as a crucial point of connection between Imagist poems in particular and the magazines in which they were published, the creators of ‘little’ poems came to resemble agents of cultural segregation.¹⁴ Most notably, Lawrence Rainey argued that many modernist authors retreated from the mass market into ‘patronage, collecting, speculation, and investment, a retreat that entailed the construction of an institutional counterspace securing a momentary respite from a public realm increasingly degraded’.¹⁵ In Eliot’s case, claimed Rainey, that meant wanting his work ‘to be successful, yet not too successful’, publishing only little amounts in order to ensure that he remained untainted by the stain of ‘popularity’.¹⁶ In reviews of Rainey’s book, however, some scholars were sceptical of his portrayal of modernist authors as cultural machinators. David Bradshaw asked whether there was

¹³ Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, Carolyn Ulrich, *The Little Magazine: A History and Bibliography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), 3.

¹⁴ A study which argues against the ‘littleness’ of ‘little magazines’ is Mark Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), and his warnings are heeded in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, ed. Peter Brooker, Andrew Thacker, Sascha Bru, and Christian Weikop, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009-13).

¹⁵ Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1998), 5.

¹⁶ Rainey, *Institutions*, 104.

any evidence that the modernists themselves, rather than their lionizers, benefactors, sponsors, publishers, promoters, and hangers-on, thought that ‘the answer to the levelling effect precipitated by a consumer economy was to defer consumption into the future, to transform it into investment’?¹⁷

But while some warned against casting artists like Eliot as marketing managers, others sought to emphasise their publicity credentials. In *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (2005), Aaron Jaffe hinted at the connection between stylistics and advertising, claiming that Eliot’s ‘scarce “literary” output’ was part of ‘the archly modernist preoccupation with undersupply, stoking demand by under-stocking the literary marketplace’.¹⁸ Suddenly, Eliot’s engagement with an aesthetics of ‘littleness’ becomes part of an overarching strategy for securing the aura of a luxury commodity. What is often missed in this classification of Eliot, however, is the critical self-reflection that runs throughout the early poems about the very idea of promotional manoeuvring in such a manner.

In its investigation of ‘Littleness’, then, this chapter presents an Eliot who was not only an effective marketer of himself and his work from a young age, but also an artist who used his poems to rehearse his anxieties about the career of the poet in broader terms. Naturally, the word has a strong connection to ideas of juvenility – to the ‘little’ T. S. Eliot – and this will be important with reference to Eliot’s understanding of what it meant to write ‘early work’, even while still a young man. Primarily, though, it will be used to discuss Eliot’s tactics for mediating access to his first sets of poems, and what that might tell us about his reputational priorities. By exploring how Eliot concealed certain factors which influenced his development and resisted comparisons with specific poets, this chapter evaluates the relationship between amateurism, professionalism, and overproduction. It concludes with a fresh reading of ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, arguing that at the heart of the poem is a debate concerning the validity of judging a whole by a smaller part. Prufrock’s recourse to the logic of synecdoche

¹⁷ David Bradshaw, ‘Review of *Institutions of Modernism*’, *Review of English Studies* 51.203 (2000), 514-15.

¹⁸ Aaron Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 106.

offers one way of approaching Eliot's early writing as a whole, which has necessitated frequent readjustments since his death through the introduction of more unpublished material to a set of poems once thought to be perfect in their 'littleness'.

Burying the *Treasury*: Eliot's Early Tools

For those who seek a neat summary of the enduring critical appeal of Eliot's early development in Pound's scout report, the relationship between the 'miraculous' and the 'inevitable' often poses more problems than it resolves. It proved a vexed piece of evidence for Christopher Ricks, who, in a review of *Trying to Explain* (1979), used it to question Donald Davie's implication that the young Eliot was a member of Pound's '*atelier*':

Eliot is introduced as 'that one of [Pound's] erstwhile protégés who had become, surprisingly, a pillar of the English establishment – Eliot, editor of the *Criterion*.' Prodigy, certainly; protégé...? It would not suit Davie's argument to acknowledge Pound's letter in 1914 about Eliot: 'He is the only American I know of who has made what I can call adequate preparation for writing. He has actually trained himself *and* modernised himself *on his own*.'¹⁹

For Ricks, Davie appears to be arguing that Eliot became less 'professional' as the years went by, because how else was he able to distance himself from the 'unrelenting professionalism in Pound that set, and continues to set, Englishmen's teeth on edge'? Ricks disagrees: Eliot need not have been guilty either of 'unrelenting amateurism' or of 'relenting professionalism', because he was never a member of Pound's '*atelier*' in the first place. This scuffle over vocabulary between Ricks and Davie raises significant questions about how a young American poet seeking acclaim in Britain should go about establishing a reputation for himself. That Eliot

¹⁹ Christopher Ricks, 'Donald Davie and the English', *London Review of Books* 2.10 (22 May 1980) <lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v02/n10/christopher-ricks/donald-davie-and-the-english> [accessed 01/03/2022].

apparently appealed to British readers because he fulfilled a ‘belief in the artist as amateur’ as opposed to the distinctly American ‘belief in the artist as professional’ – who was trained in *ateliers* and creative writing classes – demonstrates how the attraction to Eliot’s development is just as wrapped up in questions of national identity as it is in Romantic ‘genius’.

Eliot was in touch with this question of the appeal of ‘genius’ specifically to the British public. In a London Letter to *The Dial* in 1922, he highlighted the reason for ‘Dostoevsky’s appeal to the British mind’ as being ‘that he appears to satisfy the usual definition of genius; that is, an infinite capacity for taking no pains.’²⁰ Eliot is himself drawn to Dostoevsky’s impression of effortlessness: ‘it is no good making a gospel of taking pains, either; if a writer has not the standard of perfection in himself, he will not acquire it from public agitation in favour of “technique.”’ On the surface, Eliot’s comments support the view that the attraction to his own early period lay in its supposedly divine conception; ‘genius’ over ‘technique’, ‘miracle’ over ‘inevitability’. However, it is significant to notice that whenever Eliot uses the word ‘genius’, ‘technique’ isn’t far away. In fact, the distinction between the two is the hinge on which many of his essays, notably those on Romantic poets, pivot. We may look to his essay on ‘William Blake’ (1920):

His early poems show what the poems of a boy of genius ought to show, immense power of assimilation. Such early poems are not, as usually supposed, crude attempts to do something beyond the boy’s capacity; they are, in the case of a boy of real promise, more likely to be quite mature and successful attempts to do something small.²¹

Perfect early development, it seems, involves the close tracking of the two concepts together, not over-producing before the young poet is ready, but attempts at ‘something small’. Nevertheless, Blake was also an exception, whose ‘genius’ went frustratingly uncurbed: ‘What his genius required, and what it sadly lacked, was a framework of accepted and traditional

²⁰ ‘London Letter: August 1922’, *Complete Prose*, II, 411-15 (412).

²¹ ‘William Blake’, *Complete Prose*, II, 187-92 (187-88).

ideas.’²² Eliot makes a similar point in later writing on Blake: ‘The Books are full of poetry, and fine poetry, too. But they show very sadly that genius and inspiration are not enough for a poet. He must have education, by which I do not mean erudition but a kind of mental and moral discipline.’²³ As Blake grew as a poet, in Eliot’s view, the genius ran too far ahead of the ‘framework’ that was designed to channel it.

On the other hand, too much contact with ‘accepted and traditional ideas’ can be limiting in its own way, as Eliot claimed of Tennyson, whose ‘education’ led to him becoming ‘encrusted with opinion’.²⁴ However, in his later essay on ‘*In Memoriam*’ (1936), ‘genius’ and ‘technique’ are found together once more: ‘The genius, the technical power, persisted to the end’.²⁵ In that study, Tennyson’s youthful prowess is explored with reference to a text which the poet himself is said to have ‘expressed regret’ at its removal from his ‘Juvenilia’.²⁶ The ‘Song of the Three Sisters’ demonstrates, for Eliot, ‘Tennyson’s classical learning and his mastery of metre’: ‘A young man who can write like that has not much to learn about metric; and the young man who wrote these lines somewhere between 1828 and 1830 was doing something new. There is something here not derived from any of his predecessors.’²⁷ Eliot is writing in entirely Coleridgean terms here, drawn to Tennyson’s early ‘Genius’, which transcended the imitative tendencies of mere ‘Talent’. What Tennyson was doing at the age of twenty, then, was also what Pound was arguing of Eliot to Monroe: using an implied period of learning as a platform on which to attach a unique natural gift.

Although sometimes reticent to invoke his own practice as a poet in his early essays, there are a number of moments where Eliot refers to his own development explicitly. In his writings on Shakespeare in the 1930s, whose ‘normal [...] beginnings’ he had earlier compared

²² ‘William Blake’, 190-91.

²³ ‘The Mysticism of Blake’, *Complete Prose*, III, 239-244 (242).

²⁴ ‘William Blake’, 188.

²⁵ ‘*In Memoriam*’, *Complete Prose*, V, 323-336 (331).

²⁶ ‘*In Memoriam*’, 323.

²⁷ ‘*In Memoriam*’, 324.

with Blake's, Eliot sought a comparison with himself.²⁸ In 'Mr Murry's Shakespeare' (1936), the Bard is said to have

arrived in a very short number of years at a maturity which seems complete: no one has ever gone further in a short time. We cannot explain that away by saying that he started ripe: the early works are there to disprove it. But unlike most of us, he wasted no time; and everything he wrote he turned to account for his further development.²⁹

Before the posthumous publication of *Poems Written in Early Youth* and *Inventions of the March Hare*, that final tag, 'unlike most of us', smacked of Eliot's self-deprecation, with the reality being that he, like Shakespeare, 'wasted no time' in his development. Eliot's own *Collected Poems 1909-1935* (1936), published only a year before this review, was complicit in such a ruse. When Eliot came to collect his poems together in 1925, 1935, and finally in 1963, we are told each time that *Prufrock and Other Observations* appeared, as it did, in 1917. Given that each of the volumes begins with these poems, however, we wonder why the collection titles begin at '1909' and not 1917, or even 1915, when 'Prufrock' first appeared on its own in print. Now, thanks to the *Inventions of the March Hare*, we are aware that the '1909' refers to a single poem, 'Conversation Galante' drafted in November of that year.³⁰ For readers at the time, though, as Jayme Stayer points out, one logical inference was that it referred to the first poem in its entirety, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'.³¹ By starting his collection at '1909', rather than '1917', Eliot reinforced the myth of his having 'started ripe', no matter what he said in his essays.

If recent criticism of Eliot's early writing has had one major impulse, it has been to dispel this myth of immediate 'ripe[ness]'. Ever since Ronald Schuchard uncovered the content of Eliot's

²⁸ See 'William Blake', 188.

²⁹ 'Mr. Murry's Shakespeare', *Complete Prose*, v, 387-391 (388).

³⁰ See T. S. Eliot, *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 346.

³¹ Stayer, *Becoming*, 60.

Extension Lectures in 1974, his early reading in particular has captured critical interest, in the hope of isolating the elements that informed his stylistic development.³² In an article on the schoolboy Eliot, for instance, Jayme Stayer unearthed a clutch of documents from his prep school, including ledgers detailing the courses which Eliot took, alongside school curricula and lists of textbooks.³³ One intriguing fact to come out of these discoveries is how Eliot's earliest interactions with poetry were managed. In 1904, while in his seventh year at the school, Eliot's English teacher at Smith Academy relied almost entirely on the use of anthologies, with particular reference to the lyrics in Francis Turner Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* (1861). If we left our awareness of Eliot's opinions on Palgrave to the prose he published later in life, we would be forgiven for thinking he assigned it no value as creative stimulus. In *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), he is dismissive of such Victorian relics: 'The instruments of Arnold's time appear now, of course, very antiquated: his was the epoch of Ward's *English Poets*, and of *The Golden Treasury*, birthday albums and calendars with a poetical quotation for each day'.³⁴ Nevertheless, by tracing the process by which he composed his first published poem, 'A Lyric' (1905), we are not only able to restore the debt that Eliot owed to Palgrave, but also unearth just how *unmiraculous* the schoolboy's compositions really were.

Later in life, Eliot tried to flatten the source-matrix of 'A Lyric' by emphasising its status as 'an imitation of Ben Jonson', and it is an interpretation that has been echoed by every commentator who has discussed the poem since.³⁵ Although Jonson's 'To Celia' is clearly a

³² See Ronald Schuchard 'T. S. Eliot as an Extension Lecturer, 1916-1919', *Review of English Studies* 25.98 (1974), 163-73; Ronald Schuchard, 'T. S. Eliot as an Extension Lecturer, 1916-1919. (Concluded)', *Review of English Studies* 25.99 (1974), 292-304.

³³ Jayme Stayer, 'T. S. Eliot as a Schoolboy: The Lockwood School, Smith Academy, and Milton Academy', *Twentieth Century Literature* 59.4 (2013), 619-656 (644).

³⁴ 'The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism', *Complete Prose*, IV, (574-694), 658.

³⁵ T. S. Eliot and Donald Hall, 'T. S. Eliot', in *The Paris Review Interviews*, ed. Philip Gourevitch, 4 vols (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007-09), I, 62-85, (64). See, for instance, Ackroyd, *T. S. Eliot*, 27; Miller, *The Making of an American Poet*, 39; Robert Crawford, *Young Eliot*, 74; Sarah Davison, *Modernist Parody: Imitation, Origination, and Experimentation in Early Twentieth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 43.

crucial precursor for stanza-form and subject matter, it is curious to scent the influence of other writers on Eliot's vocabulary. In their commentary on the opening lines of 'A Lyric':

If Time and Space, as Sages say,
Are things which cannot be,
The sun which does not feel decay
No greater is than we.³⁶

Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue spend a page referring readers to Einstein's theory of relativity, Henri Poincaré's *Principles of Mathematical Physics*, Emerson's essay 'Self-Reliance' ('Time and space are but physiological colors which the eye makes'), and the philosophical essays Eliot published after completing a Ph.D. on F. H. Bradley.³⁷ Aside from two references to Jonson's 'To Celia', it is surprising that Ricks and McCue do not engage with the classroom context in which Eliot composed the poem.³⁸ Rather, with Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* in mind, we find the opposition of 'Time and Space' seven pages after 'To Celia' in a poem by Richard Lovelace: 'Though seas and land betwixt us both / Our faith and troth, / Like separated souls, / All time and space controls'.³⁹ To examine 'A Lyric' properly, it becomes necessary to focus on Eliot's 'intensive reading' of Palgrave's anthology.⁴⁰

The second stanza of 'A Lyric' reads:

The flowers I gave thee when the dew
Was trembling on the vine,
Were withered ere the wild bee flew
To suck the eglantine.
So let us haste to pluck anew
Nor mourn to see them pine,
And though our days of love be few
Yet let them be divine.

³⁶ 'A Lyric', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 223.

³⁷ See *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 1069-70.

³⁸ The copy of Eliot's poem preserved in the Hayward Bequest contains underlining of the words 'say' and 'vine' consistent with a teacher's marking. See "'If Time and Space as Sages Say", 1905-1943", Hayward Bequest, King's College, Cambridge, (GBR/0272/HB/V/2A).

³⁹ Richard Lovelace, 'To Lucasta, going beyond the seas', in Palgrave, Francis Turner, ed. *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1861), 81.

⁴⁰ On 'intensive reading', see Reinhard Wittman, 'Was there a Reading Revolution at the End of the Eighteenth Century?', in *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier (Oxford: Polity Press, 1999), 284-313.

(9-16).

Eliot's anachronisms reveal the way in which he immersed himself in the vocabulary of the first book of *The Golden Treasury*, where such terms as 'thee', 'ere', 'wild bee', and 'anew' proliferate. Curiously, though, a closer examination of vocabulary indicates that Eliot was inspired less by Jonson and Lovelace's entries, and instead favoured more surprising poets whose influence at this stage in his development has gone unattributed. The first two lines, 'The flowers I gave thee when the dew / Was trembling on the vine' may have a source in Herrick's 'To Daffodils': 'the pearls of morning's dew / N'er to be found again', but there is a more startling connection with lines from Milton's 'Il Penseroso', which appears twenty pages after 'To Celia':

The hairy gown and mossy cell,
Where I may sit and rightly spell
Of every star that heaven doth show,
And every herb that sips the dew;
Till old experience do attain
To something like prophetic strain.⁴¹

Milton's yoking of 'dew' with the 'prophetic strain' reaches Eliot's 'Lyric' through the 'sages' of the opening line (a word which also appears in 'Il Penseroso') and the 'dew' on his flowers. Lexical borrowings from 'Il Penseroso' do not end here; the line: 'the wild bee flew' may also be drawn from Milton's poem: 'While the bee with honey'd thigh / That at her flowery work doth sing'. Immediately preceding 'Il Penseroso' in *The Golden Treasury* is another of Milton's short poems, 'L'Allegro', and given Eliot's debt to the former it comes as little surprise that there is also borrowing from this source. Upon seeing that curiously specific plant 'eglantine' in Eliot's 'Lyric', we would be forgiven for turning to the end of Palgrave's anthology, to read

⁴¹ Robert Herrick, 'To Daffodils', in *Golden Treasury*, 89-90; John Milton, 'Il Penseroso', in *Golden Treasury*, 96-100. Eliot had previously read these two poems of Milton, according to the *Smith Academy Catalogue*, the term before. See Stayer, 'T. S. Eliot as a Schoolboy', 644.

the poems by Keats and Shelley where the plant features.⁴² However, it is in ‘L’Allegro’ that the word first appears: ‘And at my window bid good-morrow, / Through the sweetbriar, or the vine, / Or the twisted eglantine’, and the likelihood that Eliot borrowed the plant from here, and not from the Romantics, is compounded by the fact that ‘vine’ rhymes with ‘eglantine’ in Milton, as it does in Eliot’s poem.⁴³

Finding evidence for Eliot’s intensive reading of *The Golden Treasury* is significant not only for the reconstruction of his early compositional process, but also for understanding how the older Eliot revised the narrative of his youth in order to mislead editors into making excessively intellectual annotations of this classroom exercise. In a lecture presented to Midwestern school teachers in Chicago in 1959, Eliot cited the two poems of Milton within a discussion of the teaching of English: ‘poetry is something which goes on being written, which is being written now while the pupils are sitting at their desks construing L’Allegro or Il Penseroso’.⁴⁴ Indeed, these two poems prove a point of contact elsewhere in the lecture; Eliot refers to them again while criticising ‘the method by which I was introduced – academically, I mean – to English poetry’, where he was forced to ‘memorize and declaim, in front of the class, Antony’s oration and Portia’s quality of mercy, [...] But I also disliked *L’Allégro* and *Il Penseroso*: I am thankful that I did not have to study *Lycidas* in the same way.’⁴⁵ His use of ‘memorize and declaim’ is curious, as Eliot claims that his practice of poaching words ruined the poems for him, despite it being fundamental to the composition of his later poems. While it is conceivable, when Eliot discussed ‘A Lyric’ as an older critic, that he had forgotten his debt to *The Golden Treasury*, it may equally be argued that he chose instead to emphasise its

⁴² See John Keats, ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, in *Golden Treasury*, 245; Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘A Dream of the Unknown’, in *Golden Treasury*, 271.

⁴³ John Milton, ‘L’Allegro’, in *Golden Treasury*, 92-96.

⁴⁴ ‘On Teaching the Appreciation of Poetry’, *Complete Prose*, VIII, 405-415 (408)

⁴⁵ ‘On Teaching the Appreciation of Poetry’, 408.

Jonsonian influence given his celebrated essay on 'Ben Jonson' in the *Sacred Wood* (1920), and his later disparagement of Milton.⁴⁶

Within years of writing 'A Lyric', then, Eliot was divesting himself of the tools with which he first learnt to write poetry, and the fate of Palgrave as the twentieth century progressed could only have accelerated that process. In 1929, Ezra Pound proposed a project which would see him produce a 'twelve-volume anthology' of poetry in which 'each poem was chosen not merely because it was a nice poem or a poem Aunt Hepsy liked, but because it contained an invention, a definite contribution to the art of verbal expression.'⁴⁷ Upon receiving a rejection from the publisher, however, Pound inferred that his anthological model, one which promoted 'invention' over 'gems', was refused not on aesthetic merit, but because 'there were thousands of pounds sterling invested in electro-plate, and the least change in the public taste, let alone swift, catastrophic changes, would depreciate the value of those electros'.⁴⁸ Pound's target is the 'doddard Palgrave', to whom Macmillan owed a vast proportion of its profitability. By using its 'electros' as a metaphor for the static canon that Palgrave's anthology embodied, Pound claims that volumes like *The Golden Treasury* are resistant to change, a notion later compounded by Frank Lentricchia's argument that it 'inaugurated and sustains taste immune to competitive versions, to other ideals of poetic shape and function'.⁴⁹ For Eliot to cast his poems as belonging to Pound's 'inventions' rather than Palgrave's 'gems', it required him to distance himself from his use of *The Golden Treasury* in his youth, particularly as the anthology had become recognised as a tool of the self-taught 'Aunt Hepsy', a category of writer from which Eliot sought to maintain an intellectual distance, and to which it is illuminating to turn.

⁴⁶ See 'Ben Jonson', *Complete Prose*, II, 150-64; 'Milton I', *Complete Prose*, V, 371-79.

⁴⁷ Ezra Pound, 'How to Read', in *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), 15-40 (17).

⁴⁸ Pound, 'How to Read', 18.

⁴⁹ Frank Lentricchia, *Modernist Quartet* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 55.

The Problem with Hardy

Pound's boast that Eliot had 'trained himself *and* modernised himself *on his own*' perhaps has a degree of flexibility built into it; he was well aware that Eliot had attended some of the best schools in the country. Nevertheless, Eliot's opinion of poets who had not experienced such luxury – and who had truly 'trained' themselves to write – is one that consists mostly of condescension, a stark contrast to his writings on the 'genius' of Blake and Shakespeare. Eliot claimed, somewhat infamously, that no author's mind was 'so antipathetic to my own as was that of Thomas Hardy'.⁵⁰ Indeed, the fate of Hardy in the criticism throughout the period of Eliot's maturity indicates why he singled out the Dorset poet as a figure, like Palgrave, from whom to separate himself. After Hardy's death in 1928, Lytton Strachey's essay 'Mr. Hardy's New Poems' (1914) was re-published complete with its cruel reversal: 'Harmony of sound, mastery of rhythm, the exact and exquisite employment of words – in these things, they declare, lies the very soul of poetry, [...] This is the theory which Mr. Hardy's volume seems especially designed to disprove.'⁵¹ With these words, Strachey initiated a critical canon of condescension from Bloomsbury writers. In 1928, Virginia Woolf claimed of Hardy that 'No style in literature, save Scott's, is so difficult to analyse; it is on the face of it so bad, yet it achieves its aim unmistakably. [...] like Dorsetshire itself, out of these very elements of stiffness and angularity his prose will put on greatness'.⁵² Woolf and Strachey paved the way for Eliot's own back-handed comments in *After Strange Gods* (1934): '[Hardy] was indifferent even to the prescripts of good writing: he wrote sometimes overpoweringly well, but always very carelessly; at times

⁵⁰ 'To Criticize the Critic', *Complete Prose*, VIII, 456-474 (466).

⁵¹ Lytton Strachey, 'Mr. Hardy's New Poems', in *Characters and Commentaries* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1933), 195-201 (196).

⁵² Virginia Woolf, 'The Novels of Thomas Hardy', in *Collected Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf, 4 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1966-67), I, 256-266 (265).

his style touches sublimity without ever having passed through the stage of being good.’⁵³ We notice a pattern here, certainly informed by class, of writers patronising the autodidactic Hardy. When he doesn’t try hard enough, Hardy is a ‘careless’ amateur; when he tries too hard, he is a self-made pretender ‘put[ting] on’ greatness. In 1983, Stephen Spender corroborated the evidence of *After Strange Gods*, when he recounted: ‘Eliot disliked H’s poetry, thought it amateurish (so did Hardy himself, who didn’t really consider himself a pro, comparable with Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne).’⁵⁴ Not only do we scent Spender’s own condescension in his parenthetical qualification, but he also asserts that it was ‘amateurish[ness]’ that put Eliot off Hardy. In this time before Larkin, only Auden sticks up for his ‘poetical father’: ‘Hardy’s faults as a craftsman, his rhythmical clumsiness, his outlandish vocabulary were obvious even to a schoolboy, and the young can learn best from those of whom, because they can criticize them, they are not afraid.’⁵⁵ To the poets that he managed at Faber, then, Eliot was branding himself as everything that Hardy was not.

In 1925, Ezra Pound complained to H. L. Mencken that Eliot ‘don’t see either Yeats or Hardy’.⁵⁶ On the contrary, by comparing the compositional process of Hardy’s early poems with Eliot’s ‘A Lyric’, we can argue that not only did Eliot see Hardy, but that he perhaps saw himself in him, a version of himself worth burying. Mirroring Eliot’s use of Palgrave as a tool for his own juvenile development, Hardy sought literary training through cruder instruments. Critics of Hardy’s poetry often point to the years he was serving as an architect’s assistant in London in the 1860s as a crucial stage in his attempts to teach himself to write, when he dreamt of being admitted to Cambridge.⁵⁷ During these two years, he ‘read and wrote exclusively’,

⁵³ *After Strange Gods, Complete Prose*, v, 15-55 (40).

⁵⁴ Stephen Spender, *Journals, 1939-1983* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985), 473.

⁵⁵ W. H. Auden, ‘A Literary Transference’, in *Hardy: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Albert J. Guerard (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 135-142 (141).

⁵⁶ ‘To H. L. Mencken: February 1925’, in *Selected Letters of Ezra Pound*, 270.

⁵⁷ See Florence Hardy and Thomas Hardy, *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1891* (London: Macmillan, 1928), 61ff.

and purchased apparatus he hoped would accelerate his poetic capabilities.⁵⁸ In addition to such technical volumes as Walker's *Rhyming Dictionary* (1851) and Nuttall's *Standard Pronouncing Dictionary* (1863), he also received *The Golden Treasury* from Horace Moule, a book he came to associate with the cultivation of his friend, the opposite of Eliot's impression of the volume from the 1930s onwards.⁵⁹ Using a notebook he had acquired and titled *Studies, Specimens &c.*, Hardy filled four pages with words and phrases extracted from *The Golden Treasury* in what Dalziel and Millgate call 'vocabulary-building exercises', and we see them litter his earliest compositions in exactly the same way as Eliot's 'Lyric'.⁶⁰

When Hardy approached the writing of his sonnet sequence 'She, to Him', he looked to those of his specimens from *The Golden Treasury* that were drawn from the same form, taking as his primary influence the inclusions by Shakespeare. With reference to the notebook, we can reconstruct the compositional process of these sonnets through Hardy's borrowings, a number of which are concentrated in the opening three lines of the first poem:

When you shall see me lined by tool of Time,
My lauded beauties carried off from me,
My eyes no longer stars as in their prime.⁶¹

The personification of Time is drawn from 'Sonnet 65' where Hardy extracts the phrase 'Time's best jewel' into his notebook from the lines 'where, alack, / Shall time's best jewel from time's chest lie hid?' Also in *Studies, Specimens &c.* is the phrase 'divining eyes', which Hardy extracted from 'Sonnet 106', as the eyes of his speaker become 'no longer stars as in their prime'. The final borrowing in the opening three lines is the final word, 'prime'. Hardy copied this word into *Studies & Specimens &c.* from Shakespeare's 'It was a lover and his

⁵⁸ See Pamela Dalziel and Michael Millgate, 'Introduction', in *Thomas Hardy's 'Studies, Specimens &c.'* Notebook, ed. Pamela Dalziel and Michael Millgate (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), ix-xxii (xi).

⁵⁹ See Dalziel and Millgate, 'Introduction', xvi-xviii.

⁶⁰ Dalziel and Millgate, 'Introduction', xv. The specimens from *The Golden Treasury* are found in *Studies, Specimens &c.*, 8-11, marked by Hardy as 'Gol. Trea'.

⁶¹ Thomas Hardy, 'She, to Him', *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* (London: Harper & Brothers, 1898), 29.

lass': 'For love is crownèd with the prime'. The four sonnets that make up the 'She, to Him' sequence have a total of eleven lexical borrowings, all traceable to entries from *The Golden Treasury* which Hardy copied into his *Studies, Specimens &c.* notebook. With his notebook presumably open on his desk while composing the series, it creates an impression of the composition as the poetic equivalent of painting by numbers.

Hardy's tendency to implant words into his verse from his notebook has led to accusations of 'awkwardness', or what Auden called 'clumsiness'. His style is variously labelled 'a heterogeneous assortment of words,' 'a babel,' 'an oddity,' 'Frankensteinian,' and these only in one volume by Dennis Taylor.⁶² But this awkwardness, like his 'amatuerish[ness]' is also considered a crucial component of his ostensible 'sincerity'. For R. P. Hewett, the awkwardness of Hardy's poetry is accidental: 'Perhaps its overwhelming quality is its honesty – an honesty which sometimes causes clumsiness, cragginess, awkwardness, but precludes entirely the elegant smoothness which was common in Victorian poetry, and so often concealed insincerity, or at least lack of real concern, in the poet.'⁶³ For Hewett, what makes Hardy's poems more sincere than his Victorian contemporaries is a willingness to resist perfectionism, his 'honesty' demanded a form of expression that mirrored the randomness of experience itself. For Eliot, though, Hardy's 'sincere' amateurism came with its own problems:

The work of the late Thomas Hardy represents an interesting example of a powerful personality uncurbed by any institutional attachment or by submission to any objective beliefs; unhampered by any ideas, or even by what sometimes acts as a partial restraint upon inferior writers, the desire to please a large public. He seems to me to have written as nearly for the sake of 'self-expression' as a man well can; and the self which he had to express does not strike me as a particularly wholesome or edifying matter of communication.⁶⁴

⁶² Dennis Taylor, *Hardy's Language and Victorian Philology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 11; 4; 7; 306.

⁶³ R. P. Hewett, *A Choice of Poets: An Anthology of Poets from Wordsworth to the Present Day* (London: Harrap, 1968), 130.

⁶⁴ *After Strange Gods*, 40.

In this dismantling of Hardy, we notice how much of it is concerned with size; the personality is ‘uncurbed’, ‘unhampered’, lacking the ‘restraint’ often demanded by a ‘large public’. Ultimately, Hardy’s ‘self-expression’ is excessive, far beyond the value of its insight, unlike Blake’s early attempts to do ‘something small’.

Eliot and the Composition Class

In desperate pursuit of poetic acclaim, Hardy’s production of nearly a thousand poems has led to the charge that he lacked the ability to discern which of them were successes. Roy Morrell wrote: ‘it is usually agreed that the number of Hardy’s poems meriting serious attention is not large in relation to the bulk of his collected verse’, and it is a view that Eliot shared.⁶⁵ Writing to Morrell in 1964 – possibly giving him the idea – Eliot admitted: ‘My only complaint against [Hardy’s poems] is that there are too many of them, and the effect would be more impressive if he had pruned down his collection to the best.’⁶⁶ But such an exercise would have opposed Hardy’s instincts; indeed, the strength of his desire to become a poet led to a scatter-gun approach to writing and to publication.

That Eliot may have come to associate textual overproduction with the cruder methods of development of poets like Hardy is recoverable in his refusal to publish very much from an early age. When he arrived at Harvard in 1906, Eliot entered the world of student writing surprisingly late. It is not until the summer of his first year that he published two poems in the *Harvard Advocate*, ‘Song: When we came home across the hill’ and ‘Song: if space and time, as sages say’, a revised version of his Palgravian ‘Lyric’ written two years earlier.⁶⁷ Then, after

⁶⁵ Roy Morrell, *Thomas Hardy: The Will and the Way* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1965), 120.

⁶⁶ Eliot ‘To Roy Morrell, 15 May 1964’, quoted in ‘To Paul Elmer More, 18 May 1933’, *Letters*, VI, 584n.

⁶⁷ See ‘Song: When we came home across the hill’, *Harvard Advocate* 83.6 (24 May 1907), 93; ‘Song: if space and time, as sages say’, *Harvard Advocate* 83.7 (3 June 1907), 96.

more than a year's hiatus, in November 1908 he published two poems in successive issues of the magazine, 'Before Morning' and 'Circe's Palace'.⁶⁸ Eliot's decision to publish these pieces after seventeen months' delay is explained by what this qualified him to do next. You could not be nominated to the board of the *Advocate* until it had published three pieces of your work. When Eliot joined as an editor on the 26th January 1909 in his third year, he had published only these four poems in its pages in nearly three years as a student. The slowness with which he involved himself in the magazine is puzzling for someone who would later be known for his career as an editor; one of his closest friends, Conrad Aiken, was in the year below Eliot, yet had published his three qualificatory pieces by February of his first year, and had been on the board for almost a year before Eliot joined. Eliot later claimed such hesitancy was intentional: 'I wrote a few [poems] at Harvard, just enough to qualify to an editorship on *The Harvard Advocate*, which I enjoyed'.⁶⁹ But publishing 'just enough' was a curious stance for someone who edited a student magazine. Typically, joining the board was viewed as an opportunity to flood the magazine with your writing. When Aiken was appointed an editor in March 1908, he published a further twenty-six verse and prose pieces, practically something in every number. Eliot, by stark contrast, put forward only six poems between January 1909 and his graduation in June 1910, and of the three prose pieces of his that were published, two were book reviews that his position on the board obliged him to write. Eliot published so little in the *Advocate* that it even prompted his mother to ask: 'I suppose you have been [...] too busy to write for the *Advocate*, since you have sent no more copies.'⁷⁰

While the other editors swamped the *Advocate* with their poems, Eliot preferred to collect his compositions in private. It has been well-known since Christopher Ricks' edition of *Inventions of the March Hare* that in the summer of 1909, when he was about to enter his fourth

⁶⁸ See 'Before Morning', *Harvard Advocate* 86.4 (13 November 1908), 53; 'Circe's Palace', *Harvard Advocate* 86.5 (25 November 1908), 66.

⁶⁹ Eliot and Hall, 'T. S. Eliot', in *Paris Review Interviews*, 64.

⁷⁰ Charlotte C. Eliot, 'From His Mother, 3 April 1910', *Letters*, I, 12.

year at Harvard, Eliot purchased a notebook into which he would draft poems that marked a significant departure from the four stilted pieces he had published before he joined the *Advocate* board. The factors which contributed to this creative departure have been recounted time and again in studies of Eliot, following in almost every respect the narrative which Eliot himself crafted of his fortuitous discovery of the second edition of Arthur Symons' *Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1908) in the library of the Harvard Union.⁷¹ However, coinciding with the period in which he was supposedly absorbing Laforgue 'on his own', Eliot had also elected a class led by Charles Townsend Copeland, 'English 12'. Billed as 'English Composition' in the University Catalogue, Eliot may have been encouraged to attend by his brother, Henry, who declared himself a 'Copey' acolyte in a dedicatory poem: 'If wit and madness be as like as Pope and others tell, / Then Copey by the merest squeak escapes the padded cell'.⁷² The shift in Eliot's subject matter between the Palgravian conventionalism of his early *Advocate* poems and the first cityscapes of the *March Hare* notebook is usually attributed to a mixture of Baudelaire and Laforgue, but when we reconstruct the syllabus of Copey's class, we also discover an emphasis on urban observation. One of Eliot's classmates in English 12, Heywood Broun, claimed that 'the class invariably wrote sad poems about the ocean and things like that. They said that it was going to go on and on and they would not, and Copeland had to grumble like a heavy swell on a rock-bound coast to get them out of it.'⁷³ Eliot's pre-Copey poems – 'A Lyric' with its *carpe diem* theme included – were reined in so that 'by the end of the year', Broun continues, students 'would be writing readily about things which they knew'. Copey's schedule for another writing class as iterated in *Freshman English and Theme-Correcting* (1901) reveals the focus he placed on personal experience. In October and November, Copey

⁷¹ See Eliot and Hall, 'T. S. Eliot', *Paris Review Interviews*, 65.

⁷² Harvard University Faculty of Arts and Sciences, 'Announcement of the Courses of Instruction Offered by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, 1909-1910' (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1909), 20; Henry Eliot, quoted in J. Donald Adams, *Copey of Harvard: A Biography of Charles Townsend Copeland* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 101.

⁷³ Heywood Broun, quoted in Adams, *Copey of Harvard*, 174.

recommended that subjects for daily themes are to be ‘Things that they have lately seen in and about Cambridge, glimpses of the college here and there, little episodes of their everyday life,’ allowing students to ‘show their alertness, and often to describe with the eye on the subject’.⁷⁴ Such ‘alertness’ is to be amplified by subsequent assignments to specific locations: ‘different parts of the gymnasium, it may be, or the tennis courts on a bright afternoon, or the Yard, or the river and its crews, or Harvard Square at some busy season.’⁷⁵

Eliot’s return to Harvard for his final year as an undergraduate is usually seen to bear the fruit of his reading of French poetry, but it is necessary to combine this with the approach to composition he would have acquired in English 12. During the Fall semester, Eliot embarked on a series of research trips designed to garner fresh experience for his poems. His ‘First Caprice in North Cambridge’ is given the date of composition of November 1909 in the *March Hare*, into which it was copied early the following year.⁷⁶ The presence of used objects that litter the landscape, ‘a heap of broken barrows’, ‘dirty windows’, ‘trampled mud and grass’ display acute observational instinct, Baudelaire filtered through Copey.⁷⁷ That such close – even paranoid – observation was Eliot’s instinctive skill meant that Copey’s encouragement to seek fresh settings was an encouragingly lucrative strategy. Copey was ‘an old newspaper man’, Van Wyck Brooks tells us, whose course was largely considered preparation for a career in journalism: ‘I would never have seen what I did had it not been for [Copey] teaching me’, testified war correspondent John Reed.⁷⁸ It should not be considered a coincidence that many of English 12’s most famous alumni (John Reed, Walter Lippmann, and George Seldes among them) went on to become journalists, proving that, with Copey’s help, Eliot was able to unlock an impressive capacity for observational objectivity.

⁷⁴ Charles Townsend Copeland and Henry Milner Rideout, *Freshman English and Theme-Correcting in Harvard College* (New York; Boston: Silver, Burdett and Co., 1901), 4; 7.

⁷⁵ Copeland and Rideout, *Freshman English*, 31.

⁷⁶ ‘First Caprice in North Cambridge’, in *Inventions of the March Hare*, 13.

⁷⁷ ‘First Caprice in North Cambridge’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 1, 235.

⁷⁸ Van Wyck Brooks and John Reed, quoted in Adams, *Copey of Harvard*, 156.

Copey's inducement to seek fresh experience for more original compositions was so well-known among students as to be the topic of class jokes. Published in the *Advocate* in the same number as Eliot's revised Palgravian 'Lyric' was Randolph Edgar's, 'The Grind', which follows a student of English as he completes his composition assignments. Having spent the vacation at a friend's family home in rural 'Chapmansville, Vermont' instead of his usual New York City, the cosmopolitan Thurman returns to Harvard to the realization that 'I had forgotten a long theme, due, I think, in something like three days'.⁷⁹ Desperately hunting for a topic, Thurman 'consulted my scrapbook, looked over my correspondence file and went through a pile of illustrated papers, but it was no use. Then I thought of my experience at Josiah's and in an hour or so I had a story'. Exploiting his experience in Chapmansville for inspiration, Josiah mocks his friend: 'I gave a somewhat exaggerated description of the Case home, told of Josiah's attitude towards life in general in any but flattering terms'. Before he could submit the theme, however, Thurman is told by his roommate that Josiah had found his way into his room where he read and stole the piece of writing, and left a note for his friend in which he 'proceeded to give me his opinion of a person who would accept another's hospitality and then make fun of his home.' Although it transpires that Josiah had in fact not read the theme, and that the 'note' was actually written by Thurman's roommate as a practical joke ('You bit beautifully, old chap!'), the consequences of Copey's direction to write from fresh, atypical, experience was so established at Harvard as to be worthy of satire.⁸⁰

Perhaps buoyed by the freshness of his 'First Caprice', Eliot followed Copey's advice once more, and in the 'Second Caprice in North Cambridge', he journeyed further from the Yard to

The helpless fields that lie
Sinister, sterile and blind –

⁷⁹ Randolph Edgar, 'The Grind', *Harvard Advocate* 83.7 (3 June 1907), 102-06 (105).

⁸⁰ Edgar, 'The Grind', 106.

Entreat the eye and rack the mind
Demand your pity.⁸¹

Such ‘entreat[ing]’ of eyes and ‘rack[ing]’ of mind is precisely what Eliot sought on his North Cambridge research trips, and there he observed objects that would have pleased Copey’s journalistic eye: ‘ashes and tins in piles, / Shattered bricks and tiles / And the débris of the city’ (6-8). Referencing Eliot’s direct address of the reader, ‘Demand your pity’, Jayme Stayer has detected ‘didacticism’ in these opening lines, which betrays ‘insecurity on the poet’s part as to whether or not his new-found tools are working’.⁸² Although Stayer is referring only to Eliot’s new-found French ‘tools’ and not to the methods gleaned from English 12, his idea is useful with reference to Eliot’s search for fresh experience. Indeed, we might claim that by assuring his second-person listener that such a setting does ‘entreat the eye and rack the mind’, he is also reassuring himself that it is worthy of poetic exploration. Such a view is compounded by the second stanza, where Eliot repeats the image that opened the poem:

Let us pause
With these fields that hold and rack the brain
(What: again?)

(11-13).

By incorporating the self-questioning aside ‘(What: again?)’, it is as if Copey has entered the poem, to ask Eliot why he has repeated the same image of the ‘fields’ that ‘rack the mind’ from the first stanza. Here, though, Eliot’s repetition is not redundant, but effective, a reinforcement of the banality of life in North Cambridge. In the New Year, Eliot copied these first two research-trip poems into the *March Hare*, filling it with fair copies the same way he had to submit to Copeland the revised version of his theme from the previous week.⁸³

⁸¹ ‘Second Caprice in North Cambridge’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 1, 235.

⁸² Jayme Stayer, ‘Searching for the Early Eliot: *Inventions of the March Hare*’, in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. David Chinitz (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 107-19 (117).

⁸³ See ‘Second Caprice in North Cambridge’, in *Inventions of the March Hare*, 15.

In the months after his graduation, Eliot composed two more Copeyan ‘research trip’ pieces akin to those in ‘North Cambridge’, poems which would become some of his most celebrated. The first two ‘Preludes’ were originally given locational titles in the *March Hare*: ‘Prelude in Dorchester (Houses)’, subsequently changed to ‘Roxbury’, and ‘Prelude in Roxbury’, indicating the observations to have supposedly taken place in two seedy South Boston neighbourhoods.⁸⁴ Whereas in the ‘Caprices’ it was argued that Eliot was questioning the appropriateness of his new-found compositional tools, in ‘Preludes’ he emphasises not the process of writing, but the material on which the poems were written:

And now a gusty shower wraps
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves around your feet,
And newspapers from vacant lots[.]⁸⁵

It doesn’t appear to matter what information the ‘newspapers’ carry; indeed, the papers themselves are the appendix to the main subject of the sentence, the ‘withered leaves’, as the written word appropriates the ephemerality of decaying organic ‘scraps’. In ‘Prelude in Roxbury’, morning breaks to perceptions resisting certainty and wholeness; the ‘stale smell of beer’ is ‘faint’, we see not whole people but ‘hands’, not houses but ‘rooms’, and ‘muddy feet / that press / To early coffee stands’ (3-5). Playing on the multiple meanings of ‘pressed’ – the verb not only for hurrying and for making coffee, but also for printing text – the ‘feet’ around which the newspaper wrapped itself in the first ‘Prelude’ make their reappearance. But as they imprint themselves on the ‘sawdust’, the impression is shown to be as ephemeral as that of newspaper type, destined to dissolve itself with the movement of the wind.

So why, we might ask, did Eliot not seek *Advocate* publication for his newest compositions, as all the other editors did, choosing instead to copy them into his notebook

⁸⁴ See *Inventions of the March Hare*, 334-35.

⁸⁵ ‘Preludes, I’ *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 15.

where they may fade away? Jayme Stayer's argument is that the *March Hare* offered 'a private workshop where novel creations could be tried and failures could be hidden', something he places in direct opposition to 'the imaginative space in which the young Eliot composed scripted assignments, set-pieces for school periodicals, or farewells for graduation'.⁸⁶ However, it remains unresolved why Eliot – who thought the poems good enough to write up in fair copy – did not want to see them published. As Eliot puzzled out the new-found voice that he had forged by combining Copey and Laforgue, he published only four poems in the *Advocate* in his senior year: 'Nocturne', 'Humoresque (After J. Laforgue)', 'Spleen', and the graduation poem 'Ode'. In the same span of time, he copied four times that number into his notebook. While he was publishing 'just enough', then, the young Eliot was writing far more, a notion he perhaps alludes to in the notebook itself, when he writes in 'Mandarins': 'Still one more thought for pen and ink / (Though not indicative of spleen)'.⁸⁷ Appearing far more like Hardy and his hyper-productiveness than Eliot may have wanted to admit, one of the greatest surprises about the *Inventions of the March Hare* is not the content of the poems, but the sheer number of them.

That this clashes with the aesthetics of 'littleness' that he was cultivating in his minimalist observations of North Cambridge may offer one explanation as to Eliot's decision not to seek publication. It is a by-product of participation in a composition class, Mark McGurl claims, to spill a lot of ink. Taking novelist Thomas Wolfe as his case study, McGurl writes how 'Wolfe now began to write down, mostly as narrative, but sometimes in long lists, everyone and everything he had ever seen, felt, or believed, filling "enormous ledgers, filling book after book in [a] furious attempt to define the physical limits" of his "experience"'.⁸⁸ McGurl attributes this habit to the program Wolfe had attended: 'The enormous crates of

⁸⁶ Stayer, 'Searching for the Early Eliot', 109.

⁸⁷ 'Mandarins', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 245.

⁸⁸ Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 98.

manuscript he left behind as a result of this “torrent” of self-expression would provide the material not only for the massive tomes published in his lifetime [...] but also for the very long, posthumously published third and fourth novels.’ That a composition class encouraged the production of lots of first-hand experiential ‘material’ is consistent with Conrad Aiken’s testimony that in classes such as Copey’s ‘more work is done per man than in many a course in Literature’, Eliot’s ‘research trip’ poems included.⁸⁹ Publishing ‘just enough’ in the *Advocate*, rather than following Aiken in printing everything he wrote, Eliot was crafting the illusion that he wrote only when inspired, not needing to over-produce in the manner of a desperate student at a writing program, or the autodidactic and effusively ‘self-expressive’ Thomas Hardy.

Eliot’s choice of electives at Harvard has puzzled critics for decades. Professors Copey, Briggs, Wendell, and Baker all offered composition courses that attracted the brightest literary minds of the future, and their collaborative model would be crucial to Eliot in the writing of his major poems and plays. Eliot’s lack of enthusiasm first troubled Herbert Howarth: ‘In 1909 he was eligible for Course 47. Why did he not choose it?’ Howarth refuses to let the issue go: ‘Why did Eliot neglect the opportunity to practice craftsmanship, taking, instead, a long, lonely, dogged way forward without Baker’s help?’⁹⁰ When J. Donald Adams contacted him for anecdotes for his biography of Copey, Eliot responded ‘I don’t really think, to be quite candid, that the course was very profitable to me. [...] I have racked my brains in vain to think of anything that I could offer of value. I think the difficulty was that I could not learn to write English according to the methods by which Copeland taught it.’⁹¹ Historians of Copey’s class have taken Eliot’s account at face value; Edward Butscher claimed that a minority of students ‘responded negatively to Copeland’s theatrical techniques and rigid prose formula, his

⁸⁹ Conrad Aiken, quoted in Edward Butscher, *Conrad Aiken: Poet of the White Horse Vale* (Athens; London: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 126.

⁹⁰ Herbert Howarth, *Notes on Some Figures Behind T. S. Eliot* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965), 143.

⁹¹ Eliot, quoted in Adams, *Copey of Harvard*, 153-54.

emphasis on locating the correct phrase, a Kiplingesque vividness and the like,’ but ‘locating the correct phrase’ might strike us as a very Eliotic thing to do.⁹² Most likely, Eliot adopted this stance from his Harvard mentor, Irving Babbitt, who sharply criticised the elective system which Mark McGurl claims gave life to such composition classes.⁹³ When Babbitt mocked ‘the more humanitarian members of our faculties’ who are ‘ready to waste their energies in trying to elevate youths above the level to which they belong, not only by their birth, but by their capacity’, we witness, *mutatis mutandis*, the very critique that was levelled against Hardy, who was accused of ‘making experiments in the form of language which he does not seem clearly to understand and in a style for which he was assuredly not born.’⁹⁴ Nevertheless, Adams suspected that students suspicious of Copey’s methods ‘got more than they realized, or were willing to admit’ out of the course. When it came to branding himself as a Poundian modernist, however, Eliot’s attendance at a composition class – like his use of *The Golden Treasury* – was not conducive to having ‘trained himself *and* modernized himself *on his own*’.

Learning to be Little: Harvard Excision

Despite the contradiction between Pound’s oft-quoted report about Eliot’s development and the fact of Eliot’s attendance at Copey’s composition course, the kind of stylistic ‘littleness’ that we usually associate with Pound is not so different from the typical product of the early-twentieth-century writing class. In ‘A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste’ (1913), we remember Pound’s most famous rule: ‘Use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal

⁹² Butscher, *Conrad Aiken*, 89.

⁹³ See McGurl, *Program Era*, 94.

⁹⁴ Irving Babbitt, ‘The College and the Democratic Spirit’, in *Literature and the American College; Essays in Defense of the Humanities* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1908), 72-87 (76); Mowbray Morris, ‘Culture and Anarchy’, in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R. G. Cox (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 214-21 (220).

something.⁹⁵ In addition to the thematic interest in little objects, Copey also advocated for a stylistic injunction towards littleness as a way of getting to the heart of meaning. The only surviving evidence of Copey's comments on Eliot's writing are in his undergraduate essay 'The Defects of Kipling', written on 2 March 1909 and recently published in the *Complete Prose*. In his feedback, Copey encouraged Eliot to condense and clarify: 'Altho' it is a great pleasure to see that you can at last swing a long sentence, swing several, each growing out of the one before, you must now be on your guard against becoming pompous, orotund, and voluminous'.⁹⁶ Copey instructs Eliot to delete duplicate adjectives: the 'fatal weakness penetrating and marring almost everything to which Kipling sets his hand' becomes only 'marring', and the 'restless and straining immaturity' becomes only 'restless'. In other student papers preserved in Copey's archive at Harvard, we witness his excisive instincts with greater clarity. On an assortment of papers, he writes insistently 'Be more definite', 'too often used', 'word misused', and 'a thoroughly interesting work, in spite of your primitive, monstrous, dog-tooth sentences'.⁹⁷

Although a lack of direct evidence makes it difficult to uncover exactly how Eliot's poetic style was influenced by this classroom injunction to brevity, a glance at the development of one of Eliot's contemporaries offers an insight. Eliot and E. E. Cummings briefly overlapped at Harvard while the former was a graduate student. Cummings elected far more English courses than Eliot (who had been intent on a career in Philosophy), and he found Dean Briggs's 'English 16: English Versification' especially valuable. While Copey's recommendation to seek fresh experience took Eliot to the streets of impoverished North Cambridge, Cummings went a step further, and his biographer documents his research trips to 'the seedier side of Boston' where he frequented 'the saloons of Washington Street', and visited 'Scollay Square

⁹⁵ Ezra Pound, 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste', *Poetry* 1.6 (March 1913), 200-06 (201).

⁹⁶ 'The Defects of Kipling', *Complete Prose*, I, 8-14 (13).

⁹⁷ See 'English 12 Student Papers, 1897-1925', in *Papers of Charles Townsend Copeland*, Harvard University Archives (HUG 4298.65 Box 1).

with its drunks, its prostitutes, its down-and-outers, its Salvation Army preachers'.⁹⁸ His poem 'In Healey's Palace I was sitting —' (1916) finds its speaker in a dingy bar populated by undesirables: 'Joe at the ivories,' 'Irene spitting / Rag into the stinking dizzy / Misbegotten Hall', and 'Lizzie, / Like a she-demon in a rift / Of Hell-smoke'.⁹⁹ The arrival of another group leads to a confrontation:

I saw two rah-rahs – caps, soft shirts,
Match-legs, the kind of face that hurts,
The walk that makes death sweet – Ted Gore
And Alec Ross; they had that whore
May between them. Don't know which,
One looked; and May said: 'The old bitch
Lulu, as I'm a virgin, boys!'

Richard Kennedy and George Firmage assert that this poem 'shocked his versification teacher', and yet, Cummings' trip to Healey's Palace was in many ways the next logical step of the instruction that Briggs provided.¹⁰⁰ Like Randolph Edgar's 'The Grind', the pursuit of fresh, unconventional experience was a convenient way to make one's compositions more original, and Cummings' poem even shares the name of a prostitute with Eliot's *March Hare* poem, 'Ballade pour la grosse Lulu'.¹⁰¹ The poem may also remind us of the original opening of *The Waste Land*, the scene at 'old Tom's place' which is set in the context of Boston Irish nightlife.¹⁰² For Cummings as for Eliot, then, the claustrophobia of the Harvard Yard and the injunction to seek fresh experience from their respective composition instructors led them to discover the kinds of rebellious settings that would define their early verse.

⁹⁸ Richard S. Kennedy, *Dreams in the Mirror: A Biography of E. E. Cummings*, 2nd ed. (New York: Liveright, 1994), 90.

⁹⁹ E. E. Cummings, 'In Healey's Palace I was sitting—' in *Etcetera: The Unpublished Poems of E. E. Cummings*, ed. Richard S. Kennedy and George James Firmage (New York: Liveright, 1983), 32.

¹⁰⁰ Richard S. Kennedy, 'Introduction', in *Etcetera*, xi-xii (xi).

¹⁰¹ See *Inventions of the March Hare*, 311-13.

¹⁰² See *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts*, ed. Valerie Eliot and Matthew Hollis, new ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 2022), 5.

Like Copey, Dean Briggs was revered enough by many of his former students to have inspired a memoir. In it, they described a trait that he shared with Eliot's teacher: 'One of his chief methods of helping a man to perfect his style was the method of excision [...] "Clearness, precision, life," one of his former students wrote – "these were what he demanded of an English style, and his method of securing them was to trim out the dead wood"''.¹⁰³ Briggs' infamous 'pruning-hook' closely resembles Copey's in his comments on student papers: 'it extended to phrases that could be made more compact, to infinitives that stood too much in a row, to paragraphs that rolled along with too much verbal fury.'¹⁰⁴ For a student like Cummings who was discovering Pound and his Imagist circle during his time in 'English 16', Briggs' injunction to brevity chimed with the poetry he was reading for pleasure, which included his fondness for the 'toothbrush' in Eliot's 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night'.¹⁰⁵ As a result of his interest in stylistic compression, Cummings felt impelled to revise his classroom poem 'the hours rise up' into a piece that would appear in his first published collection *Tulips and Chimneys* (1923) as 'Impression IV'. Richard Kennedy printed the original manuscript poem drafted in November 1914, with its swollen lines:

I see in the street where strong men are digging bread.
And I see the shining shops, and brutal faces of people.
Contented, hideous, happy, cruel people,
Cursing and laughing, dying and living, side by side.¹⁰⁶

Whereas this first draft averages eleven words per line, in the revised version, Cummings trims the poem to an average of between four and five.

i see in the street where strong
men are digging bread
and I see the brutal faces of
people contented hideous hopeless cruel happy

¹⁰³ Rollo Walter Brown, *Dean Briggs* (New York; London: Harper & Brothers, 1926), 82-83.

¹⁰⁴ Brown, *Dean Briggs*, 84.

¹⁰⁵ See Kennedy, *Dreams in the Mirror*, 95.

¹⁰⁶ Kennedy, *Dreams in the Mirror*, 122-23.

and it is day[.]¹⁰⁷

Creating this new poem ‘by removing all the excrescences’, so much of the poem is cut away between drafts that it is as if Cummings had the help of a Poundian excisor, as well as a Harvard composition instructor.¹⁰⁸

Where Cummings’s pursuit of littleness differs from Eliot’s, however, is in his approach to publication. While Eliot took over two and a half years to publish his first four poems in the *Advocate*, and only published a total of ten by the time he graduated, Cummings was being courted by the two Harvard magazines, the *Advocate* and the *Monthly*, and published a total of twenty-five poems in both. Cummings saw opportunities to publish everywhere, and his love of print gave birth to the early collection *Eight Harvard Poets* (1917), in which a group of Briggs’ students published their work together.¹⁰⁹ When Cummings’ first book, *Tulips and Chimneys*, eventually appeared, the editor refused to print half of the poems in the original manuscript, leading Cummings to print all of the omitted poems in a supplementary self-published volume, &. (1925). There are hints that Cummings acquired this habit from English 16. In the early months of the course, Briggs encouraged students to produce copious notes on metre, to collect images from their favourite poets, and to submit numerous drafts, an exercise that survives into the postwar writing programmes surveyed by Mark McGurl.¹¹⁰ As Cummings ventured into the seedier areas of Boston, we discover how ‘[h]e drew up lists of jokes and phrases from comic strips, vaudeville acts, and burlesque-house comedians and set down scraps of talk overheard on the Boston streets.’¹¹¹ The sheer number of documents which survive in his archive at Harvard testifies to the self-consciousness with which he visited such places in

¹⁰⁷ E. E. Cummings, *Tulips and Chimneys* (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1923), 80.

¹⁰⁸ Kennedy, *Dreams in the Mirror*, 123.

¹⁰⁹ See E. E. Cummings, S. Foster Damon, J. R. Dos Passos, Robert Hillyer, R. S. Mitchell, William A. Norris, Dudley Poore, Cuthbert Wright, *Eight Harvard Poets* (New York: L. J. Gomme, 1917).

¹¹⁰ See McGurl, *Program Era*, 98.

¹¹¹ Richard S. Kennedy, *E. E. Cummings Revisited* (New York: Twayne; Oxford: Maxwell Macmillan, 1994), 28.

search of material.¹¹² For Richard S. Kennedy, Cummings's decision to make use of his student experiments for *Tulips and Chimneys* is entirely expected: 'Since it is a first book of poems, it contains a good deal of apprentice work from the college years'.¹¹³ But this didn't have to be the case. Eliot's first book of poems, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, contained not a single poem published in a college magazine. While both Eliot and Cummings acquired an injunction to brevity in their Harvard composition classes and from Pound, then, it was Eliot who saw reputational potential in extending this aesthetics to his publication habits.

Poems Written in Early Youth

While the desire to print all that he produced may have left Cummings open to the charge – like Hardy before him – that he lacked the capacity for selection, it at least displayed an honesty missing from Eliot's secret writing. Indeed, Eliot's strategy of publishing 'just enough' (but writing much more) left him vulnerable to having his developmental mythology exposed as a far more laboured process than it had seemed. In pursuit of maintaining the appearance of the genius who 'took no pains', Eliot sought to keep a lid on his training exercises. In December 1950, twelve copies of a curious volume were published secretly by Bonniers in Stockholm. Writing to Donald Gallup in June of that year, John Hayward reported that:

Eliot has agreed to allow Bonniers, his Swedish publishers, to produce a tremendously private edition of 12 copies (including one for you) of his verse *Juvenilia*. Bonniers will keep 5-6 copies for themselves (one for each of the directors) on the understanding that they must never be sold or alienated.¹¹⁴

¹¹² See 'E. E. Cummings papers', Houghton Library, Harvard University (MS Am 1823-1823.10).

¹¹³ Kennedy, *Dreams in the Mirror*, 233.

¹¹⁴ John Hayward, 'To Donald Gallup, June 1950', quoted in *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 1066.

In order to understand what impelled Eliot to allow such a volume to appear, one has to track the publication history of these poems he first composed between 1905 and 1910, a narrative not yet explored in depth in a study of Eliot's work.

In 1938, to celebrate his fiftieth birthday, the editors of the *Harvard Advocate* wrote to Eliot to enquire about publishing a special issue featuring his poems originally published in that magazine, alongside some commentaries on his mature work. Eliot promptly agreed, with conditions: 'I should feel no shame in seeing my undergraduate verse for the *Advocate* reappear, so long as each of the poems you choose is dated.'¹¹⁵ Soon after, however, Eliot discovered that the editors had been approached by 'a literary agent' who 'persuaded them into thinking of reprinting the whole issue as a pamphlet'.¹¹⁶ Eliot asserted his position to Donald Brace, his American publisher: 'I definitely object to having these poems reprinted except in the *Advocate*. [...] Mr. Harry Brown appear[s] to be under the impression that the *Advocate* holds all rights. They can hardly maintain this after receiving my veto: if they should, we must come down on them.'¹¹⁷ So vexed did Eliot feel, that he wrote to Brown himself: 'Had I wished to make these poems public, I should have included them among my other poems long ago; and the fact that I have not done so is sufficient indication of my desire that they should not appear in public.'¹¹⁸ Eliot's 'rather stern tone' achieved more than his intention, when the editors suggested that they prohibit any mention of Eliot's early poems 'in any review of the *Advocate* in any other periodical', including one forthcoming in *Time* magazine.¹¹⁹ This proposal led to a weakening of tone from Eliot: 'Obviously you cannot prevent other periodicals reviewing the number of the *Advocate*, and I should not wish to put you in the

¹¹⁵ 'To Harry Brown, 24 June 1938', *Letters*, VIII, 902.

¹¹⁶ 'To Donald Brace, 18 November 1938', *Letters*, VIII, 992.

¹¹⁷ 'To Donald Brace, 18 November 1938', 992.

¹¹⁸ 'To Harry Brown, 18 November 1938', *Letters*, VIII, supplementary online letters <tseliot.com/letters/volumes/letters_volume_8_unpublished/by-date/lv8-1676>.

¹¹⁹ Brown, quoted in 'To Harry Brown, 20 December 1938', *Letters*, VIII, supplementary online letters <tseliot.com/letters/volumes/letters_volume_8_unpublished/by-date/lv8-1715>; 'To Henry Eliot, 23 December 1938', *Letters*, VIII, 1018.

position of trying to prevent it.’¹²⁰ Eliot’s desire for proper dating of the poems, and for them to only be published in the *Advocate* – where they had originally appeared – seems designed to contain the poems as best he could.

Although Eliot had caught the editors just in time in 1938, his instincts about the profiteering of the *Advocate* proved to be correct, when, ten years later, they republished the poems a second time, this time without informing him. Donald Hall recounts how the group of editors, conscious that the magazine was on ‘the perennial lip of crisis’ with countless debts, looked to Eliot’s poems as a way to drive up sales: ‘The refrigerator was full of beer that night. Pegasus [the literary editor] picked two of the drunker editors to type up Eliot’s poems while the rest of us finished pasting galleys.’¹²¹ Eliot wrote to the editors in February 1948: ‘I am surprised that you should reprint these poems without asking my permission.’¹²² His opinion of his juvenilia had hardened in the intervening years, as he pondered the state of his *oeuvre*: ‘Authors do not always like to see in circulation the poems which they have themselves rejected.’ After this unauthorised re-issuing of the poems in 1948, the editors succumbed to the temptation of literary agents, and put together Eliot’s compositions for a pamphlet, *The Undergraduate Poems of T. S. Eliot* (1949). 1,000 copies were produced before Eliot could intervene, and Hall described how the board ‘were withered by the letter, as fig trees are withered by messiahs’.¹²³ Donald Gallup noted that 750 copies were subsequently withdrawn from circulation, but that ‘some – and possibly all – of these appear to have found their way back into the market.’¹²⁴

¹²⁰ ‘To Harry Brown, 20 December 1938’, <tseliot.com/letters/volumes/letters_volume_8_unpublished/by-date/lv8-1715>.

¹²¹ Donald Hall, *The Ancient Glittering Eyes: Remembering Poets and More Poets* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1992), 77.

¹²² ‘T. S. Eliot to the Editors of the *Harvard Advocate*, 2 February 1948’, quoted in *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 1065.

¹²³ Hall, *Ancient Glittering Eyes*, 79.

¹²⁴ Donald Gallup, *T. S. Eliot: A Bibliography*, 2nd ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 1969), 82.

Struggling to control the dissemination of these early poems and bowing to the need to correct the ‘drunk’ versions, Eliot took matters into his own hands. With John Hayward as his intermediary, Eliot approached his Swedish publisher at Bonniers with plans for a private edition of *Poems Written in Early Youth*. Despite the initial reservations of the publishing house who were not able to ‘secure an assurance of absolute loyalty’, the scheme was a success, with the firm retaining four of the twelve copies ‘sealed up in the basement of Bonniers, just in case the news got out’.¹²⁵ Georg Svensson of Bonniers wrote just after Eliot’s death that ‘Eliot was so strict about this that although a copy was sent to the Swedish Academy, the Royal Librarian and the university libraries never got any although they can claim to have one free copy of every book printed.’¹²⁶ In fact, the contingency planning – preserved in Hayward’s archive at King’s College, Cambridge – was extensive: ‘If they should be claimed by the libraries we can stipulate that we only hand the copies over on condition that they are being regarded as secret deposits.’¹²⁷ Hayward’s biographer suggests that ‘the most likely explanation for the secrecy was that Eliot was, as usual, averse to printing anything he was not entirely satisfied by, and opposed to the kind of biographical and personal interest the collection might provoke.’¹²⁸ Unsurprisingly, however, rumours leaked about the existence of the volume, and the secrecy which shrouded the plan stimulated the very investigations it aimed to smother.

Despite the confidentiality of the 12-copy run, Eliot appeared to be paving the way for its subsequent re-issuing, writing to D. E. S. Maxwell five months after publication: ‘I am averse to any further republication of my juvenile poems. [...] I think they are verse of a kind which is much better printed, if at all, some time after the author’s death.’¹²⁹ Whether Eliot had

¹²⁵ ‘Åke Runnquist to John Hayward’, 5 April 1950’, Hayward Bequest, King’s College, Cambridge (GBR/0272/HB/V/1), f. 1.

¹²⁶ Georg Svensson, quoted in *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 1066.

¹²⁷ ‘Georg Bonnier to John Hayward, 14 December 1950’, Hayward Bequest, King’s College, Cambridge (GBR/0272/HB/V/1), f. 7.

¹²⁸ John Smart, *Tarantula’s Web: John Hayward, T. S. Eliot and their Circle* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 2013), 228.

¹²⁹ ‘To D. E. S. Maxwell, 22 May 1951’, quoted in *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 1066-67.

discussed this with Valerie Eliot is unknown, but sure enough in 1967 *Poems Written in Early Youth* was published again, this time under the Faber imprint with 15,000 copies printed in Britain, and 3,500 in America.¹³⁰ In her foreword, Valerie voiced regret that such a volume had to be produced in the first place: 'So much interest has been expressed in this collection, which was supervised by the author, that it seems wise to make it generally available as a corrective to the inaccurate, pirated versions.'¹³¹ Reviews of the volume indicated that the façade of spontaneous teenage genius was on its way to being shattered: 'it would be idle to pretend that these are great poems', wrote Allan Rodway, echoing the view of *Time* magazine: 'the editors did Eliot the less certain favor of printing eight of his undergraduate poems.'¹³² Indeed, we see the success of Eliot's strategy of publishing 'just enough' unravel completely when we turn to the reaction to the publication of *Inventions of the March Hare*: 'No, proclaims the *March Hare*, T. S. Eliot did not spring forth, in full armor, declaiming "Prufrock", from the head of Zeus'.¹³³

'very little but very good': The Economics of Littleness

Eliot is not the only poet whose reputation for perfection and adolescent genius rested on the relative smallness of his output. When his editor at Faber suggested that he include in his new collection some juvenile poems first printed in a private volume many years earlier, Philip Larkin replied with a proposal for reviewing such a book by any other poet: 'Now the bastard

¹³⁰ See Gallup, *Bibliography*, 85.

¹³¹ Valerie Eliot, 'Note', in T. S. Eliot, *Poems Written in Early Youth* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), 7.

¹³² Allan Rodway, 'Review of *Poems Written in Early Youth*', *Notes and Queries* 15.2 (1968), 80; [Unsigned], 'Tom to T.S.', *Time* 33.1 (2 January 1939), 35.

¹³³ David Chinitz, 'Review of *Inventions of the March Hare*', *ANQ* 11.3 (1998), 56-64 (62-63).

has made himself a name he reckons he can unload any old crap'.¹³⁴ Larkin acknowledged only 'secur[ing] the copyright' as a reason to print early unpublished poems, connecting him to Eliot's use of Bonniers for the secret run of *Poems Written in Early Youth*.¹³⁵ The affinities between Eliot and Larkin's attitude towards publication is, though, not entirely coincidental. Despite later disavowals, Eliot had been one of Larkin's earliest influences, and, until his eventual contract with the firm, it was always Faber & Faber that he envisioned as his 'ideal for poetry'.¹³⁶ This section will outline Eliot's activities as a publisher not only of his own early work, but of the work of others, showing that his strategy of publishing small amounts served not only a reputational function for himself, but also had profound consequences for the stylistic effects of the poets he supervised at Faber.

Like Eliot, the amount of poetry that Larkin produced in his youth was only made clear after his death. The publication of his *Early Poems and Juvenilia* (2005) revealed an adolescent poet that was remarkably productive; before the appearance of his first book, *The North Ship* (1945), he had made ten typescript collections. In his survey of those collections, A. T. Tolley writes: 'The pace seems at times rather hectic: about two hundred poems in three years; while the volume for August 1940, containing nineteen poems, was brought together only a month after the previous one'.¹³⁷ The young Larkin, it seems, was a rival to Hardy and Cummings in his attempt to write his way into proficiency. However, when it came to his mature poetry, something significant changed. When he was approached by Charles Monteith at Faber about publishing a volume of poetry, Larkin was thrilled, joking that Monteith's letters were 'like enquiries from God as to how soon I can take up my post as seventy-first harpist'.¹³⁸ But he

¹³⁴ Philip Larkin, quoted in Charles Monteith, 'Publishing Larkin', in *Larkin at Sixty*, ed. Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber & Faber, 1982), 38-47 (44).

¹³⁵ Philip Larkin, 'To Charles Monteith, 16 June 1965', in *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin, 1940-1985*, ed. Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), 374.

¹³⁶ See Stephen Reagan, 'Contemporary and postwar poetry', in *T. S. Eliot in Context*, ed. Jason Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 359-69; Larkin, quoted in Monteith, 'Publishing Larkin', 40.

¹³⁷ A. T. Tolley, 'Introduction', in *Early Poems and Juvenilia*, ed. A. T. Tolley (London: Faber & Faber, 2005), xv-xxv, (xvi).

¹³⁸ Larkin, 'To Charles Monteith, 17 January 1962', in *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin*, 338.

had to let him down: 'I should really rather wait until I can offer a solidier collection than would be the case now.' Relating a quality of reputation to one of personality, Adam Kirsch notes that 'the small bulk of Larkin's mature poetry is an important part of its effect, both a badge of sincerity and a rebuke to the professionally fluent'.¹³⁹ But there is a curious tag in Kirsch's quotation that requires comment, which is that 'smallness' has become a 'badge of sincerity' because of its rejection of the 'professionally fluent.' Now, it seems that overproduction can be seen not just as a symptom of unnatural 'training' – as it was for Hardy, Cummings, and the early Eliot – but of 'professionalism'.

The equation between the 'professional' and overproduction returns us to an idea with which this chapter began, that is David Higgins's claim that one important facet of 'genius' was 'its claim to distinctiveness – it stands out from the crowd – and it was offered to consumers by publishers, critics, and authors as a mark of quality at a time of increased literary production'. It is a link that Eliot made on a number of occasions, notably whenever it was suggested that he try to earn more money as a 'professional' writer. When he was offered an editorial job at the *Athenaeum* in 1919, despite being in a desperate situation, Eliot turned it down because it would have forced him to overproduce: 'if I turned out a good deal of second rate stuff it would not in the end add to my reputation – and to make everything first rate would take too much out of me'.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, when his brother suggested that he increase his journalistic output, Eliot responded: '[m]y reputation is built on writing very little, but very good, and I should not add to it by this sort of thing'.¹⁴¹ He would write to an old mentor a fortnight later, 'My reputation in London is built upon one small volume of verse, and is kept up by printing two or three more poems in a year. The only thing that matters is that these

¹³⁹ Adam Kirsch, 'Review of *Early Poems and Juvenilia*', *Times Literary Supplement*, Iss. 5328 (May 13 2005), 9-10 (9).

¹⁴⁰ 'To His Mother, 29 March 1919', *Letters*, I, 331.

¹⁴¹ 'To Henry Eliot, 6 April 1919', *Letters*, I, 334.

should be perfect in their kind, so that each should be an event.’¹⁴² Before the final clause became associated with Larkin’s three slender volumes published a decade apart, it was a keystone of Eliot’s marketing and creative strategies.

In many ways, Larkin’s rejection of Monteith’s requests for more poems resembled the comments that Eliot made at Faber board meetings. ‘I think that we tend to publish too many books’, he told Geoffrey Faber in December 1931, ‘This is related to advertising in this way, that we cannot afford more space at present than we do take, and this space is almost invariably overcrowded.’¹⁴³ While the firm’s poetry editor, Eliot actively encouraged the members of his list to withhold volumes, and even second editions, in the hopes of generating anticipation. In ‘The Publishing of Poetry’ (1952), he delineated a method of cultivating ‘prestige’ by artificially regulating supply, advising would-be publishers to follow two points:

The first is to dissuade a poet from wanting to publish too soon: before he has enough good poems for a volume without putting in inferior poems. The other is to prevent a poet from wanting to publish too often. The saturation point of the market for poetry, for poetry even by a very well known poet, is low. It does even a good poet harm to bring out his volumes in rapid succession.¹⁴⁴

As the publisher of others’ work at Faber, Eliot followed his own advice. Upon the surprising news that his book had sold much quicker than expected and they had run out of copies, Eliot told W. H. Auden: ‘I don’t think that this is a bad thing; it makes you a collectors’ item and stimulates interest in future books.’¹⁴⁵ He continued: ‘I consider it always the best policy for a poet’s output to be sparse and small; in the long run it pays best from every point of view’.

Time and again in his correspondence as a publisher, Eliot encourages young poets to resist submitting too much too soon. He advised a budding poet contemplating self-publication with reference to his own youth: ‘At nineteen I wrote some verse worth publishing, but I did

¹⁴² ‘To J. H. Wood, 21 April 1919’, *Letters*, I, 338-38.

¹⁴³ ‘To Geoffrey Faber, 9 December 1931’, *Letters*, V, 766.

¹⁴⁴ ‘The Publishing of Poetry’, *Complete Prose*, VII, 766-772 (771).

¹⁴⁵ ‘To W. H. Auden, 17 August 1933’, in *Letters*, VI, 627.

not get anyone to publish it until I was twenty-eight. Go on with your present job, and better it if you can. Don't publish anything.'¹⁴⁶ Referring to the first publication of 'Prufrock' in 1915, Eliot's suggestion to maintain a job unconnected to literature is unwavering. Indeed, he has a strange theory when feeding back to the friend of a potential Faber poet, Ann Bowes Lyon: 'The book is good enough to be published. I will even say that it is good enough *not* to be published.'¹⁴⁷ He expands:

I mean that she ought to go on writing, although at the end of a lifetime's work her whole volume might not be very much bigger than it is now. But by that time she would have refined it as far as possible, and have developed her own critical faculty, which is so very important, to a degree at which she could distinguish very slight differences of quality which would enable her to select and reject with precision.

A theory of publication, or an elaborate rejection? It is sometimes hard to tell in Eliot's advice to poets, especially as he summons the same argument about 'select and reject' for which he criticised Thomas Hardy's hyper-productiveness. Nevertheless, to those he already admires, Eliot says the same thing. To Marianne Moore, who questioned whether she has 'enough for a book', Eliot counsels: 'Little enough, I know – that is to your credit, and also to be expected of your type of mind: but from a publisher's point of view, I know that there is enough.'¹⁴⁸ 'Little enough', as with 'just enough', comes to be something of a mantra in Eliot's publishing correspondence.

However, Eliot did not have merely a business strategy in mind; there are also hints about the stylistic possibilities of stifling the creative impulse. To his young apprentice, George Barker, he confessed: 'There have been several periods of considerable extent in my own life, when I have felt *almost* convinced that I should never be able to write again; or when I have produced something with great labour and found it still-born. In fact, these periods seem to

¹⁴⁶ 'To A. H. Cooke, 18 September 1929', *Letters*, IV, 619.

¹⁴⁷ 'To T. F. Burns, 9 February 1937', *Letters*, VIII, 486.

¹⁴⁸ 'To Marianne Moore, 31 January 1934', *Letters*, VII, 54.

make up the greater part of my life.’¹⁴⁹ Eliot’s advice for a poet going through such a period is not to write one’s way into creativity, but to store things up: ‘one can also do so much by filling up one’s mind – partly from books, from interesting oneself in new subjects in the outside world, and partly from one’s experience and study of human beings.’¹⁵⁰ By making the writing impulse scarcer, there was an implied increase in its value, that what was produced would be of higher quality.

While this notion of storage has clear repercussions for creativity, it also has related economic applications. Eliot turned down Harriet Monroe’s request to include ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ in an anthology on two occasions, arguing that the poem is the ‘ballast of a very small volume’, and should be saved for the forthcoming *Prufrock and Other Observations*.¹⁵¹ On the second time of asking, Eliot elaborated: ‘it is so much longer and confessedly so much better than anything else I have done, that I cannot afford (or so I think) to scatter my forces.’¹⁵² His recourse to analogies of economics (‘cannot afford’), and warfare (‘scatter my forces’) shows that Eliot was thinking in terms of making the biggest single impact possible. To consider his poems within an economic model had been implanted into Eliot long before he joined Faber & Faber. He was offered up as a lucrative investment opportunity by Pound in the early 1920s, when he encouraged patrons to contribute to a fund of £300 a year ‘in order that T. S. Eliot may leave his work in Lloyds Bank and devote his whole time to literature.’¹⁵³ Pound pitched Eliot as quality in an era of quantity: ‘only those of us who want better literature, not more literature, better art, not more art, can be expected to pay for it.’¹⁵⁴ In the 1930s, Eliot set up a similar subscription fund for George Barker, precisely so that he

¹⁴⁹ ‘To George Barker, 24 January 1938’, *Letters*, VIII, 777.

¹⁵⁰ ‘To George Barker, 24 January 1938’, *Letters*, VIII, 777.

¹⁵¹ ‘To Harriet Monroe, 27 March 1916’, *Letters*, I, 148.

¹⁵² ‘To Harriet Monroe, 7 June, 1916’, *Letters*, I, 154-55.

¹⁵³ Ezra Pound, ‘Bel Esprit’, quoted in ‘To Kate Buss, 23? March 1922’, in *Letters of Ezra Pound*, 241n.

¹⁵⁴ Ezra Pound, ‘carbon on T. S. Eliot’, quoted in ‘To William Carlos Williams, 18 March 1922’, *Letters of Ezra Pound*, 238n.

would not be obliged to increase his output for financial compensation: ‘An advance on a book of poems by an author who has not hitherto received general publicity is not, of course, economically justifiable but we are making the offer because we believe in the future of your work and are ready to back it.’¹⁵⁵ Barker was offered an advance of £25 on a 10% royalty, not a modest amount for the kind of poet Eliot described, and he persuaded other investors including the economist, John Maynard Keynes, to provide Barker with five shillings a week for a year.¹⁵⁶

While Eliot would draw on his rule of publishing ‘very little but very good’ frequently for his poetry list, he had one problem when it came to another of his Faber authors. Despite his stylistic injunction to ‘littleness’ and his unapologetic pursuit of an exclusive audience, Pound proved unable to match the brevity of his early poems with the amount that he wrote in total. Eliot was resentful of Pound’s willingness to flood the market: ‘to deal with Ezra’s poetry and literary criticism is as much as can be expect[ed] of any one firm,’ he wrote, ‘unless we decided to open a special Ezra Department, and I shouldn’t care to be the head of such a department myself, at any salary whatever.’¹⁵⁷ The text of Pound’s where we witness the theory and practice of ‘littleness’ come into contact with the most intriguing results is his *ABC of Economics*, published by Faber in 1933. Pound states his intentions for the book in the preface: ‘The aim of this brochure is to express the fundamentals of economics so simply and clearly that even people of different economic schools and factions will be able to understand each other when they discuss them.’¹⁵⁸ He claims to have gone to great lengths in the name of clarity: ‘there is no other way of protecting myself against the charges of unsystematized, uncorrelated

¹⁵⁵ ‘To George Barker, 1 June 1934’, *Letters*, VII, 211.

¹⁵⁶ See ‘To Walter de la Mare, 29 November 1934’, *Letters*, VII, 392; ‘To John Maynard Keynes, 17 December 1935’, *Letters*, VII, 866.

¹⁵⁷ ‘To Laurence Pollinger, 9 March 1936’, *Letters*, VIII, 103.

¹⁵⁸ Ezra Pound, *The ABC of Economics* (London: Faber & Faber, 1933), 7.

thought, dilettantism, idle eclecticism, etc., than to write a brief formal treatise.’¹⁵⁹ Even the layout of the book, likely supervised by Eliot, seems married to his aim; the large type is set with noticeably wide line spacing, as if manifesting the simplicity that he aims for in style. This sounds like a book that Copey or Briggs – with their infamous ‘pruning hooks’ – would be very pleased to read.

The irony, however, is that the *ABC of Economics* is an incredibly diffuse book. Pound, being Pound, can’t help but include a chapter titled ‘*Digression perhaps Unnecessary*’ where he offers opinions that seem out of place: ‘Personally I favour a home for each individual, in the sense that I think each individual should have a certain amount of cubic space into which he or she can retire and be exempt from any outside interference what so damn ever.’¹⁶⁰ Indeed, despite his stated aims, one can’t help but think that the book hasn’t been planned at all; suggestions about the working day appear without much anchoring in various sections, and he often finds himself repeating sentences, sometimes word for word.¹⁶¹ In fact, Pound repeats himself so frequently that the pursuit of clarity achieves the opposite: ‘For the *n*th time, I repeat that the straightest road to such a desirable condition is *via* the formula: a small amount of work for everyone, with a certificate of work done as the consequence.’¹⁶² One is led to wonder, at times, whether the *ABC of Economics* is actually something of a parody of clarity and organisation.

If the *ABC* can be seen to undermine an economy of style through repetition and discursiveness, it has a particularly intriguing relationship with the content of the treatise itself. Much of Pound’s text is taken up with a discussion of ‘overproduction’ and its impact on economic systems: ‘Nature habitually overproduces. Chestnuts go to waste on the mountain

¹⁵⁹ Pound, *ABC*, 13.

¹⁶⁰ Pound, *ABC*, 88.

¹⁶¹ See, for instance, the repetition of the passage on ‘Marxian economics’ which ‘deals with goods for sale, goods in the shop. The minute I cook my own dinner or nail four boards together into a chair, I escape from the whole cycle of Marxian economics’ on pp. 35 and 55.

¹⁶² Pound, *ABC*, 116.

side, and it has never caused a world crisis'.¹⁶³ The real issue, Pound claims, is not one of production, but of distribution and storage: '*There is enough*. How are you going to get it from where it is, or can be, to where it is not and is needed?'¹⁶⁴ As Pound ventures, then, into a discussion of supply and demand, he takes note of the best way to invest money long-term, pausing on the market for 'fine books' as a means of storing capital. As a result of post-war hyper-inflation, Pound writes,

people were freed from the *idée fixe* of money as the one and only fixed value. I admit they were only half free and mostly bought *de luxe* editions because they hoped to be able to sell them later at a profit, but at any rate it was the 'thin end of the wedge'; they had at least for ten minutes got their eye on something concrete.¹⁶⁵

For Pound, luxury books became a savvy investment during financially unstable periods, reliable in accruing value as the years passed.¹⁶⁶ This is the argument that drives the work of Lawrence Rainey, who claimed that the restriction of supply was artificially engineered by modernist writers in order to turn 'each book into an *object d'art* that acquired potential investment value for collectors.'¹⁶⁷ But, as we have seen, Pound's aesthetics of littleness conflicts with his tendency to overproduce; luxury is inevitably tied to the notion of scarcity, and he can't resist the sound of his own voice.

As a publisher, Eliot thought of Pound as something of an outlier on his list. William Empson recalled one interaction where he asked Eliot: 'If you really think it is necessary [...] as you said in the preface to the Pound anthology, for a poet to write verse at least every week?'¹⁶⁸ Eliot replied, 'I had in mind Pound when I wrote that passage. [...] Taking the question in general, I should say, in the case of many poets, that the most important thing for

¹⁶³ Pound, *ABC*, 14.

¹⁶⁴ Pound, *ABC*, 18.

¹⁶⁵ Pound, *ABC*, 110.

¹⁶⁶ The importance of this idea to Pound's own bibliography is explored in Jerome J. McGann, *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

¹⁶⁷ Rainey, *Institutions*, 154.

¹⁶⁸ William Empson, 'The Style of the Master', in *T. S. Eliot: A Symposium*, ed. Richard March and Tambimuttu (London: PL Editions Poetry, 1948), 35-37 (35).

them to do... is to write as little as possible.' By now we realise that this injunction to 'write as little as possible' had reputational and stylistic importance to Eliot, and that Pound's distinctly professional habit of writing 'at least every week' was not something with which he wished to associate himself.

Swelling the Progress: Synecdochic Logic in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'

To judge Eliot by the size of his output has proved a difficult task over the years. While an initial judgement of his adolescent 'genius' may have been justified by the available evidence when he died in 1965, the readjustment afforded by the incremental swelling of his *oeuvre* has led to persistent re-evaluations of the part to the whole. In 1963, Donald Davie was impressed by the appearance of perfection:

what we have from Mr Eliot is pretty much what he said in 1928 that we could not expect from anyone – the accumulations of five or ten years at a time, conclusively discharged in one considered poem or group of poems with no near-misses, no ranging shots, no labour-pains, no afterbirths.¹⁶⁹

And yet, he also inferred that much must have fallen between the cracks: 'we boggle, appalled, at the sheaf on sheaf that must have been destroyed, and at the austere self-control which decided time and again what, and how little, should be preserved.' In the absence of any other unpublished work, the implied whole for which the *Collected Poems* were only a part served to support Davie's impression of Eliot's 'inhuman accuracy and self-control'.¹⁷⁰ With access to the whole now possible, though, that same logic of synecdoche seems to have broken down. On the publication of *The Poems of T. S. Eliot* (2015), Daniel Swift remarked: 'One question

¹⁶⁹ Donald Davie, 'Mr Eliot', in *The Poet in the Imaginary Museum: Essays of Two Decades* (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1977), 117-121 (117).

¹⁷⁰ Davie, 'Mr Eliot', 121.

remains: do we need all this? Aren't we better off with the grand Eliot of *The Waste Land* and "Prufrock"?¹⁷¹

The final section of this chapter explores the ways in which Eliot evaluated the logic of synecdoche – of judging an implied whole by a smaller part – in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'. For a long time after completing the poem, Eliot was worried that 'Prufrock' was an outlier, and would soon no longer be representative of his entire body of work: 'I often feel that "J.A.P." is a swan song, but I never mention the fact because Vivien is so exceedingly anxious that I shall equal it, and would be bitterly disappointed if I do not.'¹⁷² In the poem, Prufrock's experience of the world is similarly imagined through the examination of a corpus: 'Let us go then, you and I, / When the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherised upon a table'.¹⁷³ David Lodge reads these opening three lines as staging an important conflict between opposing methods of representation:

these lines, like so much of Eliot's early verse, turn upon a *violation* of context: an abrupt shift from association of items according to contiguity (first two lines) to association of items according to similarity, (third line) made all the more disconcerting because the perceived similarity is so eccentric and unexpected.¹⁷⁴

The relationship between the first two lines is constructed metonymically, a strategy associated by Roman Jakobson with prose: 'the Realist author metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in space and time.'¹⁷⁵ This clear 'contiguous' connection between the journey, 'Let us go', and the delineation of time, 'when the evening is spread out against the sky', is disrupted not only by the 'eccentric[ity]' of the simile which follows, 'like a patient etherised upon a table', but by the fact that it is a

¹⁷¹ Daniel Swift, 'Casual, funny, flirtatious, severe: *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*', *Spectator* (12 September 2015) <[spectator.co.uk/article/casual-funny-flirtatious-severe/](https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/casual-funny-flirtatious-severe/)> [accessed 30/03/2024].

¹⁷² 'To Henry Eliot, 6 September 1916', *Letters*, I, 166.

¹⁷³ 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 5.

¹⁷⁴ David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), 117.

¹⁷⁵ Roman Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Language Disturbances', in *On Language*, ed. Linda R. Waugh and Monique Monville-Burstion (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1990), 115-133 (130).

metaphorical utterance, rather than a metonymic one. In opening the poem, then, Eliot offers a tension concerning how Prufrock will choose to represent the world around him.

As the poem progresses, the possibilities of these two forms of representation, metonymy and metaphor, are trialled by Prufrock in the hopes that they may aid in the communication of his thoughts and feelings. The lines which follow enact a tussle between clauses associated by what Lodge calls ‘contiguity’ and ‘similarity’:

Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question...
Oh, do not ask, ‘What is it?’
Let us go and make our visit.

(4-12).

The additive structure of the first four lines seeks to piece the setting together; the ‘streets’ give way to ‘retreats’, to ‘hotels’, and ‘restaurants’ with objects typical of the scene, ‘oyster-shells’. By the time we receive a metaphorical utterance ‘like a tedious argument’, we are not nearly as surprised as we are to read the ‘patient’ simile in the third line, largely because the groundwork for such an argument has already been laid during the metonymic series, ‘muttering retreats’. However, by the time the literal journey gives way to an apparently figurative one, ‘to *lead* you to an overwhelming question’, it seems largely ambiguous which of the two journeys – that through ‘half-deserted streets’, or the conversational journey (the ‘tedious argument’) – is the metaphorical one. The ‘visit’ to which Prufrock refers could be that which proceeds through the ‘streets’ of the conversation, or through the ‘streets’ of the city, or both. In other words, Eliot manages to disrupt our stable footing in the first verse paragraph by tangling our awareness of metonymic and metaphorical progression.

Prufrock's predisposition towards comparison is iterated clearly in one of the poem's most memorable lines: 'I have measured out my life with coffee spoons' (51). It is significant to notice, though, that his instinct to 'measure' almost always serves the primary purpose of making something smaller. He imagines himself shrunk to the size of a scientific specimen: 'when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin / When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall' (57-58) in the hope that it may aid in an act of self-examination. As in any dissection, he cuts things down to manageable size: 'I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter' (82). It is synecdoche, defined by Richard Lanham as 'substitution of part for whole, genus for species, or vice versa', to which Prufrock makes the most frequent recourse.¹⁷⁶ Throughout the poem, he focuses not on whole individuals, but on discrete parts. There are eyes: 'And I have known the eyes already, known them all' (55), there are faces: 'To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet' (27), but he dwells most frequently on limbs and extremities: 'Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl' (67), '(They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")' (41), 'time for all the works and days of hands / That lift and drop a question on your plate' (29-30), 'And I have known the arms already, known them all - / Arms that are braceleted and white and bare / (But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)' (62-64). While synecdoche usually relies on the reader to fill in the semantic gap, we are not given enough information to make an inference about the whole, the 'all' for which the 'arms' and 'eyes' are merely parts. It is only in 'lamplight' that we can gain any inclination about the identity of the person to whom the arms belong, 'downed with light brown hair'. It is this habit that also offers the memorable fragment: 'I should have been a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas' (73-74). Although we infer some kind of crustacean, our synecdochic leap has no real grounding in evidence. We may assume that these claws yearn to be part of a whole

¹⁷⁶ Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 148.

organism, but the use of the conditional perfect, ‘should have’, disrupts that assumption; Prufrock seems to exalt in the uncertainty of synecdoche. It is an uncertainty invoked in Lanham’s definition: ‘Experience is described in terms of other experience, but at a different level of magnification [...] similarity of part to whole, self-similarity as it is called, is a central characteristic of the fractal geometry introduced into modern thinking by chaos theory.’¹⁷⁷ ‘Self-similarity’ is the mathematical idea that an object is the same on any scale; the part is exactly similar to the whole. As far as Prufrock is concerned, however, the possibility of self-dissimilarity is what motivates the monologue; like the ‘bald spot in the middle of my hair’, he refuses to close the synecdochic gap.

For Lodge, metonymy (of which synecdoche is one form) is defined by this notion of the ‘gap’. His famous example sentence, ‘Keels crossed the deep’, demonstrates the way in which metonymic utterances function ‘by means of *deletions*’, having been transformed from an original, non-metonymic sentence, ‘*The keels of the ships crossed the deep sea*’.¹⁷⁸ He writes how ‘metonymy and synecdoche, in short, are produced by deleting one or more items from a natural combination, but not the items it would be most natural to omit: this illogicity is equivalent to the coexistence of similarity and dissimilarity in metaphor.’¹⁷⁹ Prufrock’s synecdoche exploits this trait by widening the gap even further; the lines about ‘arms’, ‘hands’, and ‘eyes’ delete the rest of the owner’s body, as in a typical metonymic utterance, but so too does he delete any additional context we had to identify the owners. While the rhetorician who wields synecdoche will usually know what the ‘whole’ is (in order to skilfully make use of the part), we are not entirely certain that Prufrock knows. He forces us to make presumptions about the ‘women’ as the extension of the limbs, but the phrases point only to the gap.

¹⁷⁷ Lanham, *Handlist*, 148.

¹⁷⁸ Lodge, *Modes of Modern Writing*, 76.

¹⁷⁹ Lodge, *Modes of Modern Writing*, 76.

The use of synecdoche in an act of ‘presumption’ is as fundamental to Prufrock himself as it is to our experience reading the poem. Often, the rhetorical tool is used as a means of making a quick, but informed, judgement about something; in constructing a synecdochic utterance, we usually select the part which represents a quality we seek to emphasise about the whole. It is curious, given this usage, that synecdoche does not receive attention from Christopher Ricks in *T. S. Eliot and Prejudice* (1988).¹⁸⁰ It is doubly curious, because Prufrock himself refers repeatedly to the possibility of substituting the part for the whole in the making of judgements:

Is it perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?

(65-69).

Three times in succession Prufrock asks about possibilities of presumption: ‘So how should I presume?’, ‘And how should I presume’, ‘And should I then presume’. To make a presumption is to use the evidence at hand to predict the most likely outcome of an event, thereby connected importantly to the magnificatory logic of synecdoche. Prufrock’s many different kinds of anxiety make presumption a particularly tempting activity; if he is able to guess what the outcome will be before the event takes place, he will be able to save himself a great degree of discomfort. For Charles Altieri, Prufrock’s recourse to metonymy betrays his approach to the world:

Metonymy, in fact, is rhetorically the perfect figure for Prufrock’s problems of sustaining inter-personal relationship. For the problem of inter-subjectivity is essentially a problem of overcoming metonymy, of feeling and of making another feel that one is not ‘formulated in a phrase’ but that a full being is expressed through its partial manifestations.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Ricks discusses ‘Prufrock’ at length in the opening section of *T. S. Eliot and Prejudice* (London: Faber & Faber, 1988).

¹⁸¹ Charles Altieri, ‘Objective Image and Act of Mind in Modern Poetry’, *PMLA* 91.1 (1976), 101-14 (106).

In Altieri's reading, Prufrock 'cannot resist seeking to make wholes of the fragments he encounters, and which nonetheless can only generate more and more fragments'.¹⁸² But this Prufrock imagined by Altieri strikes us as somewhat powerless, 'seeking to make wholes' but entirely unable to do so. On the other hand, we may argue that Prufrock, as a skilled rhetorician, hopes that his use of synecdoche may also be able to do something of practical benefit to his situation. If the synecdoche works, it would enable him to avoid the kind of confrontation with the 'whole' people which he ultimately seems to fear: 'there will be time / To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?" / Time to turn back and descend the stair.' (37-39). By fixating on little things, he hopes to predict and prepare for the kinds of interactions he will have:

With a bald spot in the middle of my hair –
 (They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")
 My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
 My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin –
 (They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")
 (40-44).

One primary use of synecdoche for Prufrock, then, seems to be to manage his anxieties about the whole. This is the fear which drives his desire to have 'measured out my life with coffee spoons', as a way to cope with the vast expanse of time and portion it into smaller chunks: 'For I have known them all already, known them all: / Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons' (49-50). In this vein, it is not only wholeness which seems to give Prufrock anxiety, but also ideas of excess. Another verb from the 'presume' passage becomes significant in this respect; 'digress' implies a degree of redundancy, that the words spoken are no longer entirely of use. Prufrock is constantly haunted by excess; there is the 'overwhelming question' (10) which he spends his time evading (an act which makes the entirety of his 'Love Song' an ironic 'digression'), and there is the 'soot that falls from chimneys' (19), implying the chimneys to be at capacity, and in need of sweeping. We may also notice, with Anthony

¹⁸² Altieri, 'Objective Image and Act of Mind', 107.

Cuda, just how many objects in the poem stay excessively long.¹⁸³ There is the ‘yellow smoke’ which ‘Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains’ (18) and another use of that verb: ‘We have lingered in the chambers of the sea’ (129). Prufrock worries that if things go on too long there will simply not be enough time to fit them in, repeating with an urgent compulsiveness: ‘there will be time, there will be time’ (23; 26; 28; 37). One phrase important to this notion of excess that has received comparatively little attention from critics appears in the ‘Hamlet’ passage, where Prufrock claims: ‘Am an attendant lord, one that will do / To swell a progress, start a scene or two’ (112-13). This obsolete idea of ‘swell[ing] a progress’ as an image for beginning has an important relationship with Prufrock’s monologue. In many ways, Prufrock never truly ‘gets going’ (‘how should I begin?’); the use of a verb of expansion beyond natural limits, ‘swell’, is thus an apt way of conveying Prufrock’s anxiety of excess.

Prufrock’s reliance on synecdoche as a tool of expectation management runs throughout his monologue, but his ultimate inability to match up the part and the whole implies not only the kind of psychological disturbance described by Jakobson, but a broader worry that his own sense of wholeness may be at risk, should he not fit into the contiguous chain: ‘I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each. // I do not think that they will sing to me.’ (124-25). To conclude this reading of ‘Prufrock’, I want to evaluate the extent to which the poem as a whole is amenable to the logic of synecdoche, and what consequences this might have for our understanding of Eliot’s deceptively ‘little’ poetic output in his early years. The poem has one important feature which is often used by writers to concentrate the meaning of the whole text into a smaller part. The epigraph to the poem is, though, an important comment on this very practice. It is drawn from Dante’s *Inferno*:

¹⁸³ Anthony Cuda, ‘Back, Late, from the Hyacinth Garden’, in *T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, Vol. 4 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022), 57-71.

*S'io credessi che mia riposte fosse
a persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
questa fiamma staria senza più scosse.
Ma per ciò che giammai di questo fondo
non tornò vivo alcun, s'i' odo il vero,
senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.*

(If I thought my answer were to one who ever could return to the world, this flame should shake no more; / but since none ever did return alive from this depth, if what I hear be true, without fear of infamy I answer thee.)¹⁸⁴

The passage is drawn from the episode where Dante meets Guido da Montefeltro, a former military advisor who was condemned to the Circle of the Fraudulent. Taken from the start of Guido's confession, the epigraph relies on what Teodolinda Barolini calls a 'mistaken deduction from a false premise'; Guido feels assured that he may convey his story to Dante without repercussion because he knows of nobody who has ever left the Inferno.¹⁸⁵ The idea of a 'mistaken deduction' immediately calls to mind what was discussed above regarding Prufrock's troubled attempts to make a 'presumption'. The difference, however, is that while a deduction moves from the general to the specific, a presumption moves – like synecdoche – from a small piece of evidence to a broader judgement or prediction. The distinction is significant, because the direction of reasoning is fundamental to Prufrock's incapacities, and apparent anxiety of the whole.

The very presence of an epigraph raises problems of scale and representation: to what extent do we take it to stand in for the rest of the poem? It certainly offers readings that chime with our understanding of the poem. Guido's prefatory statement connects significantly to what was discussed about Prufrock's ability to 'swell a progress', to start things off, but not to follow through. It also introduces the notion of deception, something important to our understanding of Prufrock's synecdoche, which functions predominantly to mislead rather than to inform.

¹⁸⁴ Dante, *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri*, ed. Herman Oelsner, trans. John Aitken Carlyle (London: J. M. Dent, 1900), 303.

¹⁸⁵ Teodolinda Barolini, 'Inferno 27: Disconversion,' *Commento Baroliniano, Digital Dante* (Online: Columbia University Libraries, 2018) <digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/inferno/inferno-27/> [accessed 21/03/24].

More broadly, though, Eliot's fondness for epigraphs reflects a tendency towards the attempt to condense a whole into a part.¹⁸⁶ In his account of the poems in *Prufrock and Other Observations*, Martin Scofield compares Eliot's synecdochic habit of assembling parts in the poetry to his approach to composition: 'Eliot's characteristic poetic practice at this time – and to some extent throughout his poetic career – was to write either very short poems, or fragments of poems which he then worked up later into longer poetic wholes.'¹⁸⁷ In the case of many of Eliot's poems, we might argue that this somewhat simplifies the process. While many fragments were 'worked up later into longer poetic wholes', many were left as fragments, designed to generate meaning by being situated near another undeveloped fragment, as in *The Waste Land*. With 'Prufrock', however, we observe that it is largely amenable to synecdoche. Its habit of returning to the same groups of phrases, images, and ideas, and the pervading tone of anxiety, make any part of the poem somewhat representative of the whole. Even the interlude, 'Prufrock's Pervigilium', which became known only with the publication of the *Inventions of the March Hare*, offered an extra thirty-three lines which could almost have been generated by a computer program or by guesswork:

And when the evening fought itself awake
 And the world was peeling oranges and reading evening papers
 And boys were smoking cigarettes, drifted helplessly together
 In the fan of light spread out by the drugstore on the corner
 Then I have gone at night through narrow streets,
 Where evil houses leaning all together
 Pointed a ribald finger at me in the darkness
 Whispering all together, chuckled at me in the darkness.¹⁸⁸

That the poem itself conforms to a logic of synecdoche is ironic given the intentional failure of many of Prufrock's attempts at connecting a part to a whole. But this is also the logical

¹⁸⁶ See also the epigraphs to 'Portrait of a Lady', 'Mr. Apollinax', 'La Figlia che Piange'.

¹⁸⁷ Martin Scofield, *T. S. Eliot: The Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 49.

¹⁸⁸ 'Prufrock's Pervigilium', in *Inventions of the March Hare*, 43-44.

outcome, given that it is a poem which, as a whole, is defined by its motionless sense of fragmentation.

As far as Eliot's entire body of work is concerned, there does not seem to be much space for the logic of synecdoche. When Eliot discusses his inability to write a poem to rival 'Prufrock', he talks of the need to ignore it completely: 'I feel that the best promise of continuing is for one to be able to forget, in a way, what one has written already; to be able to detach it completely from one's present self and begin quite afresh'.¹⁸⁹ As the years went by, the idea of shunning 'earlier work' became associated with ideas of 'shame'. He told a young writer in 1936: 'you will find, in two or three years, if not sooner, that your notions of poetry will change, and then there will be a time when you are rather ashamed of your earlier work because you will be writing something better.'¹⁹⁰ This is a 'process we all have to put up with,' Eliot claimed 'and it is not until we are well over twenty years old that we begin to write something which we don't become quite so sorry about.' It is a pattern that reasserts itself whenever he completed a major work: 'whatever I do next will be, at least, very different', he told Edmund Wilson after *The Waste Land*, apparently drawing the mantra from his essay on 'Philip Massinger', about making 'something better, or at least something different.'¹⁹¹

In other words, the part never hopes to aspire to the whole in Eliot's body of work, except to emphasise its greater non-contiguity, something explored in greater depth in Chapter 4. By seeking to publish 'very little but very good', then, Eliot shares Prufrock's fear of excess, but it is motivated less by social anxiety, and more by the desire to fashion an impression of effortless. By disavowing the overproduction associated with hack journalism, college writing classes, and with autodidactic poets like Thomas Hardy, Eliot's portrait of the artist as a young man was one possessed of natural talent, in need of no external help. Although the

¹⁸⁹ 'To Robert Nichols' 8 August 1917', *Letters*, I, 212.

¹⁹⁰ 'To Denise Levertoff, 24 April 1936', *Letters*, VIII, 176.

¹⁹¹ 'To Edmund Wilson, 11 January 1923', *Letters*, II, 11; 'Philip Massinger', *Complete Prose*, II, 244-59 (245).

polished poems of *Prufrock and Other Observations* implied a great deal of work, it was the mysterious synecdoche of that implication upon which Eliot's early reputation thrived.

Seriousness

Introduction

It is common to read in studies of *The Waste Land* that the poem won *The Dial* award for 1922.¹ We know, thanks to the publication of letters between Eliot and the editors, that it did; the award was fundamental in negotiations for allowing the poem to be published in the magazine.² For those who read *The Dial*, though, it was not *The Waste Land* which secured Eliot the award at all. When we turn to the announcement in the December issue, we find that the poem is only mentioned twice; once to refer to the magazine having published the poem in the previous issue, and again in a list of Eliot's publications to date.³ As far as the readers of *The Dial* knew, the award was, in fact, given for Eliot's broader body of work that was defined by its 'littleness': 'Few American writers have published so little, and fewer have published so much which was worth publication.'⁴ What made Eliot deserving of the award – so the announcement

¹ The association was certainly helped by an anthology which republished *The Waste Land* without Eliot's permission, *Prize Poems: 1913-1929*, ed. Charles A. Wagner (New York: C. Boni, 1930), 70-85. See, for instance: Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet* (London: Methuen, 1959), 181; Jewel Spears Brooker, 'Dialectical Collaboration: Editing *The Waste Land*', in *The Cambridge Companion to 'The Waste Land'*, ed. Gabrielle McIntire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 102-115 (102); Stephen Cushman, 'Poetry in the Public Square', in *A Companion to American Poetry*, ed. Mary McAleer Balkun, Jeffrey Gray, Paul Jaussen (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2022), 320-331 (326).

² See 'James Sibley Watson to Scofield Thayer, 12 August 1922', *Letters*, I, 720; 'To James Sibley Watson', 15 August 1922', *Letters*, I, 724-25; for a full discussion, see Lawrence Rainey, 'The Price of Modernism: Publishing *The Waste Land*', in *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1998), 77-106.

³ Editors, 'Comment', *The Dial* 73.6 (December 1922), 685-87 (685; 687).

⁴ Editors, 'Comment', 685.

claimed – was his ostensibly miraculous development: ‘A service to letters peculiarly acceptable now is the proof that one can arrive at eminence with the help of nothing except genius.’ As observed in the previous chapter, ‘genius’ was a myth cultivated with ‘littleness’ at its core: ‘his legend has increased’, wrote *The Dial*, because ‘Mr Eliot’s command of publicity is not exceptional’, requiring them to provide some ‘hardily gleaned facts of his biography’.⁵ Writing ‘very little but very good’ had secured Eliot a year’s worth of his Lloyds salary in a single cheque, and spread his name further than it had ever gone before.⁶

The sudden spreading of that name is, though, at odds with Eliot’s approach to self-marketing in the period up to and including *Prufrock*. For, if the early part of Eliot’s career had been focused on capturing the attention of the few, would he truly decide that being catapulted onto the front pages of newspapers was a good idea? Much recent criticism has been interested in the engineering of that catapult. While the receipt of the substantial cheque came with its own advertising potential, what made the announcement of the award appealing to newspaper editors were the rumours that the entire episode was in fact an elaborate publicity stunt. Represented and inspired by the work of Leonard Diepeveen in modernist studies and Rita Felski in literary theory, the last five years have seen substantial contributions made to the idea of modernist artworks as fraudulent or deceptive objects.⁷ In extreme interpretations, *The Waste Land*’s publication in *The Dial* was suspected to be a hoax, staged either by Eliot alone (with the intention of ridiculing Scofield Thayer’s literary pretensions), or in cahoots with the

⁵ Editors, ‘Comment’, 687.

⁶ As per J. R. Winton, *Lloyds Bank, 1918-1969* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 39, in 1922, Eliot’s salary was £450 a year, supplemented by literary work. *The Dial* award was worth \$2,000, then converting to around £450.

⁷ See especially Leonard Diepeveen, ‘Learning from Philistines: Suspicion, Refusing to Read, and the Rise of Dubious Modernism,’ in *New Directions in American Reception Study*, ed. Philip Goldstein, James L. Machor (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Leonard Diepeveen, *Modernist Fraud: Hoax, Parody, Deception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Leonard Diepeveen, ‘Eliot, Fraud’, *T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, Vol. 3 (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021), 23-46; Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

magazine's editors, who sought to 'palm off on the public an unintelligible poem by an obscure scribbler as the great poetic work of the year.'⁸

Eliot was certainly aware of the accusations levelled against *The Waste Land*; he pasted a number of reviews which alluded to the 'gigantic hoax' into his scrapbook.⁹ Some of Eliot's contemporaries may have welcomed such publicity. In order to promote his work, James Joyce collected together a set of reviews – many of them negative – and published them as a leaflet in order to goad readers into acquiring copies of his books.¹⁰ But Eliot was by no means pleased by the allegation of 'hoax' or its consequences for an understanding of *The Waste Land*. Upon receiving two clippings which quoted one source of the rumour – a journalist named Ben Hecht – Eliot was incandescent. Hecht had claimed that the poem 'differs so radically from his work in *Prufrock*' that there was no doubt 'it was carefully planned by Eliot as a hoax on the American public.'¹¹ Eliot referred to the article as 'libel', and promised two forms of retaliation: 'I can only presume that Mr Hecht believes that my being 3000 miles away will protect him from any legal action, as it certainly protects him from any physical action on my part.'¹² Henry Eliot was mystified by his brother's reaction: 'I was much surprised that you treated the matter so seriously, as the accusation of fraud (if hoax means that) is obviously

⁸ Burton Rascoe, 'In Defense of T. S. Eliot', in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 91-93 (91).

⁹ See 'T. S. Eliot press cuttings, 1919-1923: scrapbook of clippings', Henry Ware Eliot T. S. Eliot Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, (bMS Am 2560 (418)). Eliot was a subscriber to the London-based clipping agency, Romeike, and it was through this service that he acquired the majority of reviews of his early work. In his article for the *American Magazine*, Romeike asserted that aspiring writers constituted the most anxious type of client: 'The budding author is the most frequently disappointed subscriber' because they 'may get no notice at all, beyond a mere mention in the list of "books received for review" by the literary periodicals.' Once they start to get noticed, however, the conditions for a perfect paranoid storm set in: 'When you first begin to be written about in the papers, you will be rather anxious about accuracy in the least detail', and it is only when one has garnered sufficient fame that 'you will pay no attention to any but the most vital inaccuracies' when it becomes useful to know if 'unfounded rumours, or leaks of any kind, are in circulation'. See Georges D. Romeike, 'Who Is Mentioned Oftenest in the Newspapers?', *American Magazine* 93 (1922), 15; 98.

¹⁰ See James Joyce, 'Extracts from Press Notices and Reviews of *Dubliners*' (London: Grant Richards, 1914); 'Extracts from Some Press Notices of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*' (London: Egoist Press, 1916); 'Extracts from Press Notices of *Ulysses* by James Joyce' (Harlesden: Leveridge, 1922). For a discussion of these pamphlets, see William S. Brockman, "'Clio's Clippings": From Newspaper to Press Cutting', in *Publishing in Joyce's 'Ulysses': Newspapers, Advertising and Printing* (Leiden; Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2018), 175-91.

¹¹ [Unsigned], 'The Literary Scene', *Chicago Daily News* (21 Feb. 1923), 14.

¹² 'To the Literary Editor of the *New York Globe*, 6 April 1923', *Letters*, II, 105.

absurd, and if it means concealed satire, is not derogatory.’¹³ In its own way, the accusation of libel had value as a marketing tool: ‘This sounds exciting,’ N. P. Dawson argued, ‘if we were Mr Eliot we should rather have Mr Ben Hecht say about him what he was quoted as saying in the *Chicago News* than witness the swooning ecstasies into which his poem sent some of the critics’.¹⁴ Indeed, for *The Waste Land*’s other American publisher, the publicity would have been no bad thing. Horace Liveright’s biographers speak of his ‘show-business approach to book publishing’, collaborating with Edward Bernays, the ‘founding father of public relations’, to invent new ways to promote their authors.¹⁵ But it was also this ‘flair for publicity’ that Eliot seems to have resented in Liveright; for Michael North, it represented one manifestation of the poet’s latent anti-Semitism.¹⁶ While the ‘hoax’ accusation may have provided free advertising for *The Waste Land* – and especially for Liveright’s book – Eliot’s priority, as his brother claimed, was not to become notorious, but to be taken ‘seriously’.

Along no lines has Eliot divided critical opinion quite so starkly as on the nature of his seriousness. Against the accusations of hoax, Eliot’s supporters asserted his sincere credentials: ‘sometimes we feel that he is speaking not only for a personal distress, but for the starvation of a whole civilization’, wrote Edmund Wilson, while Elinor Wylie concluded assertively that there was no ‘doubt in my mind as to Mr. Eliot’s absorbed seriousness; he is fanatically in earnest.’¹⁷ For those who followed Wilson and Wylie, Eliot’s fate was tied up with the establishment of English Literature as an academic discipline, as ‘taking something seriously’ became less about affect and more about procedure.¹⁸ In *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932), F. R. Leavis offered a writer whose work rewarded serious study; he described the

¹³ ‘From Henry Eliot, 26 April 1923’, *Letters*, II, 113.

¹⁴ N. P. Dawson, ‘Books in Particular’, *New York Globe (and Commercial Advertiser)* (17 April 1923), 16.

¹⁵ Walker Gilmer, *Horace Liveright, Publisher of the Twenties* (New York: D. Lewis, 1970), 25; Tom Dardis, *Firebrand: The Life of Horace Liveright* (New York: Random House, 1995), 116.

¹⁶ Michael North, *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 79.

¹⁷ Elinor Wylie, ‘Mr. Eliot’s Slug Horn’, *Contemporary Reviews*, 95-96 (95).

¹⁸ See Diepeveen, *Modernist Fraud*, 41ff.

‘organization’ of Eliot’s poetry, the ‘control’, the ‘poise’, the ‘conscious elegance’: ‘the poet’s command both of his experience and of his technique (if we can distinguish) is perfect.’¹⁹ In *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot* (1935), F. O. Matthiessen brandished Eliot’s work as a chance to prune literary criticism of its detritus, forerunning the efforts of the New Criticism: ‘My double aim in this essay is to evaluate Eliot’s method and achievement as an artist, and in so doing to emphasize certain of the fundamental elements in the nature of poetry which are in danger of being obscured by the increasing tendency to treat poetry as a social document and to forget that it is an art.’²⁰ By the time of Eliot’s death, his seriousness in both affective and methodological terms had become a cornerstone of his literary reputation. Not only was he, in Hugh Kenner’s words, the ‘first major poet of the first age devoted to serious and systematic, indeed curricular, scrutiny of its own literature’, but, as the *New York Times* obituary claimed, ‘he always remained in the layman’s view, the poet of gray melancholy.’²¹

Since the turn of the century, however, critical interest has been weighted in the opposite direction, and the spirit of ‘practical criticism’ has now been matched, if not overtaken, by that of ‘practical cats’. In *Eliot’s Dark Angel* (1999), Ronald Schuchard explored what he called the poet’s ‘savage comedy’, offering readings of the ‘Sweeney’ poems and concluding that ‘In his bawdy, lighthearted moods, his more natural moods perhaps, he would beg us, as “Possum,” as Tom, not always to take him so seriously.’²² Schuchard explored Eliot’s use of comedy in what are usually regarded as his most obscure poems, and in doing so was building on work by Steven Helmling and C. A. Patrides, both of whom sought to separate

¹⁹ F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry: A Study of the Contemporary Situation* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932), 77.

²⁰ F. O. Matthiessen, *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot: An Essay on the Nature of Poetry* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1935), vii.

²¹ Hugh Kenner, ‘Introduction’, in *T. S. Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 1-14 (2); [Unsigned], ‘T. S. Eliot, the American-Born Poet, Dies in London at 76’, *New York Times* (5 January 1965), 1.

²² Ronald Schuchard, *Eliot’s Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 101.

Eliot from his New Critical portrait of indefatigable ‘seriousness’.²³ Eventually, more studies expanded our understanding of Eliot’s reliance on comic techniques in his major poems. Most notably, David Chinitz’s *Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (2003) tracked the development of his interest in popular culture, drawing on jazz, music hall, and minstrelsy to show how Eliot absorbed different forms of entertainment into his thinking about poetry.²⁴ Many scholars have built on Chinitz’s research, and the last twenty years have seen a number of important articles on Eliot’s bawdy verse, the *Practical Cats*, his fondness for Groucho Marx, and of ideas of ‘comic repetition’ in *The Waste Land*.²⁵

Despite some of these recent studies making cross-references between Eliot’s so-called ‘light’ and his ‘serious’ writing, it is still the case that we are encouraged to think of them as separate exercises. They are opposing trenches to which Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue have lent their spades; their edition of *The Poems of T. S. Eliot* banishes the light verse to a second, much slimmer, volume padded out with composition history. As Steve Ellis claimed in his review, it seems reasonable to assume that many general readers will simply forgo the second volume entirely.²⁶ It was a fact of which Eliot himself was all too aware. He confessed to Geoffrey Faber that ‘I was so anxious that the *Cats* should flourish, if at all, on their own merits, and not as a TSE curio, that I would have asked that it be published anonymously had I thought that fair to the publishers; it is *intended* for a NEW public, but I am afraid cannot

²³ See C. A. Patrides, ‘T. S. Eliot: Alliances of Levity and Seriousness’, *The Sewanee Review* 96.1 (1988), 77-94; Steven Helmling, ‘The Grin of Tiresias: Humour in *The Waste Land*’ *Twentieth-Century Literature* 36.2 (1990), 137-154.

²⁴ David Chinitz, *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

²⁵ On Eliot’s bawdy verse, see Loretta Johnson, ‘Feeling the Elephant: T. S. Eliot’s Bolovian Epic’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 37.4 (2014), 109-129; Michelle A. Taylor, ‘(In)discreet Modernism: T. S. Eliot’s Coterie Poetics’, *College Literature* 47.1 (2020), 34-64. On the *Practical Cats*, see Elizabeth Sewell, ‘Lewis Carroll and T. S. Eliot as Nonsense Poets,’ in *Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Kenner, 65-72; Paul Douglass, ‘Eliot’s Cats: Serious Play Behind the Playful Seriousness’, *Children’s Literature* 11.1 (1983), 105-24; Sarah Bay-Cheng, ‘“Away we go”: Poetry and Play in Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats and Andrew Lloyd Webber’s Cats,’ in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. David Chinitz (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 228-38. See also Lee Siegel, *Groucho Marx: The Comedy of Existence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), Matthew Bevis, ‘Eliot Among the Comedians’, *Literary Imagination* 16.2 (2014), 135-56.

²⁶ Steve Ellis, ‘*The Poems of T. S. Eliot* – review’, *Modernist Cultures* 12.3 (2017), 463-68 (465).

dispense with the old one.’²⁷ Eliot understood that, for most of his readers, the question of his seriousness would be black or white; yes or no; volume one or volume two. What this chapter seeks to argue, however, is that this is a false and unproductive binary as far as Eliot’s writing is concerned. The ‘unserious’ is a fundamental constituent of Eliot’s poetic and critical procedures, and a trait that he attempted, with little success, to emphasise to those interested in his work.

The ongoing publication of Eliot’s letters and light verse allows us to see just how much his sense of humour relied on the idea of taking something seriously. On one occasion, he poked implicit fun at the way he had responded to Ben Hecht’s libellous accusation of ‘hoax’ by pushing his characteristic seriousness to the point of absurdity. In letters exchanged in 1936, a supposedly ‘serious rift’ emerged between Eliot and his colleagues at Faber & Faber after the poet stood accused of owning a ‘Dance Club’ in Charing Cross.²⁸ Eliot was forwarded a clipping from *The Times* which contained an advert for ‘Eliot’s Club’, and was asked to provide the Board with an explanation. In response, Eliot wrote a long, severe letter chastising his colleagues for doubting him, and declaring that the use of his name by such private establishments was out of his control: ‘any organisation wishing to inspire confidence in the public, might easily be tempted to assume a name that is a synonym for probity, fastidiousness and impeccable behaviour.’²⁹ This ‘elaborate joke’ shared between the colleagues, Toby Faber informs us, was preserved for decades in the Faber archives as evidence of the poet’s dour self-importance, rather than the self-effacing comedy for which it is now recognised.³⁰ Similarly, it had been assumed for decades that Eliot made a concerted effort to get his bawdy verse

²⁷ ‘To Geoffrey Faber, 27 July 1939’, *Letters*, IX, 211.

²⁸ Toby Faber, *Faber & Faber: The Untold Story* (London: Faber & Faber, 2019), 118.

²⁹ ‘To Geoffrey Faber, 7 July 1936’, *Letters*, VIII, 260.

³⁰ ‘To John Hayward, 9 July 1936’, *Letters*, VIII, online supplementary letters <tseliot.com/letters/volumes/letters_volume_8_unpublished/by-date/lv8-0405>; see Faber, *Untold Story*, 118.

published in the 1910s, following the publication of letters to Pound and Joyce in 1988: 'I have corresponded with Lewis, but his puritanical principles seem to bar my way to Publicity.'³¹ In a recent study, however, Jayme Stayer argued persuasively that this was in fact sarcasm, a mock-seriousness which alluded to the difficulties Lewis and Pound had encountered getting their own 'obscene' writing published.³² In both cases, Eliot's sense of humour evaded scholars for many years, as they sought to assimilate his letters into predetermined accounts of the poet's seriousness.

In these two examples, Eliot's sense of humour anticipates one of Susan Sontag's definitions of camp, which she sees as involving 'a new, more complex relation to "the serious." One can be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious.'³³ This is a connection inferred by David Chinitz, who hints at Eliot's 'complexity of attitude mixing appreciation with irony and at times approaching something very much like camp.'³⁴ But Chinitz's attention is directed predominantly towards the objects of Eliot's attitude – the 'genres that tread the always-indistinct line between "mass" and "popular" (e.g., Tin Pan Alley song)' – rather than the attitude itself. In fact, Eliot used camp as one of his key mechanisms for coping with fame, as Henry Hewes noted: 'Mr. Eliot knows this influence well through the kind of cult a great many of his admirers make about him. His formula for avoiding it is constant struggle against it, plus a sense of humor with which to see one's own absurdity.'³⁵

³¹ See 'To Ezra Pound, 2 February 1915', *Letters*, I, 93; 'To James Joyce, 21 May 1921', *Letters*, I, 562. For examples of critics who have not read the letters sarcastically, see Gabrielle McIntire, 'An Unexpected Beginning: Sex, Race, and History in T. S. Eliot's Columbo and Bolo Poems', *Modernism/Modernity* 9.2 (2002), 283-301 and Loretta Johnson, 'T. S. Eliot's Bawdy Verse: Lulu, Bolo and More Ties', *Journal of Modern Literature* 27.1-2 (2003).

³² Jayme Stayer, 'The Short and Surprisingly Private Life of King Bolo: Eliot's Bawdy Poems and Their Audiences', in *T. S. Eliot Studies Annual: Vol. 1* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 3-30.

³³ Susan Sontag, 'Notes on Camp', in *Susan Sontag: Essays of the 1960s & 70s*, ed. David Rieff (New York: Library of America, 2013), 259-74 (271).

³⁴ Chinitz, *Eliot and the Cultural Divide*, 9.

³⁵ Henry Hewes, 'T. S. Eliot at Seventy, and an Interview with Eliot', *Saturday Review* 41 (12 September 1958), 30-32 (32).

It is only recently that the criticism has proved open to the idea of techniques being shared by modernist and camp aesthetics; Marsha Bryant and Douglas Mao asserted in a special issue of *Modernism/modernity* in 2016 that ‘There can be neither camp nor modernism without someone’s going *over the top*.’³⁶ Indeed, it is a significant paradox of Eliot’s personality that his seriousness was often made the butt of his own jokes. In the Faber Christmas catalogue for 1933, his books were promoted by making light of the qualities with which he had become associated: ‘E is for Eliot, a very stern man. / His prose is severe, and his poems don’t scan’.³⁷ Eliot even allowed glimmers of camp humour to appear in his *Collected Poems*. The ‘Five Finger Exercises’ took his ‘stern[ness]’ and ‘sever[ity]’ as their punchline:

How unpleasant to meet Mr. Eliot!
With his features of clerical cut,
And his brow so grim
And his mouth so prim
And his conversation, so nicely
Restricted to What Precisely
And If and Perhaps and But.³⁸

To many, Eliot’s decision to preserve these verses alongside *The Waste Land* and *Ash-Wednesday* in the *Collected Poems 1909-1935* (1936) came as something of a shock. Rolfe Humphries described them as ‘unworthy of one who may aspire to saintliness, and the spectacle of an ascetic copying the attitudes of Edward Lear is ghastly incongruous rather than genuinely comic or edifying.’³⁹ But this was hardly an isolated incident; Eliot consistently played up to the character of ‘Mr Eliot’. As Simon Grimble has written, Eliot’s ‘Englishness’ came largely by means of ‘precise markers’, including his exaggerated accent, fashion sense, and even the topics about which he chose to write.⁴⁰ In his letters to Emily Hale, we learn about the way he

³⁶ Marsha Bryant and Douglas Mao, ‘Camp Modernism: Introduction’, *Modernism/modernity* 23.1 (2016), 1-4 (2).

³⁷ See Faber, *The Untold Story*, 94.

³⁸ ‘Five-Finger Exercises’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 143.

³⁹ Rolfe Humphries, ‘Eliot’s Poetry’, *New Masses* 20 (18 August 1936), 25-26 (25).

⁴⁰ Simon Grimble, ‘Englishness’, in *T. S. Eliot in Context*, ed. Jason Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 43-51 (49).

would ‘make up myself for evening parties’ with ‘a peculiar green powder I got in Paris, which under artificial light gave a corpselike effect which had a great success.’⁴¹

One major discovery to come out of the recent publication of Eliot’s letters to Hale and to Mary Trevelyan is his tendency to switch the serious and the unserious on instinct – as in Sontag’s understanding of camp – with confusing repercussions for the two women. Trevelyan’s memoir reveals an Eliot who relished unpredictability: ‘Having said, severely, that he’d call at 7 p.m., he arrived at 6 p.m. I remarked on the reproving tone of his note and he replied: “Ah, but when I am serious you laugh and when I joke you take me seriously.” I agreed.’⁴² Mary’s agreement strikes one as more cordial than it does complicit, and there are other moments where Eliot’s joviality threatened to hurt her feelings: ‘Unless one happens to want to talk serious, T. in these absurd moods is the greatest fun – but he won’t be interrupted – it seems he has to work his mood out of his system.’⁴³ With Hale, the effects were more severe. In the early stages of their correspondence, Eliot outlined a curious communicative framework: ‘I love to be foolish with you, because my feelings are so serious that they are far below the level of ordinary serious conversation or correspondence, and therefore nothing in words except a kind of levity seems to be of use.’⁴⁴ Eventually, though, it became evident that the two had serious differences that ‘levity’ could not acknowledge: ‘I shall make this letter wholly impersonal, since the tone of your reply to me is such that any personal word would perhaps if not probably be interpreted also.’⁴⁵

Eliot’s habit of mixing seriousness and unseriousness has an important bearing on our understanding of his work. Often, his creative writing did not get the tone of response he

⁴¹ ‘To Emily Hale, 14 July 1932’, *Eliot-Hale Letters*, ed. John Haffenden (Online: T. S. Eliot Estate, 2023), <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/1154>.

⁴² Mary Trevelyan and Erica Wagner, *Mary & Mr Eliot: A Sort of Love Story* (London: Faber & Faber, 2022), 170.

⁴³ Trevelyan, *Mary & Mr Eliot*, 218.

⁴⁴ ‘To Emily Hale, 14 January 1936’, *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/1445>.

⁴⁵ ‘Emily Hale to T. S. Eliot, 3 December 1956’, *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/11209>.

expected. In 1933, he described a performance of *Sweeney Agonistes* to Hale as ‘a little too comic; I think most of the audience took it as pure farce.’⁴⁶ A similar outcome occurred in *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), when it became apparent that the speeches of the Knights explaining their motives for killing the Archbishop had ‘amused the audience instead of shocking them, and thereby made them miss the point – the main point of the whole play.’⁴⁷ In these cases, serious scenes were received with misleading lightness, but on other occasions the reverse was true. Eliot rebuked his brother for sending him a ‘questionnaire’ about the *Noctes Binarianae* (1939), a collection of light verses composed by Eliot with a group of friends: ‘I am somewhat embarrassed by having this pamphlet taken so seriously.’⁴⁸ On some occasions, though, Eliot mystifies over how he wished certain poems to be taken. When it came to the pieces in *Ara Vos Prec* (1919), he gave no explanation beyond: “‘Bleistein (like “S[weeney] among the Nightingales”) is meant to be very serious! And “Hippopotamus” and Webster aren’t.’⁴⁹ He would later tell his brother ‘I consider my Sweeney poems as serious as anything I have ever written, in fact much more serious as well as more mature than the early poems but I do not know anybody who agrees with me on this point except Vivien and William Butler Yeats.’⁵⁰

Although we are now told frequently in the criticism to think about the joining of the serious and the unserious Eliot, we are yet to be told what that joining may look like. This chapter seeks to examine what it is about *The Waste Land* which has enabled it to be considered both a statement of Eliot’s ‘probity, fastidiousness and impeccable behaviour’ – the qualities he mocked in the ‘Eliot Club’ correspondence – and also as a potential parody of those same qualities. It turns firstly to the stylistic procedures of the poem itself, examining how Eliot

⁴⁶ ‘To Emily Hale, 16 May 1933’, *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/l242>.

⁴⁷ T. S. Eliot and George Hoellering, ‘Preface’, in *The Film of Murder in the Cathedral* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952), 11-14 (14).

⁴⁸ ‘To Henry Eliot, 14 October 1939’, *Letters*, IX, 291.

⁴⁹ ‘To Mary Hutchinson, 9 July 1919, *Letters*, I, 371.

⁵⁰ ‘To Henry Eliot, 8 December 1922’, *Letters*, I, 803.

turned a technique which he would exploit on many occasions in his light verse – the combination of incongruous elements – into one of his most important theories of poetics. It turns next to Eliot's own use of the word 'serious' in *The Sacred Wood*, where he argued that it required fusing with 'levity' if it was to have the desired impact on readers. The association of the 'serious' with the academic, something which emerges from the discussions of both *The Waste Land* and *The Sacred Wood*, forms the second part of the chapter. First, Eliot's failed scholarly aspirations are surveyed alongside his recourse to academic parody in his bawdy verse. The tension between these two exercises – scholarship and parody – are then examined with reference to the text that has caused the most problems for an understanding of Eliot's 'seriousness': the 'Notes' to *The Waste Land*. Through a comparison with Percy Shelley's *Queen Mab*, the chapter concludes by arguing that the 'Notes' are intended not as a parody of scholarly annotation or as a 'hoax', but as a diagram for the creatively incongruous 'mind of the poet'.

Light Verse Mechanics

The story of Eliot reading *The Waste Land* to Leonard and Virginia Woolf in the summer of 1922 has become myth. 'He sang it & chanted it rhythmized it,' the latter wrote in her diary, 'It has great beauty & force of phrase: symmetry; & tensivity. What connects it together, I'm not so sure...' ⁵¹ This image of Eliot as a poet-prophet, 'chant[ing]' as if he engaged in a ritual of the kind described in *The Golden Bough*, has proved attractive for critics emphasising the historical significance of this moment. ⁵² But there was also, for Woolf at least, something disarmingly

⁵¹ Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, 5 vols (London: Granta, 2023), II, 222.

⁵² On Eliot's 'chanting', see Ronald Schuchard, *The Last Minstrels: Yeats and the Revival of the Bardic Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 320ff.

funny about it. Clive Bell recounted that whenever Eliot paid a visit to Rodmell in the 1920s, he and his sister-in-law struggled to contain themselves:

Between Virginia and myself somehow the poet became a sort of ‘family joke’: it is not easy to say why. To some people the combination of human frailties with supernatural powers will always appear preposterous, which is, I suppose, a roundabout way of saying that a genius is an oddity. To us, at any rate this mixture, genius, in its rarest form, combined with studied primness of manner and speech, seemed deliciously comic.⁵³

One can’t help but feel sorry for Eliot, that Bell and Woolf found his incongruous ‘mixture’ of ‘genius’ and ‘primness’ ‘deliciously comic’. To defend the pair, however, we might argue that their reaction was entirely formulaic. ‘Incongruous combination’ is now the dominant theory among philosophers of humour for explaining why we find certain events and arrangements of words amusing. Jokes of all kinds, from puns and stand-up routines to the campness of Eliot’s ‘four-piece suit’, rely on the clashing of incongruous elements, as Noël Carroll explains: ‘what is key to comic amusement is a deviation from some presupposed norm – that is to say, an anomaly or an incongruity relative to some framework governing the ways in which we think the world is or should be.’⁵⁴ For Terry Eagleton, this property lends humour a political significance, disrupting the orderly powers of the ego: ‘Humour of this kind is the amusement that springs from things being out of order, estranged or defamiliarized, deprived for a moment of their allotted role in the overall scheme of things.’⁵⁵ Incongruity, in other words, offers an invaluable opportunity for subversive creativity, and it is this notion that will be shown as appealing to Eliot in developing his own theories of poetry.

What the next two sections of this chapter seek to argue, then, is that Eliot’s use of incongruous combination as the abiding structural procedure of *The Waste Land* has a significant and undervalued relationship with his sense of humour. From an early age, Eliot

⁵³ Clive Bell, ‘How Pleasant to Know Mr Eliot’, in *T. S. Eliot: A Symposium*, ed. Richard March and Tambimuttu (London: PL Editions Poetry, 1948), 15-19 (15).

⁵⁴ Noël Carroll, *Humour: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 17.

⁵⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Humour* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 27.

understood the comic potential of incongruity. The poems in his childhood magazine, *Fireside*, exploited the element of surprise to entertain members of his family, including the prescient:

I thought I saw a banker's clerk
A-riding on a 'bus,
I looked again and saw,
It was a hippo[po]tamus.⁵⁶

In his mature light verse, Eliot makes use of a similar tactic, harnessing the possibilities of rhyme to yoke together disparate ideas for comic effect:

Mr. Possum wishes that his name was Tristram Shandy,
Or Mahatma Gandhi
Or even Yankee Doodle Dandy
So that he could reply in poetry to the kind invitation of
Miss Alison Tandy.⁵⁷

The layering of names from literature, politics, and popular song through the associative logic of sound amuses in its randomness, but also offers a new way of thinking about the connections between the individuals. In *Noctes Binaniana* (1939), Eliot allows surprising rhyming words to dictate the imagery of his poems, with similarly absurd consequences:

At the sound of a sudden sub-pœna
He withdraws in alarm to his lair —
Very much like the spotted hyæna
When pursued by the cinnamon bear.⁵⁸

The more incongruous the combination, the greater the amusement generated, as we laugh not only at the impossibility of joining 'sub-pœna' with 'hyæna', but in the contortion of syntax and sense required to position them at the ends of the lines. It is a technique that Eliot had referred to in another light poem, a 'get-well-soon' piece for his mother: 'Hoping you are better, / At least enough to read my letter, / Which I have twisted into rhyme / To amuse you, I have

⁵⁶ 'Fireside: A Weekly Magazine', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, II, 148.

⁵⁷ 'Mr. Possum wishes that his name was Tristram Shandy', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, II, 166.

⁵⁸ 'How to Pick a Possum', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, II, 212.

taken time'.⁵⁹ Eliot would import this 'twisting' into his 'serious' writing, where the clashing of high and low, mythical and trivial not only offers a mutually-illuminating comparison, but also generates laughter. Although he makes no comparison with the light verse, Martin Scofield points to the 'incongruous' rhymes of Eliot's early writing, especially in 'Mr Apollinax': 'In the palace of Mrs. Phlaccus, at Professor Channing-Cheetah's / He laughed like an irresponsible fœtus'.⁶⁰ We might also take notice of a quatrain from 'Sweeney Erect' which achieves such an effect:

Morning stirs the feet and hands
(Nausicaa and Polypheme).
Gesture of orang-outang
Rises from the sheets in steam.⁶¹

And this, we remember, is from a poem that Eliot considered 'more serious' than anything he had written before.

While in the examples above the humour arises from the forcing of two surprising words together, 'Channing-Cheetah's'/'fœtus', 'sub-pœna'/'hyæna', 'Gandhi'/'Yankee Doodle Dandy', in other poems Eliot disrupts the sense of inevitability generated by a rhyme scheme. On some occasions, he manipulates our expectation of full rhyme to create bathos, as in a verse-letter to Virginia Woolf:

Among the various Middle Classes
(Who live on treacle and molasses)
A custom has (for want of better)
Been called the Bread & Butter Letter.
But Mrs. Woolf would not rejoice
In anything that's so bourgeoisie,
So what can poor Old Possum do,
Who's upper-middle through and through?⁶²

⁵⁹ 'Dear Charlotte, Hoping you are better', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, II, 152.

⁶⁰ 'Mr. Apollinax', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 25; Martin Scofield, *T. S. Eliot: The Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 55.

⁶¹ 'Sweeney Erect', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 36.

⁶² 'Among the various Middle Classes', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, II, 177.

Our retrospective revision of ‘rejoice’ to ‘rejoise’ lends it the kind of mock-pretentiousness that is implied in the content of the verse itself, as ‘poor Old Possum’ struggles to impress his correspondent with verbal dexterity. But nowhere does Eliot make use of our expectations of rhyme more thoroughly than in the refrains of *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats* (1939). The surprising appearances of ‘physiognomy’, ‘economy’, and ‘gastronomy’ – all of which mystify as to their relevance to the poem’s subject – amuse largely because they prefigure in our mind what we know is about to come: ‘Old Deuteronomy’.⁶³ The comedy is attendant upon the poet’s elaborate attempts to find rhymes for that tricky cat’s name, in the same way as it does in ‘Mr. Mistoffelees’.⁶⁴ Similarly, in ‘Macavity: the Mystery Cat’, it becomes impossible to come across a word terminating /eə/, ‘despair’, ‘air’, ‘square’, ‘repair’, ‘stair’, ‘spare’, without expecting it to be followed by the comically repetitive: ‘*Macavity’s not there!*’.⁶⁵ The amusing inevitability of the refrain pattern matches that of Eliot’s earlier verse, especially in ‘Prufrock’, where the ‘throwing off a shawl’ bathetically summons the refrain from the previous verse: ‘That is not it at all, / That is not what I meant, at all’ (109-10).

In *The Waste Land*, we might notice that Eliot’s most thorough use of incongruous rhyme as a comic tool is in sections that Pound excised. While Robert S. Lehman has argued persuasively that a significant alteration from ‘He Do the Police in Different Voices’ is the ‘dissolution of satire’, we may argue more broadly that the published version of *The Waste Land* does not try quite so hard to be funny.⁶⁶ Sometimes, the rhymes in the excised passages are spontaneous, and make use of the kind of bathos described above: ‘Get me a woman, I said; you’re too drunk, she said, / But she gave me a bed, and a bath, and ham and eggs’.⁶⁷ The

⁶³ ‘Old Deuteronomy’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, II, 16-17.

⁶⁴ See ‘Mr. Mistoffelees’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, II, 21-22.

⁶⁵ ‘Macavity: the Mystery Cat’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, II, 23-24.

⁶⁶ Robert S. Lehman, ‘Eliot’s Last Laugh: The Dissolution of Satire in “The Waste Land”’, *Journal of Modern Literature* 32.2 (2009), 65-79.

⁶⁷ *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts*, ed. Valerie Eliot and Matthew Hollis, new ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 2022), 5.

rhyme creates a sense of ironic inevitability in the line, as if the logical answer to being ‘too drunk’ is not to throw the speaker out of ‘Myrtle’s Place’, but to make him ‘ham and eggs’. The incongruity of the outcome contributes to the comedy of the scene at large, as we follow a group of men causing havoc on a night on the town in Boston. Other sections cut by Pound rely heavily on the incongruous possibilities of rhyme. The Fresca couplets, for instance, maintain ironic tension between Fresca’s posing and the narrator’s opinion of what lies beneath it: ‘Fresca! In other time or place had been / A meek and lowly weeping Magdalene’.⁶⁸ The half-rhyme on ‘Magdalene’ disrupts the expected sound of ‘been’, mirroring the forced nature of the comparison between Fresca and Mary Magdalene much as Eliot would with ‘bourgeoise’ and ‘rejoice’ in the epistolary poem to Woolf. But also, far less remarked upon in studies of the poem’s genesis, is the original opening of ‘Death by Water’:

Even the drunken ruffian who descends
 Illicit backstreet stairs, to reappear,
 For the derision of his sober friends,
 Staggering, or limping with a comic gonorrhea,

 From his trade with wind and sea and snow, as they
 Are, he is, with ‘much seen and much endured’,
 Foolish, impersonal, innocent or gay,
 Liking to be shaved, combed, scented, manicured.⁶⁹

The polysyllabic rhymes ‘reappear’ and ‘gonorrhea’, ‘endured’ and ‘manicured’, would be at home in Eliot’s light verse. Indeed, these lines contain some of the syntactic ‘twisting’ typical of the *Practical Cats* or the *Noctes Binarianae*, as the set-up of the jokes requires a delay with an ‘or’ clause, and the listing of adjectives ‘shaved, combed, scented, manicured’ in order to move the rhyme-word into the correct position, both common techniques in those collections. In her book, *Humor, Empathy, and Community in Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (2021), Rachel Trousdale argues that Eliot’s sense of humour revolves around notions of superiority;

⁶⁸ *The Waste Land: A Facsimile*, 27.

⁶⁹ *The Waste Land: A Facsimile*, 55.

his characters are always laughing *at* one another (or at themselves) in an effort to establish distance.⁷⁰ What a brief survey of the construction of jokes in Eliot's light verse and excised portions of *The Waste Land* shows, however, is that Eliot made consistent use of incongruity and surprise in his attempts to make his reader smile.

The Waste Land's Incongruities

But this chapter is not entirely about moments intended to be humorous in the poems, because while incongruous combination had the potential to elicit a cheap laugh, for Eliot it also had an important role in the creation of poetic effects. In her seminal study of *The Creative Mind* (1990), Margaret Boden outlines three experimental methods – shared by the arts and the sciences – which facilitate innovation. ‘Combination’, ‘Exploration’, and ‘Transformation’ are the names she gives to these approaches, but it is the first of these methods that has the greatest relevance to Eliot. ‘Combinational creativity’, Boden claims, is that which ‘involves making unfamiliar combinations of familiar ideas’ with broad applications, including in the production of jokes.⁷¹ Occasionally, that meant combining elements that had very little in common with the product they created, an idea on which Marcus du Sautoy elaborates:

Often the rules governing one world will suggest an interesting new framework for the other. Combination is a very powerful tool in the realm of mathematical creativity. The eventual solution of the Poincaré Conjecture, which describes the possible shapes of our universe, was arrived at by applying very different tools to understand flow over surfaces.⁷²

⁷⁰ Rachel Trousdale, *Humor, Empathy, and Community in Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

⁷¹ Margaret A. Boden, *The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms*, 2nd ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 3.

⁷² Marcus du Sautoy, *The Creativity Code: How AI is Learning to Write, Paint, and Think* (London: 4th Estate, 2019), 8.

Whenever Eliot discusses the production of something ‘new’, it is hardly ever a matter of divine conception, but the result of a process he most commonly calls ‘combination’. ‘These lines of Tourneur and of Middleton’, he writes in ‘Philip Massinger’ (1920), ‘exhibit that perpetual slight alteration of language, words perpetually juxtaposed in new and sudden combinations, meanings perpetually *eingeschachtelt* into meanings, which evidences a very high development of the senses’.⁷³ Throughout Eliot’s prose, distinct elements are forever ‘fusing’, ‘forging’, ‘amalgamating’, and ‘merging’, be they words, emotions, or sensory data: ‘The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.’⁷⁴ In ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1919), ‘combine’ is the verb of choice, appearing nine times in quick succession. It is used to describe the process that takes place in the ‘mature’ poet’s mind during an act of composition: ‘a more finely perfected medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations.’⁷⁵ The famous analogy of the chemical reaction follows: ‘When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. The combination takes place only if the platinum is present’. Marcus du Sautoy’s referral of the ‘combinational’ method of creativity to scientific research is no accident for Eliot. In ‘Modern Tendencies in Poetry’ (1919), he was especially keen for this link to be made: ‘[The poet] is aware of a great number and variety of elements which can be combined into new and important compounds; his training has given him knowledge of what the elements have been made to do already, and has made him exceptionally sensitive to what they can be made to do.’⁷⁶ The analogy of literary art as an experimental science persisted in Eliot’s mind. In 1941 he wrote to Geoffrey Faber how

⁷³ ‘Philip Massinger’, *Complete Prose*, II, 244-59 (248).

⁷⁴ ‘The Metaphysical Poets’, *Complete Prose*, II, 375-85 (380).

⁷⁵ ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, *Complete Prose*, II, 105-14 (108-09).

⁷⁶ ‘Modern Tendencies in Poetry’, *Complete Prose*, II, 212-25 (214).

younger men seem to me (I am only trying to make clear how biased my view must be) to go on complacently making the old school-laboratory experiments when they ought to be investigating the undeveloped possibilities of their art. [...] (to see, for instance, the sort of thing I have been doing lately simply as experiments in putting together three or four unrelated things, as one would fiddle with chemicals, just to see what happens when you put 'em together) is due (as perhaps with Henry James) to an inner necessity to get my mind off feelings in order to get them out[.]⁷⁷

It was this embrace of scientific procedure which Eliot claimed could help generate an aesthetic of 'seriousness' for a newly-mature poet: 'if we take poetry seriously as a work and not as the mere ebullition of personality, we shall find that the poet's training and equipment is parallel to the training and equipment of the scientist'.⁷⁸

By the time of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', then, 'incongruity' had developed from the key ingredient of a joke to the primary tool of poetic imagination: '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.'⁷⁹ By uniting Boden's theory of 'combinational creativity' with an incongruity theory of humour, we uncover how the fusion of discrete components not only has a disarmingly humorous dimension, but that it is instrumental in producing any kind of novel effect. There is something paradoxical about this alliance. After all, in his advocacy of a 'scientific' combination of unlikely elements, Eliot envisioned a more 'serious' approach to poetry. What the following analysis of *The Waste Land*'s incongruous combinations will demonstrate, however, is that 'humour' and 'seriousness' are not mutually exclusive. While the structure of Eliot's poem relies on incongruous combinations – and those combinations have an innate capacity to amuse – the laughter they elicit has a re-directive impulse, designed to conceal something tragic that lies beneath it.

⁷⁷ 'To Geoffrey Faber, 25 March 1941', *Letters*, IX, 779.

⁷⁸ 'Modern Tendencies in Poetry', 213.

⁷⁹ 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', 110.

That *The Waste Land* was an incongruous poem was a point on which all early readers could agree. What was less consensual, however, was how successful Eliot's incongruities were at generating specific effects. While some found 'the juxtaposition of Andrew Marvell, Paul Dreiser and others equally incongruous' to be 'more cryptic in intention and even more dismal in effect', others praised Eliot's pursuit of 'effects in new combinations of images'.⁸⁰ What often goes unnoticed, though, is the way in which *The Waste Land* itself dramatizes what would become one of the key debates about the poem. Nowhere is this more obvious than at the opening, which invokes the combinational creativity of reproduction:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.⁸¹

The poem begins by arguing with itself about the consequences of combinational production. Unlike the humorous possibilities of incongruity, however, the novelty produced here is an object of resentment; the personified roots would prefer to stay covered in 'forgetful snow' than be forced into life. But in this beginning about beginnings, *The Waste Land*'s denial of nature's creativity has itself produced an incongruous fusion of elements. This is found not only in the unlikeliness of 'Lilacs' sprouting out of 'dead land', or the alliance between 'Memory and desire', but in the surprising yoking of 'breeding' to 'cruellest'.

The mixture of the retrospective and the prospective finds its embodiment in a figure who resists any kind of discrete category. As an 'Old man with wrinkled female breasts' (219), Tiresias is already an incongruous combination, and is connected to theories of humour and

⁸⁰ Louis Untermeyer, 'Disillusion vs. Dogma', in *Contemporary Reviews*, 93-95 (94); Allen Tate, 'Whose Ox', *Contemporary Reviews*, 90-91 (90).

⁸¹ *The Waste Land, Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 55.

camp through what Colleen Lamos has called his ‘spurious androgyny’.⁸² While Tiresias’s prophetic talents lay claim to an increased capacity for emotional congruence in the form of empathy, walking ‘among the lowest of the dead’ (246), he does not make much use of it. Indeed, Steven Helmling sees in Tiresias’s ‘foresuffering’ the act of a parodic saint: ‘While Tiresias is the closest thing to a Christ-figure in the poem, the grin of Tiresias exorcises, by mocking it, the temptation “to conceive of himself as a Messiah.”’⁸³ For Tiresias is not the most empathetic of voices; his characterisation of the young man carbuncular as ‘One of the low on whom assurance sits / As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire’ (233-34) betrays the petty attitude of an aristocrat, hardly tolerant of the ‘low’ with whom he had ‘walked’ in the Underworld. So too is his attitude towards the typist deficient in empathy, an ethereal vision polluted with the urban venom of Popean satire. When describing all that is suffered on ‘this same divan or bed’, Tiresias goes out of his way to remind us of the dual purpose of this item of furniture on which he had already remarked: ‘On the divan are piled (at night her bed)’ (226). Pound wrote next to the line ‘inversions not warranted by any real exigence of metre’, but we might argue that Pound was misunderstanding Eliot’s intent, which was drawing on his conscious use of syntactic ‘twisting’ to generate laughter in his light verse.⁸⁴ Tiresias’s inability to resist a cheap joke, in other words, clashes against the loftiness of his semi-divine powers.

When isolating instances in which incongruous combinations present themselves in *The Waste Land*, it is striking to observe just how concentrated they are at moments that would usually demand a sense of closure. In the three successive verse paragraphs marking the transition between ‘A Game of Chess’ and ‘The Fire Sermon’, the speaker repeatedly denies readers the comfort of a conclusion. The pub scene terminates with the clashing of high and low registers:

⁸² Colleen Lamos, *Deviant Modernism: Sexual and Textual Errancy in T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 111.

⁸³ Helmling, ‘Grin of Tiresias’, 148.

⁸⁴ *The Waste Land: A Facsimile*, 45.

Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight.
 Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.
 Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.
 (170-72).

Throughout the scene, we gather that the injunction to separation, encouraged by the landlord's 'HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME', will be prolonged as much as possible. Indeed, just as we anticipate Lil's extended 'goodbye' may finally come to an end, Eliot offers a point of tonal conflict to open it back up again, with the allusion to Ophelia. In his exploration of the combination of high and low in Joyce, Robert H. Bell suggests that the oscillation between seriousness and non-seriousness in *Ulysses* gives the seemingly tragic figure of Stephen an opportunity to prolong his fate by becoming comic, following a 'pattern of descent and reascent, that jocoserious sine curve, [that] not only recalls the lost but revives the living.'⁸⁵ Lil's movement from comic pubgoer to tragic heroine reverses the Joycean formula, but retains its essential effect. Here, the 'jocoserious' combination functions to prolong, but also – and more significantly – to defer, requiring a reader to meditate on the combination, rather than to let it terminate the paragraph.

Similarly, in 'The Fire Sermon', the opening two verse paragraphs resolve themselves into incongruous combinations of tone. In the first, the speaker who 'sat down and wept' is haunted by the jarring sound of laughter: 'The rattle of bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear' (182; 186). In the second, the description of the waste land gives way to a bawdy ballad 'O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter / And on her daughter / They wash their feet in soda water' (199-201), which is followed by the climactic quotation from Verlaine: '*Et, O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!*' (202). Here, the dissonance of the songs' associations terminates an especially loud paragraph, which began with the 'dragging' of the rat's belly,

⁸⁵ Robert H. Bell, *Jocoserious Joyce: The Fate of Folly in 'Ulysses'* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 84.

and proceeded through the clanging of a ‘gashouse’, the ‘rattling’ of bones, and the ‘sound of horns and motors’. The orchestral effect amplifies the impression of incongruity in the verse paragraph, as we imagine separate instruments playing jarring chords at the same time. In the face of such tonal conflict, the poem allows its animals to speak, but they communicate not with human language as they do in Lewis Carroll or Edward Lear, but with sheer, unintelligible noise: ‘Twit twit twit / Jug jug jug jug jug jug’ (203-04).

By piling up discrete elements into incongruous combinations at significant moments, *The Waste Land* seems intent on redirecting our attention away from its emotional centre. This is most evident in the episode where the logic of incongruity is pushed *ad absurdum* in a conversation that demands clear answers:

‘My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
‘Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
‘What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
‘I never know what you are thinking. Think.’

I think we are in rats' alley
Where the dead men lost their bones.

‘What is that noise?’
The wind under the door.
‘What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?’
Nothing again nothing.

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

I remember
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
'Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?'
But

O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag-
It's so elegant
So intelligent

‘What shall I do now? What shall I do?
‘I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street
‘With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?
‘What shall we ever do?’

The hot water at ten.
And if it rains, a closed car at four.

And we shall play a game of chess,
 (The ivory men make company between us)
 Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.
 (111-138).

Playing a game of chess does not require the kind of combinational creativity that Eliot relies on for many of his structural effects. Indeed, Marcus du Sautoy writes how incongruous thinking is not appropriate for chess, which relies instead on moves within a prescribed set of rules: 'The axioms are the starting positions of the pieces on the board and the rules of logical deduction are the parameters determining how each piece can move.'⁸⁶ By having a game of chess invoked during a conversation in which the speaker offers incongruous responses, Eliot offers an analogy for the speaker refusing to play by the rules of dialogue. In response to the first two questions, the speaker offers a sensible move:

‘What is that noise?’
 The wind under the door.
 ‘What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?’
 Nothing again nothing.

However, in the excesses of emotional exasperation, the algorithm by which he calculates a reply to the other questions falters; each of his subsequent four responses appear incongruous to her questions. It is significant, though, to notice what kind of information the speaker does manage to produce. On all occasions, he answers the question literally and literarily. The recourse to snippets of text; ‘rats’ alley’, which had already appeared in the poem, the song from *The Tempest* which Sosostris had recited earlier, and the ‘Shakespearean Rag’, indicate an automatic referral to someone else’s words. Even ‘lidless’, contained in the final, most intelligible, response, vibrates with intertextual charge from Coleridge, Shelley, and Tennyson.⁸⁷ What is moving about the passage, however, is that the true feelings of the speaker

⁸⁶ du Sautoy, *Creativity Code*, 142.

⁸⁷ See Coleridge’s ‘lidless dragon-eyes’ in ‘Ode to the Departing Year’, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Vol. 16: *Poetical Works: Part 1*, ed. J. C. C. Mays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 311; Shelley’s ‘Philosophy did strain / Her lidless eyes for thee’ in ‘Ode to Liberty’, and ‘Naked, beneath the lidless eye of Heaven!’ in ‘Ode to Naples’, *The Poems of Shelley, Volume 3, 1819-1820*, ed. Jack Donovan,

remain unsaid. In fact, it is highly significant that this – perhaps the most emotionally charged moment in the poem – is not lyric at all, but dramatic. We infer the agony of both characters in the gaps *between* what is said, in the comically deadpan answers of the speaker, and the tragic anxiety of his companion.

It is during the incongruous conversation above that the speaker's reliance on allusion as a tactic of emotional deferral becomes especially clear. In the face of her probing questions, the poem breaks down, finding itself repeating what has already been said, mirroring its disintegration into noise in the opening of 'The Fire Sermon'. In this way, then, *The Waste Land*'s incongruities resemble a kind of displacement behaviour; as Eliot told Geoffrey Faber, 'combination' was a tool he used in order to 'get my mind off feelings in order to get them out.' Troubled by an excess of emotion, the speaker channels their anxiety into different terms entirely, producing clashing allusive combinations. For Ronald Bush, this offers an insight into the psychology of the poem itself. He posits the idea of a 'dream censor', who 'is able to agitate and then shatter a fantasy that gets too close to some forbidden truth'.⁸⁸ In his reading, *The Waste Land* consistently replays the same formula: 'A dramatic situation emerges, intensifies mysteriously, reverberates with frightening tension and then, just before the situation is clarified, disperses'. That dispersal is enacted most frequently by the appearance of a literary reference, which functions as a structural earth wire, siphoning off a build-up of charged emotion along a path of less resistance:

— Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.

Oed' und leer das Meer.

Cian Duffy, Kelvin Everest, Michael Rossington (London: Longman, 2011), 393; 638; Tennyson's 'lidless watcher of the public weal' in 'The Princess', in *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, ed. Christopher Ricks, rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 2014), 276.

⁸⁸ Ronald Bush, *T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 63.

(37-42).

In the manuscript, Eliot added the allusion to Wagner in pen, as if the emotional gap in the typescript after ‘silence’ loomed too large on a second reading.⁸⁹ Throughout the poem, we witness what seem to be cracks in the speaker’s emotionally re-directive core: ‘By the waters of Lemane I sat down and wept...’ (182); ‘My friend, blood shaking my heart’ (402); ‘On Margate sands / I can connect / Nothing with nothing’ (300-02). The third of these is especially curious, as the speaker reveals their difficulty in triangulating how they feel through the combination of incongruous elements. This is revealed most significantly at the end of the poem, where images of connection seek to join a number of *The Waste Land*’s discrete narrative strands:

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down

Poi s’ascose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam uti chelidon – O swallow swallow
Le Prince d’Aquitaine à la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo’s mad againe.
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.

Shantih shantih shantih

(423-433).

The two lines which indicate acts of organisation, ‘Shall I at least set my lands in order?’ and ‘These fragments I have shored against my ruins’, both appear amidst a tangle of allusive references. While the first may strike us something of a Prufrockian rhetorical question, it is followed by a succession of European languages in a specific order: English, Italian, Latin, and French. ‘Shored’, meanwhile, speaks not only to the various ‘ruins’ that may require propping

⁸⁹ See *The Waste Land: A Facsimile*, 7.

up, 'London bridge' and '*la tour abolie*', but also the 'shore' on which the speaker is 'Fishing', and, alliteratively, to the concluding 'shantih'. The work of these two lines is, then, to offer possibilities for combination. Like Sosostris with her Tarot cards, they suggest different ways for 'order[ing]' the material of the poem, encouraging the reader to collaborate in the process as one might in the production of incongruous humour.

Serious Laughter in *The Sacred Wood*

The previous section argued that some of Eliot's most important theories about poetry have a significant and undervalued relationship with humour. Indeed, when it came to contemporary approaches to *The Waste Land*, Eliot often sought to supplement their analysis with a degree of lightness. There is the early letter responding to Edmund Wilson's review, where we might read much behind Eliot's politeness: 'I think you have understood the poem remarkably well, perhaps a little over-understood it! I mean read more into it than it contains here and there.'⁹⁰ It was one of his habitual manoeuvres to compliment a critic as having found far more in the poem than he had intended: 'Well! I supposed that I was merely working off a grouch against life while passing the time in a Swiss sanatorium; but apparently I meant something by it.'⁹¹ He says something similar to Cleanth Brooks in 1937, after reading his essay in the *Southern Review* and claiming that it 'made me feel, for instance, that I had been a great deal more ingenious than I had been aware of, because the conscious problems with which one is concerned in the actual writing are more those of a quasi musical nature, in the arrangement of metric and pattern, than those of a conscious exposition of ideas.'⁹² Eliot hints at a need to

⁹⁰ 'To Edmund Wilson, 11 January 1923', *Letters*, II, 11.

⁹¹ 'To Thomas McGreevy, 14 February 1931', *Letters*, V, 484.

⁹² 'To Cleanth Brooks, 15 March 1937', *Letters*, VIII, 537.

respond to the poem more immediately, perhaps even to embrace the kinds of reactions that occur when the poem is performed, rather than studied on the page.

Eliot's interest in the psychology of critical approach, and especially the role of immediate reactions, has proved a particularly rich area for scholars interested in his prose. After all, it is one of Eliot's essays that is often seen to have provided the New Criticism with its mission statement: 'But we must learn to take literature seriously.'⁹³ And yet, the relationship between Eliot's prose and his own sense of 'seriousness' has long been under strain. His interest in topics ranging from music hall to types of cheese is one way that David Chinitz finds Eliot as a critic to resist the category of 'seriousness' into which he is often placed.⁹⁴ But Eliot does not only resist seriousness in his discussions of non-literary topics, for he also returns frequently to ideas of fun in his writing on poetry. Richard Shusterman was one early critic intrigued by Eliot's frequent emphasis on the importance of art as 'amusement', taking special note of remarks in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*: '[The poet] would like to be something of a popular entertainer ... would like to convey the pleasures of poetry ... As things are, and as fundamentally as they must always be, poetry is not a career but a mug's game'.⁹⁵ Shusterman argues that such comments are 'much more than ironic rhetorical ploy against romantic attitudes', and are in fact indicative of a 'positive and complex view of what poetry is and how it satisfies'.⁹⁶ In other words, Eliot's imagery of the 'game' is seen to lend poetry a much greater significance than straightforward assertions of its importance ever could.

In elucidation of this idea, Shusterman offers a definition of a 'game' as distinct from other types of recreational activity:

⁹³ 'Professional, or...', *Complete Prose*, I, 698-701 (701), See Leonard Diepeveen, 'Taking Literature Seriously: Essays to 1927', in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. David Chinitz (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 263-74.

⁹⁴ See Chinitz, 'Mr. Eliot and the Cheese', in *Eliot and the Cultural Divide*, 175-79.

⁹⁵ Eliot, 'The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism', quoted in Richard Shusterman, *T. S. Eliot and the Philosophy of Criticism* (London: Duckworth, 1988), 134.

⁹⁶ Shusterman, *Philosophy of Criticism*, 134.

A game thus may be seen as a rule-structured make-believe world, limited but complete and coherent in itself, which we project ourselves into for our amusement; one in which we surrender and transform ourselves as we interpretatively respond to it and interactively actualize or play it out, and which, in testing and exercising us, can provide cognitive enlargement and self-knowledge.⁹⁷

With this in mind, Shusterman turns his attention to Eliot's criticism, characterising his idea of a poem as a similarly 'imaginary structured world which we imaginatively enter, interpretatively recreate, and respond to'.⁹⁸ Most of Shusterman's evidence to support the analogy comes from 'Milton I', in which Eliot outlines a dual methodology that involves both immersion in and distance from the 'game' of the poem. Firstly, Eliot argues that any act of criticism must accept the laws which govern the poet's world, beginning with the moment 'when we isolate him, when we try to understand the rules of his own game, adopt his own point of view'.⁹⁹ Only through this initial act of surrender, as Shusterman interprets Eliot, will we be able to 'get involved or caught up in the work' and thus be able to 'understand and enjoy it properly'.¹⁰⁰ After this entry into the world of the poem is made, Eliot invokes the importance of stepping outside of the game. He continues in 'Milton I' by making conscious links back to 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', to the importance of 'measur[ing] [the poet] by outside standards, most pertinently by the standards of language and of something called Poetry, in our own language and in the whole history of European literature.'¹⁰¹ This bifocal 'game psychology', which combines immediate enjoyment of the poet's world with the distance of a timeless spectator, is considered by Shusterman as crucial to the approach of Eliot's criticism.

Exactly what happens in the mind of a person when they participate in a game has preoccupied a number of philosophers, mathematicians, and economists. Shusterman offers illuminating links to Aristotle and Gadamer, the latter noticing something important about the

⁹⁷ Shusterman, *Philosophy of Criticism*, 141.

⁹⁸ Shusterman, *Philosophy of Criticism*, 141.

⁹⁹ 'Milton I', *Complete Prose*, v, 371-79 (378)

¹⁰⁰ Shusterman, *Philosophy of Criticism*, 142.

¹⁰¹ 'Milton I', *Complete Prose*, v, 371-79 (378).

distinction between seriousness and playfulness when we enter into the world of a game: ‘only seriousness in playing makes the play wholly play. One who doesn’t take the game seriously is a spoilsport.’¹⁰² Channelling this observation into Eliot’s view of criticism, Shusterman argues that ‘the same obviously goes for appreciating poetry, which can give but minimal enjoyment when not attended to seriously’.¹⁰³ It is in this way that Shusterman is able to reconcile the ‘seriousness’ of Eliot’s critical task with his frequent injunctions to amusement. Unsurprisingly, then, Shusterman uses as his mission statement the passage from ‘The Frontiers of Criticism’ (1956) in which ‘enjoyment’ and ‘understanding’ are inextricably linked: ‘It is certain that we do not fully enjoy a poem unless we understand it; and on the other hand, it is equally true that we do not fully understand a poem unless we enjoy it.’¹⁰⁴ When Eliot implores us to ‘take literature *seriously*’, then, Shusterman would infer that he means this surprisingly *congruous* combination of seriousness-in-play.¹⁰⁵

One fundamental issue with Shusterman’s theory, however, is that it relies on a relatively small number of brief examples where Eliot equates the exercise of literary criticism with the playing of a game, all of which occur after 1936. Indeed, despite ‘serious’ being a key term for Eliot in an earlier period (just before the writing of *The Waste Land*) Shusterman does not consider Eliot’s own treatment of the word, or its implications for his ‘game theory’ of critical appreciation. Given what we know about Eliot’s characterisation of the combinational procedure of *The Waste Land* as a more ‘serious’ style of composition, though, and especially given its relationship with theories of humour, it seems of great importance to examine how he applied the word in his contemporary criticism, with special relevance to the way he combined it with ‘levity’.

¹⁰² Shusterman, *Philosophy of Criticism*, 139.

¹⁰³ Shusterman, *Philosophy of Criticism*, 139.

¹⁰⁴ Eliot, ‘The Frontiers of Criticism’, quoted in Shusterman, *Philosophy of Criticism*, 137.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Professional, or...’, 701.

In much of Eliot's early prose, the word 'serious' appears so often that Hannah Sullivan sees it as a kind of 'nervous repetition' that 'approaches neurosis'.¹⁰⁶ In *The Sacred Wood*, it strikes us as something of a critical twitch, and, like a twitch, there are moments where it appears to lose some of its precision. In the collection's opening essays, 'serious' is charged with the attitude of the last major critic to be obsessed with the word. For Matthew Arnold, 'seriousness' was a crucial criterion if one wanted to qualify for the status of a classic:

Only one thing we may add as to the substance and matter of poetry, guiding ourselves by Aristotle's profound observation that the superiority of poetry over history consists in its possessing a higher truth and a higher seriousness (*φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον* [*philosophoteron kai spoudaioteron*]).¹⁰⁷

When Arnold came to weaponize the word in the name of an artistic hierarchy in 'The Study of Poetry', it accrued much affective baggage: 'The substance of Chaucer's poetry, his view of things and his criticism of life, has largeness, freedom, shrewdness, benignity; but it has not this high seriousness.'¹⁰⁸ Without it, Arnold argues, our 'spirits' have little to 'rest upon' in Chaucer; 'and with the increasing demands of our modern ages upon poetry, this virtue of giving us what we can rest upon will be more and more highly esteemed'. But Eliot didn't agree. In his Harvard Lectures, he tackled Arnold's classification head-on: 'Chaucer [is] a poet who, although very different from Arnold, was not altogether deficient in high seriousness.'¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, Eliot took a while to come around to this criticism of Arnold. Indeed, in the 'Introduction' to *The Sacred Wood*, his view seems still to be undergoing a process of crystallisation:

How astonishing it would be, if a man like Arnold had concerned himself with the art of the novel, had compared Thackeray with Flaubert, had analysed the work of

¹⁰⁶ Hannah Sullivan, "'But we must learn to take literature seriously": T. S. Eliot and the Little Magazines of Modernism, 1917-1920', *Critical Quarterly* 46.2 (2004), 63-90 (72).

¹⁰⁷ Matthew Arnold, 'Introduction from *The English Poets. Selections with Critical Introductions by Various Hands*, ed. Thomas Humphry Ward (1880) ['The Study of Poetry']', in *Matthew Arnold*, ed. Seamus Perry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 595-615 (602).

¹⁰⁸ Arnold, 'The Study of Poetry', 606.

¹⁰⁹ 'Lecture VI: Matthew Arnold', *Complete Prose*, IV, 654-67 (662).

Dickens, had shown his contemporaries exactly why the author of *Amos Barton* is a more *serious* writer than Dickens, and why the author of *La Chartreuse de Parma* is more serious than either?¹¹⁰

The passage reads like a praise of Stendhal, George Eliot, and then Dickens, but this order is curious, because we know that Eliot enjoyed Dickens the most, and found him especially useful in crafting *The Waste Land*. Are we, then, to think that ‘serious’ is actually a negative term, denoting texts that are worthy of ‘analysis’ but with which Eliot did not associate himself?

As *The Sacred Wood* progresses, each fresh appearance of ‘serious’ seeks to trouble the boundaries of its Arnoldian definition by forcing it into increasingly incongruous combinations. In ‘The Possibility of a Poetic Drama’ (1920), Eliot suggests that one may ‘confect a poetic drama’ by looking to the model of the music hall, but admits that superficial judgements about genre may corrupt how well this idea is understood: ‘I am aware that this is a dangerous suggestion to make. For every person who is likely to consider it seriously there are a dozen toymakers who would leap to tickle aesthetic society into one more quiver and giggle of art debauch. Very few treat art seriously.’¹¹¹ In fact, we witness the beginning of a connection forming between ‘amusement’ and ‘seriousness’, of the kind that Shusterman locates in Eliot’s later prose: ‘Elizabethan drama was aimed at a public which wanted *entertainment* of a crude sort, but would *stand* a good deal of poetry; our problem should be to take a form of entertainment, and subject it to the process which would leave it a form of art.’¹¹² To take this suggestion ‘seriously’, as Eliot hopes, means to consider the combination of art and entertainment as being fundamental to its proper appreciation. However, the implication is that it ought not to tilt too far to either side, to produce ‘one more quiver and giggle’ by being too playful, nor to stunt itself with solemn ‘pastiches of Euripides and Shakespeare’.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ ‘Introduction to *The Sacred Wood*’, *Complete Prose*, II, 294-99 (295).

¹¹¹ ‘The Possibility of a Poetic Drama’, *Complete Prose*, II, 278-85 (283).

¹¹² ‘Possibility of a Poetic Drama’, 283.

¹¹³ ‘Possibility of a Poetic Drama’, 283.

In his celebrated criticism on the Elizabethan dramatists, Eliot pushes 'serious' further out of its Arnoldian orbit. In 'Some Notes on the Blank Verse of Christopher Marlowe' (1919), he offers a new model for reading *The Jew of Malta* not as a tragedy, 'but as a farce'. Being careful to qualify his terms, however, Eliot explains that this is not farce as readers have come to know it:

I say farce, but with the enfeebled humour of our times the word is a misnomer; it is the farce of the old English humour, the terribly serious, even savage comic humour, the humour which spent its last breath on the decadent genius of Dickens. It has nothing in common with J. M. Barrie, Captain Bairnsfather, or *Punch*. It is the humour of that very serious (but very different) play, *Volpone*.¹¹⁴

As with 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', Eliot is forced to justify his supposedly incongruous combination of the serious and unserious; this is not the kind of farce that contemporary readers had in mind. In the context of the conventional affective associations of 'seriousness', though, a 'terribly serious, even savage comic humour' sounds like an oxymoron. But Eliot seeks to harness that paradox for his own ends. While 'humour' implies superficial immersion in the poet's world, the addition of 'serious' brings a degree of detachment, as Eliot the critic stands back from his instinctive 'enjoyment' of the text. In his criticism of *The Jew of Malta*, J. B. Steane draws extensively on Eliot's ideas, and claims that the laughter elicited by Barabas' descent into caricature is 'serious' because 'Laughter will by-pass that countering reason and carry our inner allegiances into places where we have no sober intention of their going: hence its importance.'¹¹⁵ The language of 'by-passing' sounds eerily similar to what was noticed in *The Waste Land*, about clashing allusions acting as emotional earth-wires seeking to protect the speaker's true feelings beneath. Matching up with the methodology of the 'game' which Shusterman observed in 'Milton I', this incongruous combination of 'terribly serious, even savage comic humour' fosters immediacy *and* distance, enjoyment *and* understanding.

¹¹⁴ 'Christopher Marlowe', *Complete Prose*, II, 97-104 (101).

¹¹⁵ J. B. Steane, *Marlowe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 172.

Eliot would make this point in similar terms two years later, when a consideration of Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress' leads him to argue that an 'alliance of levity and seriousness (by which the seriousness is intensified) is a characteristic of the sort of wit we are trying to identify.'¹¹⁶ By alloying 'seriousness' with 'levity', Marvell's wit has an athleticism that both delights and intrigues, and which demands a similarly flexible approach from any critic who attempts to explain it. We may remember Samuel Johnson's classification of the work of Donne and Cowley used by Eliot as his point of departure in 'The Metaphysical Poets' (1921): 'the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together'.¹¹⁷ But Eliot is not entirely satisfied with Johnson's terms: 'The force of this impeachment lies in the failure of the conjunction, the fact that often the ideas are yoked but not united [...] But a degree of heterogeneity of material compelled into unity by the operation of the poet's mind is omnipresent in poetry.'¹¹⁸ Defending what the previous section termed 'incongruous combination', Eliot inherits the 'alliance of levity and seriousness' that he observes in Marvell in his own verse. The kind of poetry which Eliot was writing required both sensibilities, and it is for this reason that Eliot was frustrated by the kinds of one-sided methodologies that were used to tackle *The Waste Land* after its publication. In order to better understand the charge of parody that is often levelled against the poem, it is to these methodologies, and to Eliot's reaction, that it is especially revealing to turn.

The All Souls Application

Despite Eliot's attempts to alloy ideas of seriousness with levity, *The Waste Land* and *The Sacred Wood* both helped to establish a reputation for intellectual elitism. A fundamental reason

¹¹⁶ 'Andrew Marvell', *Complete Prose*, II, 312.

¹¹⁷ 'The Metaphysical Poets', *Complete Prose*, II, 375-85 (376).

¹¹⁸ 'The Metaphysical Poets', *Complete Prose*, II, 375-85 (376).

for such an outcome is that critics focused less on the *process* of incongruous combination – the aspect that interested Eliot by far the most – and more on the elements that were involved: ‘Every now and then some crotchety professor complains to me about T. S. Eliot. I hear that the poet is a kind of unpleasant encyclopaedia, unpleasant because he is constantly making distant allusions which he pretends to think you will recognize.’¹¹⁹ Had some of the passages which Pound excised been allowed to remain in the poem, we may conjecture that this reputation may not have been so inevitable.

One notable problem with Eliot’s ostensible status as a serious and ‘unpleasant encyclopaedia’, however, is the idea that established scholars (‘crotchety professor’) were particularly averse to his writing. Robert Speaight, an English undergraduate at Lincoln College, Oxford from 1923-26, remembered what it was like to own the *Collected Poems* when they first appeared in 1925: ‘you ran a considerable risk if you allowed a volume of poems by T. S. Eliot to be seen on the table of your study. Your tutor would almost certainly think you were making a fool of yourself, and he would probably tell you so.’¹²⁰ In the days before I. A. Richards’ championship of Eliot at Cambridge, his books were rumoured to have been refused for King’s College by its Fellow Librarian, F. L. Lucas.¹²¹ But why might this poet with a reputation for intellectual obscurity have been so resented by older academics? In order to tease out the question of Eliot’s ‘seriousness’ among the scholarly community, this section examines an episode which is occasionally referenced in studies of Eliot, but whose finer details have yet to be related to larger questions of Eliot’s scholarly credentials and the charge of academic parody.

In the spring of 1926, Eliot was put forward for a Research Fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford, by his friend and colleague, Geoffrey Faber. The particulars of the Fellowship

¹¹⁹ Edmund Scott, ‘There is Humor in T. S. Eliot’, *Christian Science Monitor* 36.38 (11 January 1944), 10.

¹²⁰ Robert Speaight, ‘T. S. Eliot, O.M.: A Birthday Tribute’, *The Listener* (25 September 1958), 60, 455-57 (455).

¹²¹ See *Letters*, IV, 281n.

were appealing to a practitioner of ‘littleness’ seeking something bigger, argued Faber in his letter of recommendation: ‘Mr Eliot is of the age when the financial help and recognition implied in our Research Fellowships will be of the greatest assistance to him in undertaking a serious and prolonged piece of original work’.¹²² ‘Serious’ as this work promised to be, scant attention was paid to Eliot’s poetry in the application dossier. The recently published *Poems 1909-1925* (1925) received only a single mention, buried beneath a bibliography of his prose criticism. But it wasn’t enough; Eliot’s application was denied, so Faber told him, on two counts, the first being ‘your Poems, which had shocked some professorial old women’ and the second being a ‘narrow angular opposition of the academic historians to any kind of research other than that which they themselves understand’.¹²³ It was primarily the content of the *Poems* which ruined Eliot’s chances, agreed A. L. Rowse; ‘when the Scotch professors read some of the episodes of *The Waste Land* (the typist’s tea-time hour, in Part III, for example), or “Lune de Miel” [...] they were horrified’.¹²⁴ After complaints about ‘a few more of the comprehensible but questionable poems’, Eliot’s fate was apparently sealed.

It is an entertaining story; Eliot’s lofty ambitions to write a book on *The School of Donne* at All Souls scuppered by the ‘typist home at teatime’. But it is worth digging deeper into the second reason for Eliot’s rejection, that is the ‘opposition of the academic historians’ towards Eliot’s ‘research’. The letters of recommendation in Eliot’s dossier did their best to assure the Committee of his scholarly credentials: ‘Mr Eliot is no “light skirmisher”, unaccustomed to laborious study’, asserted Faber, ‘he is an unusually well-equipped scholar’, with a ‘mind, which is patient, analytical, painstaking almost to excess’.¹²⁵ Charles Whibley agreed on Eliot’s temperament: ‘To all that he studies he brings the cool, analytical talent of

¹²² ‘From Geoffrey Faber, Whit Monday 1926’, *Letters*, III, 155.

¹²³ ‘From Geoffrey Faber, Whit Monday 1926’, 155.

¹²⁴ A. L. Rowse, *A Cornishman at Oxford* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1965), 314.

¹²⁵ ‘Geoffrey Faber to The Warden, All Souls College, Oxford, 11 April 1926’, *Letters*, III, 139.

the scholar.’¹²⁶ Nevertheless, the historians and the philosophers did not agree. Perusing the Clark Lectures (1926) that Eliot had submitted in support of his application, historians Sir Charles Oman and E. L. Woodward, and lawyer J. L. Brierly were unable to ‘find evidence of a depth of knowledge sufficient to justify his philosophical and historical conclusions’, and found his proposed project ‘far too wide for any one man to undertake, and must lead to generalisations, the value of which must be doubtful, since the foundation of knowledge on which they are based must frequently be inadequate’.¹²⁷

The Committee on which Oman, Woodward, and Brierly sat was completed by three more historians, C. G. Robertson, A. F. Pollard, and Rev. Arthur Johnson, and the Warden, Francis Pember – a lawyer. Were we to read the Clark Lectures through the eyes of these scholars, it is easy to see why they were hesitant. At no point does Eliot claim the lectures will constitute a new contribution to the scholarship, in fact, he refutes it, contradicting Faber and Whibley with Poundian language: ‘My attitude is that of a craftsman who has attempted for eighteen years to make English verses, studying the work of dead artisans who have made better verses.’¹²⁸ In his concluding lecture, Eliot alluded to the lack of value of his work for historians: ‘So far, therefore, as I have trespassed on the territory of history, social or political, of theology and religion, of psychology, my criticism of metaphysical poetry has been seriously at fault.’¹²⁹ For a committee disproportionately skewed towards historians and lawyers, these were not the wisest of framing remarks. Nevertheless, Eliot did his best to convey an impression of academic rigour, predominantly through discussion of his method:

It is important, in an undertaking of this kind, that we should scrutinise narrowly our method at every possible moment; that we should keep reminding ourselves of our aim; that we should keep testing our tools, knowing what to expect of each, not too much or too little; that we should ask ourselves at every moment whether we

¹²⁶ ‘From Charles Whibley, 7 February 1926’, *Letters*, III, 142-43.

¹²⁷ All Souls Committee, quoted in *Letters*, III, 155-56n.

¹²⁸ ‘The Clark Lectures: Lecture I, Introduction’, *Complete Prose*, II, 610-27 (611).

¹²⁹ ‘The Clark Lectures: Lecture VIII, The Nineteenth Century: Summary and Comparison’, *Complete Prose*, II, 742-61 (753).

are using the right tools, neither too many nor too few. It will be obvious that my aim is not solely to arrive at a definition of metaphysical poetry. One must always be as exact and clear as one can – as clear as one's subject matter permits. And when one's subject matter is literature, clarity beyond a certain point becomes falsification.¹³⁰

The irony in a passage of this kind, of course, is that it does not offer the kind of methodological precision Eliot may have hoped it might, but the opposite. Much of the passage is tautologous, and the discussion of clarity and vagueness serves only to confuse.

That is not to say, though, that Eliot did not engage with existing scholarship in his Clark Lectures. He drew extensively on the work of Mario Praz, H. J. C. Grierson, and Mary Ramsay, the latter providing much of the information for his work on the learning of John Donne: 'Miss Ramsay conducted her investigation into Donne's reading with the thoroughness only possible to a candidate for a doctor's degree; there is not a single reference or allusion which she has not made indefatigable attempts to track down'.¹³¹ As much as Eliot praises her scholarship, he can't help but distance himself from it: 'When we inspect the dreary index of his reading which Miss Ramsay most usefully gives us, we recoil. No man of Donne's ability and attainments ever seems to have read a greater amount of positive rubbish.'¹³² By virtue of his refusal of the title of 'scholar', Helen Thaventhiran writes how Eliot permits himself a 'typical manoeuvre: literary-critical comments depend on scholarly notes yet despise them.'¹³³ This contempt, Thaventhiran argues, comes from an acknowledgement of the freedom of which a University scholar is in possession: 'Eliot sometimes pretends that he is not opposed to "thoroughness", only short of time for it'. But this was a 'preten[ce]', according to Thaventhiran. To add the 'detail of fact and authority' in a revision of the Clark Lectures, 'would, in fact, require Eliot to lower some of his defences, including the well-erected barrier

¹³⁰ 'The Clark Lectures: Lecture I', 619.

¹³¹ 'The Clark Lectures, Lecture II: Donne and the Middle Ages', *Complete Prose*, III, 628-47 (628).

¹³² 'The Clark Lectures, Lecture II', 628-29.

¹³³ Helen Thaventhiran, *Radical Empiricists: Five Modernist Close Readers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 42.

or argument about the superiority of craftsman's notes to excessive scholarly annotations.'¹³⁴

But if Eliot did not intend to lower those defences and to embrace the leisure of scholarly life, why was he applying to All Souls in the first place?

There are further moments in the Clark Lectures which fly in the face of scholarly rigour.¹³⁵ Referencing one of I. A. Richards' arguments, Eliot writes 'I have been unable to find again the passage alluded to. But I will quote another specimen from [*The Principles of Literary Criticism*]: page 264'.¹³⁶ In the same lecture, Eliot once again refuses to double check his sources: 'There is a passage in the *Odyssey* which has been used by someone, I think Matthew Arnold, as an illustration of sublimity; I should like to use it for another purpose. It is when Ulysses, on his visit to Hell, meets the shade of Elpenor, who, you remember, had fallen overboard and been drowned some time before.'¹³⁷ But we do not remember this, because Eliot is wrong. Without consulting a copy of the *Odyssey*, Eliot has misremembered that it was not Elpenor but Palinurus who suffers the fate described.¹³⁸ However, it is not only the fact that Eliot misremembers which is significant, but that he purposefully refuses to convey confidence that it was Arnold who had used the passage in the first place. In this way, Eliot is not too dissimilar from Arnold himself, whose imprecise 'Wordsworth says somewhere' has been considered 'one way Arnold the rhetorician countered all varieties of polish, showing instead how liberating academic carelessness could be.'¹³⁹ In its context, Arnold's 'academic carelessness' is seen by Thomas Owens to be consciously marshalled in opposition to the 'technical learning evident in Newman's admiration for phonology and historical linguistics',

¹³⁴ Thaventhiran, *Radical Empiricists*, 42.

¹³⁵ For a reading of Eliot's other scholarly mistakes, see F. W. Bateson, 'T. S. Eliot: The Poetry of Pseudo-learning', *The Journal of General Education* 20.1 (1968), 13-27.

¹³⁶ 'The Clark Lectures, Lecture II', 636.

¹³⁷ 'The Clark Lectures, Lecture II', 639.

¹³⁸ See Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. A. T. Murray, rev. George Dimock, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1995), I, 10.550ff. (399); Virgil, *Aeneid*, in *Virgil, Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid, Books 1-6*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1999-2000), 5.835ff. (529).

¹³⁹ Thomas Owens, "'Sweetness and Light" from Swift to Arnold', *Review of English Studies* 68.283 (2017), 99-122 (113).

which Arnold found ‘grossly excessive’ in ‘On Translating Homer’ (1861).¹⁴⁰ The Clark Lectures paint the picture of Eliot as either intentionally careless (at best) or simply a bad scholar (at worst). No matter which is the case, the decision to apply for the Research Fellowship at All Souls strikes us as incredibly misguided.

Scholarship and Recreation: Eliot’s Academic Grudge

Eliot seems to have come to this conclusion himself. With the hindsight of nearly four decades, he reflected ‘I am happy to say that the College was spared the ignominy of electing an unscholarly member and I was spared the waste of energy involved in pretending to a scholarship which I did not possess.’¹⁴¹ But this does not alter the fact of his reputation. Eliot also acknowledged that ‘In my earlier years I obtained, partly by subtlety, partly by effrontery, and partly by accident, a reputation amongst the credulous for learning and scholarship, of which (having no further use for it) I have since tried to disembarass myself.’¹⁴² The *incredulous* – typically such older academics as those at All Souls – were correct, Eliot seems to say, but the parting shot is in the implication that such ‘learning and scholarship’ was not important in the first place. Over time we notice Eliot came to harbour a particular grudge against certain forms of scholarly enquiry, with one fundamental reason being the way in which some academics had approached *The Waste Land*. Although he did, at times, praise the work of scholars, intending to ‘write an essay to show the extent to which literary criticism must depend upon the researches of scholars’, such an essay never appeared.¹⁴³ Even his famous remark about ‘Shakespeare’s laundry bills’ and the ‘possibility that some genius will appear

¹⁴⁰ Owens, ‘Sweetness and Light’, 113.

¹⁴¹ ‘Memorial Tribute for Geoffrey Faber’, *Complete Prose*, VIII, 453-55 (454).

¹⁴² ‘The Classics and the Man of Letters’, *Complete Prose*, VI, 295-309 (295).

¹⁴³ ‘To Bruce Richmond, 3 January 1930’, *Letters*, V, 12.

who will know of a use to which to put them' is qualified by the likelihood that no such scholar shall appear.¹⁴⁴ In 1956, he made explicit reference to such scholars: 'A good deal of contemporary criticism, originating at that point at which criticism merges into scholarship, and at which scholarship merges into criticism, may be characterized as the criticism of explanation by origins'.¹⁴⁵ He described scholars who went out hunting for the sources of *The Waste Land* as embarking on a 'wild goose chase'.¹⁴⁶ For a later work, *The Cocktail Party* (1949), he complained about what Shusterman categorised as an imbalanced emphasis on 'understanding' rather than simple 'enjoyment': 'my mail was swollen for months with letters offering surprising solutions of what the writers believed to be the riddle of the play's meaning.'¹⁴⁷ For Eliot, critics were amusing themselves with the most unenlightening of games: 'the writers did not resent the puzzle they thought I had set them – they liked it. Indeed, though they were unconscious of the fact, they invented the puzzle for the pleasure of discovering the solution.' There is a playfulness in this excessive pursuit of facts, Eliot implies, but it is not the kind of playfulness that sheds light on the work itself.

Eliot's ungenerous analogy of the scholarly-critical approach as being that of the puzzle-solver threatens to throw a spanner into the workings of Shusterman's game psychology examined in an earlier section. For, if Eliot thought the best way to describe the perfect critical approach was through the logic of a game, why are puzzles the wrong type of game? One answer is that puzzles do not conform to the definition of a game that Shusterman offers; there is no discrete, coherent world into which the player enters, and out of which they can remove themselves to facilitate a broader perspective. Puzzles, rather, rely on infrequent bursts of immediate satisfaction, as a piece is found which connects to another piece, beginning the search for a third piece. The kind of scholarly criticism that Eliot describes in 'The Frontiers of

¹⁴⁴ 'The Function of Criticism', *Complete Prose*, II, 458-68 (465-66).

¹⁴⁵ 'Frontiers of Criticism', *Complete Prose*, VIII, 121-138 (125).

¹⁴⁶ 'Frontiers of Criticism', 127.

¹⁴⁷ 'Frontiers of Criticism', 127.

Criticism' likewise lacks the ability to see beyond such bursts: 'they invented the puzzle for the pleasure of discovering the solution'.¹⁴⁸ An example of this kind of research is offered in the form of John Livingston Lowes's *Road to Xanadu* (1927), described by Eliot as a 'fascinating piece of detection'.¹⁴⁹ Lowes 'ferreted out all the books which Coleridge had read (and Coleridge was an omnivorous and insatiable reader) and from which he had borrowed images or phrases to be found in *Kubla Khan* and *The Ancient Mariner*'.¹⁵⁰ But such a method of source hunting shines little to no light on the effects of the poem itself: 'How such material as those scraps of Coleridge's reading became transmuted into great poetry remains as much of a mystery as ever.'¹⁵¹ The reference to 'transmute' refers us back to Eliot's favourite terminology of 'combining', 'fusing', and 'forging'; this kind of criticism, he argues, is useless at helping us to appreciate the type of poetry which relies on combination as its fundamental technique, like *The Ancient Mariner* and *The Waste Land*. It should not be surprising, then, that in her study of combinational creativity, Margaret Boden also criticises *The Road to Xanadu*: 'Livingston Lowes was well aware that cut-and-paste cannot suffice to explain this sort of creative novelty [...] something more than *mere* combination is going on. Conscious recollection and reconstruction have an important place in creativity, but they are not enough.'¹⁵²

Eliot's inference that there is a recreational self-indulgence to the practice of scholarship has become an influential critical idea helped, in no small part, by Pierre Bourdieu. His work on contemporary higher education institutions in *Homo Academicus* (1984) was praised for its 'genuinely reflexive sociology', whereby Bourdieu took his own colleagues as his subject in order to 'neutralize the biases inscribed both in the contemplative relation between

¹⁴⁸ 'Frontiers of Criticism', 127.

¹⁴⁹ 'Frontiers of Criticism', 125.

¹⁵⁰ 'Frontiers of Criticism', 125.

¹⁵¹ 'Frontiers of Criticism', 126.

¹⁵² Boden, *Creative Mind*, 130.

the social observer and her object and in the fact of occupying a particular location in the universe under investigation.’¹⁵³ In one of the essays in which Bourdieu considers the academic field of cultural production, ‘The Scholastic Point of View’ (1989), he meditates on the opportunities for playfulness in academic research. Taking his title from J. L. Austin: ‘What does the fact of thinking within a scholastic space, an academic space, imply?’, Bourdieu’s answer produces the same attitude – and the same terminology – that Shusterman claims defined Eliot’s approach to literary criticism:

The scholastic point of view of which Austin speaks cannot be separated from the scholastic situation, a socially instituted situation in which one can play seriously and take ludic things seriously. *Homo scholasticus* or *homo academicus* is someone who is paid to play seriously; placed outside the urgency of a practical situation and oblivious to the ends which are immanent in it, he or she earnestly busies herself with problems that serious people ignore – actively or passively.¹⁵⁴

‘Serious’ darts in and out of sentences here, much as it does in *The Sacred Wood*, but there are key areas of difference between Bourdieu’s notion of scholarship as ‘play[ing] seriously’ and Eliot’s model of literary criticism as ‘serious play’. To begin with, Bourdieu’s ‘scholastic view’ appears to be less about a psychological perspective and more about practicality: academic scholars have the time and the money to take seriously the kinds of subjects that others do not. It was this argument that Geoffrey Faber had made in his letter of recommendation to All Souls, when he suggested that ‘During the last ten years, Mr Eliot has laid the foundations of a growing reputation both as a poet and critic, though the limited leisure at his disposal and the deliberate avoidance of hasty generalisation, by which all his work is marked, have combined to restrict his published output.’¹⁵⁵ But Eliot was never very interested in ‘leisure’; indeed, we remember what Helen Thaventhiran had to say about the importance of not having enough time to complete various projects he had proposed. By virtue of being within a closed loop of

¹⁵³ Loïc J. D. Wacquant, ‘For a Socio-Analysis of Intellectuals: On “Homo Academicus”’, *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 34 (1989), 1-29 (2).

¹⁵⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Scholastic Point of View’, *Cultural Anthropology* 5.4 (1990), 380-91 (380-81).

¹⁵⁵ ‘Geoffrey Faber to The Warden, All Souls College, Oxford, 11 April 1926’, *Letters*, III, 138.

cultural production, the activities of scholars are ‘playful’, since they have little application to the outside world, but ‘serious’ because of the effort with which they are conducted. Eliot’s idea of literary criticism is unsurprisingly less sociological. There, the ‘playful’ disregard for the outside world is tempered by the ‘serious’ distance that accompanies it.

It was this useless kind of scholarly play that Eliot objected to in his later prose, and which he ridiculed throughout his life in his light verse. Academic procedure was the butt of one of his most prolonged jokes, which spanned almost five decades in letters to his closest friends. The first extant example of one of Eliot’s Bolo stanzas occurs in a letter to Conrad Aiken in 1914, and is accompanied by extensive mock-serious commentary from Eliot himself:

Now while Columbo and his men
Were drinking ice cream soda
In burst King Bolo’s big black queen
That famous old breech l(oader).
Just then they rang the bell for lunch
And served up – Fried Hyenas;
And Columbo said ‘Will you take tail?
Or just a bit of p(enis)?’

The bracketed portions we owe to the restorations of the editor, Prof. Dr Hasenpfeffer (Halle), with the assistance of his two inseparable friends, Dr Hans Frigger (the celebrated poet) and Herr Schnitzel (aus Wien). How much we owe to the hardwon intuition of this truly great scholar! The editor also justly observes: ‘There seems to be a *double entendre* about the last two lines, but the fine flavour of the jest has not survived the centuries’. – Yet we hope that such genius as his may penetrate even this enigma.¹⁵⁶

As in Eliot’s light verse explored earlier in this chapter, he relies on the expectations of rhyme to supply a good deal of the humour; ‘l(oader)’ and ‘p(enis)’ hardly need the parenthetical information, and Eliot pokes fun at having given it to us: ‘The bracketed portions we owe to the restorations of the editor’. Although she does not make the comparison, for Gabrielle McIntire, Eliot’s accompanying commentary anticipates ‘The Frontiers of Criticism’, suggesting how Eliot endorsed a view of academia as ‘a dirty pursuit of the parenthetical, the

¹⁵⁶ ‘To Conrad Aiken, 19 July 1914’, *Letters*, I, 46-47.

excised, and the obscure’, and remarks how ‘He writes a remarkable body of pornotropic poetry, then laughs at us for considering it.’¹⁵⁷ But is Eliot really laughing? For Jayme Stayer, as for McIntire, ‘Eliot would be exasperated to know that scholars were writing somber analyses of his bawdy poetry’, but both critics must qualify their arguments with the fact that Eliot did not go out of his way to destroy his Bolo poems.¹⁵⁸ In fact, the circumstances of the survival of the verses is a fundamental part of their internal comedy.

Eliot went on distributing ‘discoveries’ about Bolovian culture in letters to his friends for decades, with a large concentration going to his *Criterion* chum Bonamy Dobrée: ‘You must not be impatient, as this great poem – only to be compared to the *Odyssey* and the *Chanson de Roland* – moves slowly.’¹⁵⁹ Eliot casts himself as an eminent authority on Bolovian textual criticism, writing to an old Milton friend how he had worked ‘In the Vatican Library’ for a month, finding only ‘one genuine stanza; the rest of the MSS. being *hopelessly* corrupt.’¹⁶⁰ Eliot also invents a disagreement with ‘Professor Doctor Breitensträter of Giessen’ who shows his title as ‘Professor of Physical Culture’ by writing to Eliot that ‘if I maintain my theories and ever come to Giessen he will [give] me ‘*die Augen oder Lampen verputzen*’ i.e. he will blacken my eye.’¹⁶¹ Among the long letters to Dobrée include one concerning Bolovian Polo, which was ‘played with llamas instead of ponies’, in which Eliot invents a disagreement with Prof. Dr. Schnitzel of Vienna about its relation to the modern game.¹⁶² He claims to have written a monograph for the *Leipziger Akademie fuer Bolowissenschaftslehre* proving the Professor wrong, as well as providing scholarly citations: ‘it is certain that Bolovians knew the game of water-polo, which they practised on occasions of public rejoicing (v. the Boloviad

¹⁵⁷ Gabrielle McIntire, ‘An Unexpected Beginning: Sex, Race, and History in T. S. Eliot’s Columbo and Bolo Poems’, *Modernism/Modernity* 9.2 (2002), 283-301 (294).

¹⁵⁸ Jayme Stayer, *Becoming T. S. Eliot: The Rhetoric of Voice and Audience in ‘Inventions of the March Hare’* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021), 208.

¹⁵⁹ ‘To Bonamy Dobrée, 7 August 1927’, *Letters*, III, 613.

¹⁶⁰ ‘To Howard Morris, 24 October 1929’, *Letters*, IV, 656.

¹⁶¹ ‘To Bonamy Dobrée, 29 July 1927’, *Letters*, III, 596.

¹⁶² ‘To Bonamy Dobrée, 10 August 1927’, *Letters*, III, 622.

Canto V, v. 352 ff.) and consequently a fortiori they must have known Polo'.¹⁶³ The pointless play of scholars in his light verse thus became an important manifestation of Eliot's academic grudge.

Serious Annotations: *The Waste Land* and *Queen Mab*

For decades, the 'Notes' to *The Waste Land* have played a leading role in studies which declare the poem, like the Bolo verses, to be a parody of scholarly-critical enquiry. Often, they are the pivot-point in any affective investigation of the poem. F. L. Lucas used them to accuse Eliot of insincere exploitation: 'it is particularly easy to win the applause of the blasé and the young, of the coteries and the eccentricities.'¹⁶⁴ Philip Larkin compared them to Bertrand Russell's comment about Eliot's 'window-dressing', arguing that the 'array of references that make up the notes' were 'designed to impress rather than illuminate'.¹⁶⁵ Hugh Kenner, meanwhile, declined to consider the 'Notes' at all, claiming we must 'ignore them' in order to truly 'grasp what the poetry is aiming to be'.¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the 'Notes' have persisted in lending their support to scholars interested in *The Waste Land*'s deceptive potential, from Max Nänny's observation of 'a parodic display of erudition', to Sarah Davison's conclusion that 'the notion that the notes were bogus served only to amplify the poem's parodic elements'.¹⁶⁷ This is despite the fact that Eliot himself repeatedly denied the idea of the 'Notes' as being motivated by parody. When Arnold Bennett asked him 'Were the notes to *the Waste Land* a lark or

¹⁶³ 'To Bonamy Dobrée, 10 August 1927', 622.

¹⁶⁴ F. L. Lucas, 'The Waste Land', *Contemporary Reviews*, 115-17 (117).

¹⁶⁵ Philip Larkin, 'An Unofficial Life', in *Further Requirements: Interviews, Broadcasts, Statements and Book Reviews 1952-85*, ed. Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber & Faber, 2001), 358-61 (360).

¹⁶⁶ Kenner, *Invisible Poet*, 130.

¹⁶⁷ Sarah Davison, *Modernist Parody: Imitation, Origination, and Experimentation in Early Twentieth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 185.

serious?’, Eliot replied with a revealing assertion: ‘they were serious, and not more of a skit than some things in the poem itself.’¹⁶⁸ When approached by a schoolteacher with the same question: ‘Are the notes to *Waste Land* to be taken seriously?’ Eliot replied with exasperated bluntness: ‘The notes to the *Waste Land* should be taken at their face value.’¹⁶⁹ The publication of the *Facsimile* in 1971 only added further grist to the mill of parody, as the knowledge of Eliot’s Popean experimentations in ‘The Fire Sermon’ suddenly saw the ‘Notes’ placed in explicit dialogue with similar textual apparatus in eighteenth-century satire.¹⁷⁰ Steven Helmling, for one, was convinced that the ‘Notes’ gave ‘the poem’s allusiveness (and to the other mock-pedantic features of its format, like the “critical edition”-style numbering in the margins), a pseudo-scholarly aura that has always seemed funny’, and concludes ‘We could do worse than see *The Waste Land* as a twentieth-century *Dunciad*.’¹⁷¹

Arguing against this trend, this section will place the ‘Notes’ in an entirely different genealogy, one that leads not from Pope to Eliot, but traces the influence of Percy Shelley’s *Queen Mab*. Eliot’s objective in the ‘Notes’ was less in making a comment – parodic or otherwise – on the role of scholarly procedure as he had elsewhere, and more to emphasise the process of incongruous combination that underlies the structure of the poem at large. They are ‘serious’ annotations in the sense that they offer an insight into the way Eliot hoped the poem may be approached, and resemble Shelley’s ‘Notes’ by encouraging a reader to engage with the work both immediately, and from a distance, as with Shusterman’s model of ‘game psychology’.

¹⁶⁸ Arnold Bennett, *The Journals of Arnold Bennett: Vol. III – 1921-28*, ed. Newman Flower (London: Cassell, 1933), 52.

¹⁶⁹ ‘To Gregor Ziemer, 10 February 1937’, *Letters*, VIII, 492.

¹⁷⁰ See *The Waste Land: A Facsimile*, 23ff.

¹⁷¹ Helmling, ‘The Grin of Tiresias’, 146-47.

What makes the ‘Notes to *The Waste Land*’ so untrustworthy to many readers is that they do not perform the kind of function expected in modern annotations. For a poet clearly possessed of much esoteric knowledge, to have written explanatory notes which do not explain the poem’s meaning is a clear signal that they are not what they seem. Nevertheless, it is the object of the following analysis to show how Eliot’s ‘Notes’ do, in fact, explain the poem remarkably well. It makes sense to begin with the note on which by far the most critical ink has been spilt, that concerning Tiresias, who, ‘although a mere spectator and not indeed a “character,” is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest’.¹⁷² It is the penultimate sentence of the note that has captured the attention of scholars, and the idea that ‘What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem’ has led to numerous studies of the typist passage as being of central interest to the poem.¹⁷³ What is often assumed is that ‘substance’ refers metaphorically to the ‘meat’ of the poem, that Tiresias’s vision of the ‘typist’ is where the poem’s message resides in compressed form. However, it is striking when surveying Eliot’s prose to observe just how often he uses the term ‘substance’ in scientific or philosophical contexts, rather than as a turn of phrase (i.e. as the ‘substance’ of the argument). In his student essays, Eliot has a keen interest in ‘substance’ as a composite of form and matter, working out in a study of Aristotle an apparent ‘contradiction’ that ‘whereas everything else is predicated of substance, substance is predicated of matter.’¹⁷⁴ When Eliot writes how Tiresias ‘sees’ the ‘substance’ of the poem, then, it may act as shorthand for the idea that he ‘sees’ the combinational texture of the poem itself.

In his task of ‘uniting’ many disparate elements in the poem, Tiresias is often viewed as something of an authorial cipher. But the primary way in which Tiresias is *not* like Eliot is

¹⁷² ‘Notes on *The Waste Land*’, in *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 72-77. Parenthetical references to the ‘Notes’ will cite the corresponding line number of the poem.

¹⁷³ See, for instance, Steve Ellis, *T. S. Eliot: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2009), 43; Lawrence Rainey, *Revisiting ‘The Waste Land’* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2005), 52.

¹⁷⁴ ‘[Matter and Form in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*], *Complete Prose*, I, 220-26 (223).

that he is largely an observer, whereas the 'Notes' give us an insight into Eliot's subconscious associations as the organising force of poem as a whole. When he explains his use of the Tarot cards: 'I am not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack of cards, from which I have obviously departed to suit my own convenience' (46), the reference to his 'convenience' introduces a whimsical, even self-indulgent relationship with the facts. He proceeds to confess that 'The Hanged Man, a member of the traditional pack, fits my purpose in two ways: because he is associated in my mind with the Hanged God of Frazer, and because I associate him with the hooded figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in Part V.' The important factor here is not the individual cards but the 'association' that Eliot has made between separate images. The logic is personal, mysterious even to Eliot himself, who declares that 'The Man with Three Staves (an authentic member of the Tarot pack) I associate, quite arbitrarily, with the Fisher King himself.' When Hugh Kenner refuses to consider the 'Notes' in his study of *The Waste Land* because they were 'done in haste', then, we might comment that he has entirely missed the point. The 'hastiness', even nonchalance, of the 'Notes' is an important part of their function, to show how one mind – even 'arbitrarily' – brought discrete elements together in sometimes incongruous combinations. This tone of voice permeates many of the 'Notes', such as 'This may not appear as exact as Sappho's lines, but I had in mind the "longshore" or "dory" fisherman, who returns at nightfall' (221), and the 'dead sound on the final stroke of nine' which is 'A phenomenon which I have often noticed' (68). To some, this final note is evidence that the 'Notes' are a joke; as Eliot cites an impressionistic source rather than the anecdote's true provenance in the Bible.¹⁷⁵ But it is also an assurance from Eliot that the sources for *The Waste Land* are not from books on shelves but rather the projection of fragments that have lodged in his own mind.

¹⁷⁵ See Jo Ellen Green Kaiser, 'Disciplining *The Waste Land*, or How to Lead Critics Into Temptation', *Twentieth-Century Literature* 44.1 (1998), 82-99 (91).

Another tendency that has convinced some critics beyond all doubt that the ‘Notes’ are intended as a parody of the scholarly-critical approach is what they consider half-hearted approximations of academic citational procedure. Perhaps the most famous chastiser of Eliot’s scholarly rigour is F. L. Lucas, who complained: ‘What is the use of explaining “laquearia” by quoting two lines of Latin containing the word, which will convey nothing to those who do not know that language, and nothing new to those who do?’¹⁷⁶ Lucas is right to state that Eliot’s references to his sources in the ‘Notes’ are often inconsistent, displaying the lack of rigour that defined the earlier examination of the scholarship in the Clark Lectures. He quotes Baudelaire, Dante, Virgil, Ovid, and Hesse without translation, and he gives citations with varying detail, from verse numbers in some cases (for Wagner, Shakespeare, and Dante) to just a name and a title for others (Webster, Marvell, Spenser, and Kyd). However, by considering these more factually-oriented references within the compass of Eliot’s ‘arbitrary’ logic of personal association, we begin to see that translation was not entirely called for. On a number of occasions, Eliot testified that he remembered lines of poetry in a foreign language without even knowing what it meant. In ‘Dante’ (1929), he claims that he was ‘passionately fond of certain French poetry long before I could have translated two verses of it correctly’, and of Dante himself that he would commit passages to memory until ‘I was able to recite a large part of one canto or another to myself, lying in bed or on a railway journey.’¹⁷⁷ It is the way in which these quotations lodged in his mind – and not their origination in one translation or other – that was important.

For some, Eliot’s ‘Notes’ are the worst of both worlds. Jo Ellen Green Kaiser has argued persuasively that they refuse to satisfy either a ‘philological’ or an ‘impressionistic’ method of critical approach, and therefore constitute a parody of both.¹⁷⁸ She concludes that the ‘Notes’

¹⁷⁶ Lucas, ‘*The Waste Land*’, 116.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Dante’, *Complete Prose*, III, 700-45 (700); ‘What Dante Means to Me’, *Complete Prose*, VII, 482-92 (482).

¹⁷⁸ Green Kaiser, ‘Disciplining *The Waste Land*’, 93.

thereby encourage a reader to embrace a middle ground, to be neither too ‘philological’ nor too ‘impressionistic’, but ‘receptive to both’ critical approaches.¹⁷⁹ I read the ‘Notes’ less as a parody and more as an extension of the logic of the poem itself. The purpose of the ‘Notes’ is not about giving us ‘access to the author’, as Kaiser claims an impressionistic critic may want, but rather access to the state of mind that allowed certain allusive associations to be made, to facilitate the re-directive impulses of Eliot’s speaker in ‘A Game of Chess’.¹⁸⁰

Thanks to the way in which they encouraged a wave of what he called ‘bogus scholarship’, Eliot came to regret having ever written the ‘Notes’: ‘it is not because of my bad example to other poets that I am penitent: it is because my notes stimulated the wrong kind of interest among seekers of sources.’¹⁸¹ When it came to ‘other poets’ who made use of such annotations, Eliot is often allied with Pope and with Marianne Moore, the latter suggested by Eliot himself.¹⁸² There is, however, another poet whose connection to Eliot’s ‘Notes’ has yet to be explored, despite Eliot’s own hints that we do so: ‘I was preceded by Shelley with “Queen Mab”.’¹⁸³ It is surprising that the link has not yet been examined, especially given that Eliot returned to Shelley’s note-writing on a number of occasions: ‘Very few people want to give much time to the early long poems of Shelley, *The Revolt of Islam* and *Queen Mab*, though the notes to the latter poem are certainly worth reading.’¹⁸⁴ It is in his Harvard Lectures, however, that Eliot gives the most important assessment:

The notes to *Queen Mab* express, it is true, only the views of an intelligent and enthusiastic schoolboy, but a schoolboy who knows how to write; and throughout

¹⁷⁹ Green Kaiser, ‘Disciplining *The Waste Land*’, 93.

¹⁸⁰ Green Kaiser, ‘Disciplining *The Waste Land*’, 91.

¹⁸¹ ‘The Frontiers of Criticism’, 127.

¹⁸² See ‘The Frontiers of Criticism’, 127.

¹⁸³ T. S. Eliot and Tom Greenwell, ‘Talking Freely’, in *The Bed Post: A Miscellany of the Yorkshire Post*, ed. Kenneth Young (London: MacDonald, 1962), 41-53 (43).

¹⁸⁴ ‘What is Minor Poetry?’, *Complete Prose*, VI, 566-80 (574).

his work, which is of no small bulk for a short life, he does not, I think, let us forget that he took his ideas seriously.¹⁸⁵

In this assessment, Eliot hails Shelley's 'serious[ness]' of intent, that although these were 'schoolboy' notes, they were done without an eye to deceiving the reader. Shelley himself wrote of the poem as a 'sincere overflowing of the heart & mind, and that at a period when they are most uncorrupted and pure'.¹⁸⁶ To understand why Shelley's 'sincere' 'Notes to *Queen Mab*' offer an interesting analogue to Eliot's for 'Notes to *The Waste Land*', we must turn to the debate which has energised scholars of Romanticism over the last decade: the question of genre.

To draw a line from *The Dunciad* straight to *The Waste Land* is to miss an important stage in the history of self-annotation in poetry. Miriam Lahrsow has explored how the use of 'Notes' altered drastically in the course of the eighteenth century; 'Put briefly, self-annotated humorous poetry commonly featured extensive notes from 1729 onwards until the end of the Romantic age, while the length and number of self-annotations in "serious" poetry started to increase from 1750 onwards and culminated in the decades between 1800 and 1830.'¹⁸⁷ Such 'serious' poems as Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), Byron's *The Giaour* (1813), and Shelley's own *Queen Mab* (1813) all made recourse to textual 'Notes'. *Queen Mab* begins with the descent of the Fairy Mab in her 'celestial' chariot to the bedside of the sleeping Ianthe. After separating Ianthe's soul from her body, Mab leads her on an airborne tour of the chaos of the past and the present, pointing out 'Where Athens, Rome, and Sparta stood, / There is a moral desert now'.¹⁸⁸ Of primary interest to scholars has been the way in which the polemical content is framed, and David Duff concludes that '*Queen Mab* represents a decisive moment

¹⁸⁵ 'Lecture V: Shelley and Keats', *Complete Prose*, iv, 641-53 (642)

¹⁸⁶ 'To Mr. Waller, 22 November 1813), in *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, I, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 566.

¹⁸⁷ Miriam Lahrsow, *The Author as Annotator: Ambiguities of Self-Annotation in Pope and Byron* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, Brill Deutschland, 2022), 228-29.

¹⁸⁸ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Queen Mab*, in *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Volume 2, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 178.

in the revival of romance.’¹⁸⁹ Mab’s descent to Ianthe offers the clearest indication of the frame, as Ianthe’s soul awakens, asking ‘Do I dream? Is this new feeling / But a visioned ghost of slumber?’¹⁹⁰ Shelley’s use of a ‘mythic structure’, for Duff, works to mediate the poem’s political force, but it is not what most readers take away from the poem; ‘the trip to the stars, and the magical education that ensues, are an adventure for Ianthe, but this constitutes only the most rudimentary of plots.’¹⁹¹ In the narrative concerns of the poem, this trait of *Queen Mab* has an important relevance to *The Waste Land*. Unlike the former, the framing of Eliot’s own tour of the chaos of the past within the genre of romance happens largely through the use of the ‘Notes’, with its reference to Jessie L. Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance* (1920). Eliot claims that ‘Miss Weston’s book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do’, but, as in the case of *Queen Mab*’s ‘mythic’ structure, not everyone has been convinced. Green Kaiser, quoting Hugh Kenner, reminds us that ‘it is the notes’ – not the poem itself – ‘that assert that the plan is based on the grail legend’; without them, ‘the grail quest appears at most a minor theme.’¹⁹² Seamus Perry calls reading Weston’s book with a view to illuminating *The Waste Land* ‘a waste of an afternoon’.¹⁹³

Annotation thus proves a crucial point of tension between the genre of romance and an author’s ostensible intentions for the poem. For Marilyn Butler, the function of ‘Notes’ in poems of Shelley, Byron, and Southey is for ‘the “romance” element in Romanticism [to be] checked and undercut by a self-conscious modernity or a distancing intellectuality.’¹⁹⁴ The ‘Notes’ to *Queen Mab*, in this reading, function as a foil to the fictionality of the poem, rooting it in the real world. But the ‘Notes’ also import their own narrative which refers to the author’s

¹⁸⁹ David Duff, *Romance and Revolution: Shelley and the Politics of a Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 79.

¹⁹⁰ Shelley, *Queen Mab*, 170.

¹⁹¹ Duff, *Romance and Revolution*, 112-13.

¹⁹² Green Kaiser, ‘Disciplining *The Waste Land*’, 86.

¹⁹³ Seamus Perry, ‘Modern-ish Poets (Live): *The Waste Land*’, *London Review of Books Podcast* (2022) <lrb.co.uk/podcasts-and-videos/podcasts/close-readings/modern-ish-poets-live-the-waste-land>.

¹⁹⁴ Marilyn Butler, ‘Culture’s Medium: The Role of the Review’, in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 127-52 (136).

experience of compiling the poem. As a whole, Shelley's 'Notes' take on a very different form to Eliot's. The most conspicuous difference is in length; while Eliot's 'Notes' added twelve small pages to the first edition of *The Waste Land*, Shelley's annotations exceed the length of *Queen Mab* itself. Containing factual references to sources, anecdotal digressions, and essays on topics including Necessity, sex, and vegetarianism, they combine an objective, factual voice with a more subjective, impressionistic tone associated with Shelley's personal perspective. It is in this respect that the 'Notes to *Queen Mab*' have an important relevance to those of *The Waste Land*, foregrounding the way in which the architecture of the 'mind of the poet' has worked to construct the content of the poem. For instance, elucidating the lines: 'religion / Drives his wife raving mad', Shelley offers two different kinds of note. The first is rather frivolous: 'I am acquainted with a lady of considerable accomplishments, and the mother of a numerous family, whom the Christian religion has goaded to incurable insanity.'¹⁹⁵ The second note that Shelley provides is an untranslated passage from Lucretius: '*Nam iam saepe homines patriam, carosque parentes / Prodiderunt, vitare Acherusia templa petentes*. Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, iii. 85-6.' By combining these two very different kinds of sources, Shelley proposes distinct ways of approaching the content of the poem, both human and philosophical, up close and from a distance.

Another similarity between Eliot's and Shelley's 'Notes' is the refusal to translate. In *Queen Mab*, Shelley kept quotations in Latin, French, and Greek untranslated, and while some critics have used this to claim that he seeks a specific, educated reader – as they have for the 'Notes to *The Waste Land*' – others argue something different.¹⁹⁶ Timothy Morton interprets Shelley's refusal to translate within the parameters of 'constructivist form', extending the generic experimentation of the poem to 'perform the Copernican spadework of wrenching our

¹⁹⁵ Shelley, "'Notes'" [Shelley's Notes to *Queen Mab*], in *Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley Volume 2*, 239-312 (251).

¹⁹⁶ See Alex Watson, 'The Faith of the Faithless: Percy Bysshe Shelley's Notes for *Queen Mab*', in *Romantic Futures: Legacy, Prophecy, Temporality*, ed. Evy Varsamopoulou (New York: Routledge, 2023), 129-47.

localized, embedded, imprisoned mind into a vaster, more unsettling frame.’¹⁹⁷ This resembles what Shusterman suggested about Eliot’s own criticism, which unites ‘understanding’ and ‘enjoyment’ when considering a poem a kind of ‘game’. In my reading, however, informed by *The Waste Land*, we may turn our attention to the question of Shelley’s fidelity to the creative crucible of his own mind.

Despite the wealth of knowledge that informs both *Queen Mab* and *The Waste Land*, the ‘Notes’ remind us that the knowledge has been brought together by the – occasionally ‘arbitrary’ – associations of one individual mind. Shelley’s note ‘This fragment is a translation of part of some German work, whose title I have vainly endeavoured to discover. I picked it up, dirty and torn, some years ago, in Lincoln’s-Inn-Fields’ may remind us of Eliot’s note: ‘The following lines were stimulated by the account of one of the Antarctic expeditions (I forget which, but I think one of Shackleton’s)’ (199).¹⁹⁸ Neither Shelley nor Eliot is able to quote the exact source, but neither does it seem exceedingly important; both seem more interested in their own experiences coming into contact with the words, rather than the source itself. Alex Watson has recently argued that the ‘storehouse’ of *Queen Mab*’s ‘Notes’ constitute a ‘personal archive’, building on Kenneth Neill Cameron’s similar point in *Young Shelley*: ‘In spite of the wide reading behind it, it is not a bookish poem but a poem arising from life, the reaction of a mind sharpened by a shattering experience to the social realities of the world around it, and transmitting material in the crucible of this experience.’¹⁹⁹ ‘[R]eaction’ calls to mind the important scientific words that Eliot made thorough use of in the 1920s to discuss theories of combination in the production of novel effects. By drawing our attention to *Queen Mab*, Eliot seems to be in touch with this reading of ‘personal archive’, and by reminding us that Shelley

¹⁹⁷ Timothy Morton, ‘The Notes to *Queen Mab* and Shelley’s Spinozism’, *The Neglected Shelley*, ed. Alan Weinberg and Timothy Webb (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 77-94 (78).

¹⁹⁸ Shelley, ‘Notes’, 283.

¹⁹⁹ Watson, ‘The Faith of the Faithless’, 138; Kenneth Neill Cameron, *The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical* (London: Gollancz, 1951), 241.

does not 'let us forget that he took his ideas seriously', we are encouraged to reassess our approach to the 'Notes' to *The Waste Land* as a form of scholarly parody.

Badness

Introduction

For a sequence that concludes with an image of harmonious unity, a fiery forge where ‘All manner of thing shall be well’ and the ‘fire and the rose are one’, *Four Quartets* (1943) has kindled, rather than dissolved, differences of opinion.¹ Eliot had grown accustomed to receiving bad reviews, but as his fame grew in the 1930s, so did his anxiety, as reviewers compared him not with other writers – as they had previously – but with himself. There were hints in the reception of the *Collected Poems 1909-1935* (1936) that the pieces added since its previous instantiation a decade earlier were being received more coolly than the earlier works.² Already, commentators were beginning to identify a separation in Eliot’s literary career, with Conrad Aiken going as far as to suggest that a different – worryingly worse – poet had been resurrected ‘After Ash-Wednesday’.³ By the time *The Family Reunion* (1939) had finished its run at the Westminster Theatre to an even frostier reception than the *Collected Poems*, Eliot was writing to Virginia Woolf as if his entire literary legacy hung in the balance, should he not be able to produce a successful mid-life phase: ‘After you finish a piece of work it only seems

¹ ‘Little Gidding’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 1, 209.

² See, for instance, Louis Untermeyer’s review, which called the early poems ‘more compelling than the later penitences and salvations’, in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 373-74 (374).

³ See Conrad Aiken, ‘After Ash-Wednesday’, *Contemporary Reviews*, 312-314.

good to you for a few weeks; or if it seems good at all you are convinced that it is the last you will be able to write; and if it seems bad you wonder whether everything you have done isn't poor stuff really'.⁴

But what, exactly, did Eliot mean by 'bad'? Whenever he discusses writing that deserves the label, he retreats into meandering clarifications of his terms. His Introduction to Pound's *Selected Poems* (1927) advises 'when one cannot write poetry, it is better to write what one knows is verse and make it good verse, than to write bad verse and persuade oneself that it is good poetry.'⁵ Only three years later, however, in his preface to *Anabasis* (1930), Eliot would claim that 'poetry' is 'good verse': "'Poetry" introduces a distinction between good verse and bad verse; but we have no one word to separate bad prose from good prose.'⁶ By contrast, in Eliot's letters advising members of his list at Faber, the 'good/bad' binary commonly indicates the deviation from an individual's style. Auden is usually one or the other, depending on his choice of subject matter. When Eliot was forced to alter some lines from *New Year Letter* (1941), he chose: 'So conditions his ears as to keep the Song / This is not a sorrow from the invisible twin' which 'does not make very good sense but it sounds like good Auden'.⁷ Clearly, when it came to his publishing duties, there was a distinction between absolute judgment and editorial direction.

It was those same editorial duties, however, which Eliot claimed desensitised his ability to scent 'badness' in the first place. He complained to Walter de la Mare that he received 'so much bad verse' at Faber that 'the only way of verifying one's impressions' was to 'put it into my cold storage, which means digging things out at intervals of a month or so and re-reading them to see if I get a fresh impression to correspond with the first.'⁸ Even when asked directly

⁴ 'To Virginia Woolf, 28 December 1939', *Letters*, IX, 374.

⁵ 'Introduction to *Selected Poems*, by Ezra Pound', *Complete Prose*, III, 517-533 (525).

⁶ 'Preface to *Anabasis*', *Complete Prose*, IV, 132-37 (133).

⁷ 'To Richard de la Mare, 7 February 1941', *Letters*, IX, 727.

⁸ 'To Walter de la Mare, 16 November 1938', *Letters*, VIII, supplementary online letters <tseliot.com/letters/volumes/letters_volume_8_unpublished/by-date/lv8-1671>.

to offer a definition of ‘good writing’, Eliot threatened to throw up his arms: ‘I am rather inclined to believe, for myself, that my best poems are possibly those which evoke the greatest number and variety of interpretations surprising to myself.’⁹ Good writing, then, seems distinct from authorial intention. When he finished *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), he wrote: ‘I don’t know whether it is good or bad, I never was so in the dark about anything I have written’; that play, he discovered, taught him that sometimes what was intended to be ‘good’ can serve a ‘bad’ function: ‘it’s no use putting in nice lines that you think are good poetry if they don’t get the action on at all’.¹⁰ Such a fact provided an added layer of paranoia for a poet wrestling with lacklustre reviews and writer’s block: ‘Some imp always whispers to me, as I am struggling to get down to any new piece of work, that this is going to be lamentably bad, and that I won’t know it.’¹¹ Along such lines with reference to ‘Burnt Norton’ (1936), Eliot confessed to Emily Hale that:

I can’t tell whether this will be a good poem or a bad one; at any rate, it is I think a new kind of love poem, and it is written for you, and it is fearfully obscure: so, if it is published in my volume, you will, if asked, be able truthfully to say either that you do understand it or that you don’t understand it, according to which reply is more convenient at the moment and in reply to that particular enquirer.¹²

Just as a general definition of ‘bad writing’ eluded Eliot, when it came to isolating the technical criteria which qualified a specific poem for ‘badness’ he was equally ambiguous. As early as ‘Swinburne as Poet’ (1919), ‘bad’ was proving a slippery label, as potential criticisms turned out to be compliments: ‘The words of condemnation are words which express his qualities. You may say “diffuse.” But the diffuseness is essential; had Swinburne practised greater concentration his verse would be, not better in the same kind, but a different thing. His

⁹ ‘To I. A. Richards, 11 November 1931’, *Letters*, v, 732.

¹⁰ ‘To I. A. Richards, 16 May 1935’, *Letters*, vii, 627; ‘T. S. Eliot’, in *The Paris Review Interviews*, ed. Philip Gourevitch, 4 vols (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007), i, 62-86 (73).

¹¹ ‘On Poetry: An Address at Concord Academy’, *Complete Prose*, vii, 11-18 (13).

¹² ‘To Emily Hale, 13 January, 1936’, *Eliot-Hale Letters*, ed. John Haffenden (Online: T. S. Eliot Estate, 2023) <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/1444>.

diffuseness is one of his glories.’¹³ The essay proceeds according to a logic of misdirection; on two occasions, Eliot prepares us to hear from Swinburne with introductory sentences: ‘what he gives is not images and ideas and music, it is one thing with a curious mixture of all three’; ‘But in Swinburne there is no *pure* beauty – no pure beauty of sound, or of image, or of idea’, the quotations which follow these sentences, however, are not from Swinburne at all, but Campion and Shelley.¹⁴ Similarly, Eliot sets up the ‘bad poet’ who ‘dwells partly in a world of objects and partly in a world of words’ as one of Swinburne’s alter-egos: ‘When you take to pieces any verse of Swinburne, you find always that the object was not there – only the word.’¹⁵ However, we quickly discover that Swinburne resists becoming ‘bad’, as Eliot acknowledges the structural deception of his essay:

It might seem to be intimated, by what has been said, that the work of Swinburne can be shown to be a sham, just as bad verse is a sham. It would only be so if you could produce or suggest something that it pretends to be and is not. The world of Swinburne does not depend upon some other world which it simulates; it has the necessary completeness and self-sufficiency for justification and permanence.¹⁶

But what does ‘sham’ actually mean? As Eliot continues, he sounds persuasive enough, with his short sentences and tricolon: ‘The poetry is not morbid, it is not erotic, it is not destructive. These are adjectives which can be applied to the material, the human feelings, which in Swinburne’s case do not exist.’¹⁷ When we reach the end, though, we realise that we have received only three quotations from Swinburne’s poetry in the entire essay. It is over before Eliot can lead us through the evidence, leaving us to take his word as to Swinburne’s resistance of ‘bad poetry’. We are as much in the dark as to what makes it ‘good’ as Eliot was about *Murder in the Cathedral*.

¹³ ‘Swinburne as Poet’, *Complete Prose*, II, 181-186 (181).

¹⁴ ‘Swinburne as Poet’, 182.

¹⁵ ‘Swinburne as Poet’, 183.

¹⁶ ‘Swinburne as Poet’, 184.

¹⁷ ‘Swinburne as Poet’, 184.

By the time we arrive at Eliot's most prolonged critical engagement with 'bad writing' in the second version of 'The Social Function of Poetry' (1945), the opening does not seem promising: 'I have known a good many poets, including some very good ones: but I cannot think of anything in common between them all except the fact that they have all written poems.'¹⁸ As Eliot proceeds, however, he elaborates on the relationship between 'good', 'bad', and authorial intention, having previously denied any apparent link in his comments on *Murder*. He begins by outlining the stakes of the lecture, suggesting that

the function of [a man's] poetry cannot be judged by his purpose. I can best make clear what I mean by this, by reference to a vast body of literature to which students of aesthetics and psychology might perhaps pay more attention: I mean *bad* poetry.¹⁹

Eliot can't resist bifurcating his category of 'badness', distinguishing between 'the *true* bad poet and the *false* bad poet'. The latter type refers to 'every person [...] who is moved at some moment of adolescence to express himself in verse and who for a brief period cherishes the illusion that what he has written is poetry.' The former, 'the *true* bad poet', is more complex, and may remind us of Eliot's categorisation of Hardy: 'a person of perseverance and industry, who goes on writing, after this adolescent crisis has been passed, to the end of his life.' To be more specific about what qualifies for badness, Eliot splits his category yet again into 'two types of *true* bad poet' depending on what kind of failure they exhibit. 'The first', Eliot outlines, 'is a lover of words; he has nothing to say that has not already been said, but he thinks that originality consists in expressing the commonplace sentiment in a slightly unusual syntax, metric, and vocabulary'. In this discussion of 'unusual syntax', we wonder whether a reference to Swinburne would have been helpful. The other type of '*true* bad poet' is, by contrast, 'not a virtuoso; he has found a serious purpose; he has a message to convey. [...] He has a religious,

¹⁸ 'The Social Function of Poetry', *Complete Prose*, vi, 639-652 (642).

¹⁹ 'The Social Function of Poetry', 642.

or a philosophical, or a political turn of mind; and his poetry is the vehicle of a message which he is sure is of importance to the world.’²⁰ In their simplest terms, then, Eliot’s two types of ‘true bad poet’ are either too concerned with the language they use, or not concerned enough.

But how does one decide which poets may earn such labels? At the conclusion of this passage, Eliot finally makes an observation that advances his pursuit of a definition of ‘badness’:

I find that, in reading the work of a *good* poet, I am apt to be struck by a certain ambiguity. At moments I feel that his language is merely the perfect instrument for what he has to say; at other moments I feel that he is simply making use of, even exploiting, his beliefs for the sake of the verbal beauty in which he can express them. He appears to be both inside and outside of his beliefs and interests. Where this doubt about the attitude of the poet cannot arise, one is tempted to suspect the poetry. If we can enjoy the form while indifferent to the content, that poetry is for us mere virtuosity; if we can attend to the ideas and be indifferent to the words in which they are expressed, what we are reading is for us merely bad prose.²¹

It seems that, all along, Eliot’s ambiguous statements about ‘bad poetry’ were somehow performing their own definition. The key to ‘good poetry’ is not a specific device or technique, but ‘ambiguity’ itself; to qualify as ‘good’, the reader must be uncertain as to which category – and which sub-category – of ‘bad’ they should place it. Even the inconclusive conclusion of ‘Swinburne’ seems rolled up in this definition: ‘the bad poet dwells partly in a world of objects and partly in a world of words, and he never can get them to fit’.²² Of course, ‘ambiguity’ had become an important literary-critical category in the years before ‘The Social Function of Poetry’, and the word connects Eliot’s remarks to New Critical practices of reading.²³ As far as this chapter is concerned, however, Eliot’s *negative* definition of ‘badness’ is what is of use in exploring the ambiguous critical status of *Four Quartets*. Indeed, it should be considered no

²⁰ ‘The Social Function of Poetry’, 643.

²¹ ‘The Social Function of Poetry’, 643.

²² ‘Swinburne as Poet’, 184.

²³ See William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1930); Donald J. Childs, *The Birth of New Criticism: Conflict and Conciliation in the Early Work of William Empson*, I. A. Richards, Robert Graves, and Laura Riding (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2013).

coincidence that these passages on ‘bad poetry’ were being added to ‘The Social Function of Poetry’ just as the four poems of Eliot’s series were being published together for the first time in 1943.

The Fight over *Four Quartets*

Eliot’s explorations of badness in his essays repeatedly turn up the same categories. There is the balance between the ‘world of objects’ and the ‘world of words’, the vexed relationship with prose, and those key notions of ‘ambiguity’ and ‘doubt’. When we collate reviews of *Four Quartets*, we not only observe a preoccupation with these same themes, but also a difficulty in using them to pass judgement about the poems. Such is the breadth of critical opinion, that even a volume like Bernard Bergonzi’s *‘Four Quartets’: A Casebook* (1969) was not published without controversy.²⁴ In her authoritative account of the *Composition of ‘Four Quartets’* (1978), Helen Gardner called Bergonzi’s decision to include an essay by Donald Davie entitled ‘T. S. Eliot: The End of an Era’ (1956) ‘unfortunate’, as it gave ‘wide currency’ to the line of argument that ‘The Dry Salvages’ (1941) was intended as a parody of ‘bad poetry’.²⁵ Although he didn’t allude to Gardner’s comment in his review of her book for *Encounter*, Bergonzi reasserted the importance of reflecting the spectrum of opinion about the poems, opening with: ‘T. S. Eliot’s *oeuvre* is binary: *Waste Land: Quartets*. Some readers are strongly attracted to one pole, some to the other.’²⁶

However, like Eliot’s own successive bifurcations of the ‘bad poet’, it is not only his body of work which encourages polarisation, but the individual poems themselves.

²⁴ Bernard Bergonzi, ed., *T. S. Eliot, ‘Four Quartets’: A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1969).

²⁵ Helen Gardner, *The Composition of ‘Four Quartets’* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), 4n.

²⁶ Bernard Bergonzi, ‘Ghostly Voices: Review of *The Composition of “Four Quartets”*’, *Encounter* 51.1 (1978), 69-73.

Researching early critics' attempts to find a place for *Four Quartets* in the Eliot canon, John Xiros Cooper talks of a 'rescue' mission, one which saw 'ideological defenders' rushing to save the poems from a critical onslaught.²⁷ In his introduction to a selection of that criticism, Bergonzi pointed to divisions along such 'ideological' lines; 'critics who sympathised with Eliot's Christianity and his general cultural position were naturally disposed to applaud the *Quartets* [...] whilst left-wing and agnostic critics were correspondingly inclined to deplore what they regarded as the obscurantism and pessimism of the poems.'²⁸ But ideology is not the only criterion separating detractors from admirers. Bergonzi also signalled a strain of criticism that focused on the style of the poems: 'Some have regarded the frequently abstract language and the relative decorum of the verse as evidence of a slackening poetic intensity on Eliot's part, whilst others [...] see the *Quartets* as a major achievement, showing marvellous flexibility and subtlety and rhythm, and a new mastery of complex experience.'²⁹ In his 1942 review of the first three *Quartets*, George Orwell voiced dissatisfaction – in ideological *and* stylistic terms – for Eliot's most recent writing: 'There is very little in Eliot's later work that makes any deep impression on me.'³⁰ What begins as a critique of obscurity, 'something has departed, some kind of current has been switched off', quickly turns to a consideration of Eliot's religion: 'I should imagine that the struggle with meanings would have loomed smaller, and the poetry would have seemed to matter more, if he could have found his way to some creed which did not start off by forcing one to believe the incredible.'³¹ Orwell successfully goaded a response from Kathleen Raine, who defended the marriage of form and content: 'These poems are revolutionary in a sense that transcends the mere use of words.'³² Taken to its extreme, Raine's

²⁷ John Xiros Cooper, *T. S. Eliot and the Ideology of 'Four Quartets'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 110.

²⁸ Bernard Bergonzi, 'Introduction', in *'Four Quartets': A Casebook*, 11-20 (11).

²⁹ Bergonzi, 'Introduction', 12.

³⁰ George Orwell, 'Points of View. T. S. Eliot', *Contemporary Reviews*, 452-455 (452).

³¹ Orwell, 'Points of View', 453; 454-55.

³² Kathleen Raine, 'Points of View: Another Reading', *Contemporary Reviews*, 455-58 (458).

argument covers all manner of sins. If the language is said to be obscure, as Orwell claims, it signifies nothing, because the meaning of the poem rises above it, as was – apparently – Eliot’s intention. Even the dialogue of Shade’s poem in *Pale Fire* (1962) seems to lose its ironic power:

‘Mother, what’s *grimpen*?’ ‘What is what?’ ‘Grim Pen.’
 Pause, and your guarded scholium. Then again:
 ‘Mother, what’s *chthonic*?’ That, too, you’d explain,
 Appending: ‘Would you like a tangerine?’
 ‘No. Yes. And what does *sempiternal* mean?’³³

The allusions to Eliot’s ‘phony modern poem’ have been read as Nabokov’s rejection of the ‘Anglo-Catholic spirituality of *Four Quartets*’.³⁴ But even Nabokov’s attempts to subvert the lofty connotations of each word is nullified by Raine’s argument about transcendence. Over the years her interpretation has been a popular one, with some even claiming that ‘none of the critical procedures developed in the last fifty years has been responsive to the kind of poetry we find in the *Quartets*’.³⁵ But it is not only necessary to ask how persuasive this kind of argument is, but also to interrogate what it is about Eliot’s style and reputation which allowed the argument to have been formulated in the first place.

That *Four Quartets* must be ‘good’, simply because it was written by T. S. Eliot, defined another fierce disagreement, this time in *Scrutiny*. When D. W. Harding reviewed ‘Little Gidding’ (1942), his approach was a laudatory summary, surveying sections of the poem and praising wherever he went. In his concluding remarks, he stepped back to consider how the poem related to Eliot’s earlier work: ‘In most of Mr Eliot’s poems the intellectual materials which abound are used emotionally. In much of this poem they are used intellectually, in literal

³³ Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (London; New York: Penguin, 2016), 39.

³⁴ John Burt Foster, ‘Not T. S. Eliot, but Proust: Revisionary Modernism in Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*’, *Comparative Literature Studies* 28.1 (1991), 51-67 (54).

³⁵ Edward Lobb, paraphrasing Denis Donoghue, in ‘Introduction’, in *Words in Time: New Essays on Eliot’s ‘Four Quartets’*, ed. Edward Lobb (London: Athlone Press, 1993), xi-xiv (xii).

statement which is to be understood literally'.³⁶ Just as we anticipate a venture into analysis, possibly with reference to the categories of the 'intellectual' and the 'emotional' in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), Harding stops himself: 'How such statements become poetry is a question outside the range of this review.'³⁷ This lacuna is not left to stand, however. In the next issue of *Scrutiny*, R. N. Higinbotham begins his 'Objections to a Review' by disapproving of Harding's approach: 'Surely any reviewer should suspect his reactions when he can find nothing better to say than what his poet has already said better?'³⁸ Proceeding to outline 'some disturbing impressions' about 'Little Gidding', Higinbotham takes up Harding's identification of the 'emotional' and the 'intellectual', noting that in order to be successful, the latter must 'be sufficiently powerful to stand the pressure generated' by the former. For Higinbotham, though, Eliot does not achieve his objective: 'it lacks body, is thin. [...] since his intellectual material is not felt enough to be constantly with him and with the whole of him, it has insufficient background and body to produce spontaneous symbols.'³⁹ It is not only the symbols that Higinbotham finds artificial, though, but also the way in which Eliot had

succumbed to the unselfconscious use of old phrases like 'the world's end'; of clichés like 'the enigma of the fever chart', 'transient beauty', 'worshippers of the machine.' Nothing is gained by such paraphrasing. The original meaning's effect is not widened but confined, forced into the compass of a stock-response. Often the meaning is lost; often it does not seem worth finding. Secondary effects of this artificiality are preciousness, disappearance of verbal evocativeness, vagueness and a continual groping after the elusive, with the one authentic word slipping through the enunciation. Finally the straining after effect causes an occasional portentousness, as though Mr Eliot were promulgating, rather than writing, verse[.]⁴⁰

³⁶ D. W. Harding, 'We Have Not Reached Conclusion', in *'Four Quartets': A Casebook*, 64-68 (68).

³⁷ Harding, 'We Have Not Reached Conclusion', 68.

³⁸ R. N. Higinbotham, 'Objections to a Review of "Little Gidding"', in *'Four Quartets': A Casebook*, 68-71 (68).

³⁹ Higinbotham, 'Objections to a Review', 69-70.

⁴⁰ Higinbotham, 'Objections to a Review', 70.

Higinbotham concludes with a broader comment on the tone of *Four Quartets*: ‘If Mr Eliot’s achievements were not so great and his seriousness not beyond question I should use the term “insincerity” to describe the general effect’.⁴¹

That F. R. Leavis felt the need to respond to this claim of Higinbotham’s about *Four Quartets* ought to indicate that he had struck a nerve. Eliot’s ‘sincerity’ was a hallmark of Leavis’ own criticism of the poems. In his review of ‘The Dry Salvages’ in 1942, Leavis had argued that ‘The poetry from “Ash-Wednesday” onwards [...] is a searching of experience, a spiritual discipline, a technique for sincerity – for giving “sincerity” a meaning.’⁴² If Leavis’s understanding of the intrinsic ‘sincerity’ of ‘The Dry Salvages’ was being questioned, so was his entire conception of Eliot’s poetic project. Leavis tried to terminate the argument by claiming that Higinbotham had not understood the poem properly: ‘This poetry is difficult by reason of the discipline of self-knowledge and readjustment it imposes.’⁴³ The discussion may have ended here in *Scrutiny*, with Leavis’ final word, but it is not resolved. Leavis hasn’t quite taken the sting out of Higinbotham’s argument. Locating ‘insincerity’ at the heart of *Four Quartets* could still be used to undermine the ‘difficulty’ that arises in appreciating the poem, as well as Raine’s argument about mystical ‘transcendence’.

The critical arguments that appeared in journals before 1965 may be dated, but, like the poems themselves, have an uncanny way of repeating themselves. In fact, the “adversary tradition” of opposition to the *Quartets*’ that Bergonzi identified has resolved itself into an attempt to reconcile the good and the bad under the notion of ‘intentionality’, beginning with the essay of Donald Davie that Gardner so abhorred.⁴⁴ In ‘T. S. Eliot: The End of an Era’, Davie structured his argument in two parts. He begins by outlining his surprise

⁴¹ Higinbotham, ‘Objections to a Review’, 71.

⁴² F. R. Leavis, ‘Eliot’s Later Poetry’, *Contemporary Reviews*, 446-452 (447).

⁴³ F. R. Leavis, ‘Reflections on the Above’, in *‘Four Quartets’: A Casebook*, 71-80 (79).

⁴⁴ Bergonzi, ‘Introduction’, 15.

that no one should yet have remarked to my knowledge how the third Quartet, 'The Dry Salvages,' sticks out among the rest like a sore thumb. At first sight it is not only incongruous with the others, but different unaccountably and disastrously. One could take it by itself and prove convincingly that it is quite simply *rather a bad poem*.⁴⁵

He proceeds by analysing areas of weakness, taking account of tone, metre, rhyme, transitions between sections, and finding only 'incantatory gibberish' and 'slapdash inefficiency'. Around half-way through the essay, however, Davie turns back on himself, and sweeps up all of his criticisms under the name of 'parody'. Claiming the poem to be 'spoken *in character*, spoken in character as the American', suddenly 'the incompetence turns out to be dazzling virtuosity; and the inhumanity of the conclusion reached turns out to be only a parody of the true conclusion reached in *Little Gidding*'.⁴⁶ Davie was fond of making this sort of argument. In his study of *Personae* (1926), he quotes Ezra Pound's notion of the 'mask':

In the 'search for oneself,' in the search for 'sincere self-expression,' one gropes... for some seeming verity. One says 'I am' this, that or the other, and with the words scarcely uttered one ceases to be that thing... I began this search for the real in a book called *Personae*, casting off, as it were complete masks of the self in each poem. I continued in a long series of translations, which were but more elaborate masks.⁴⁷

Applying the idea to *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1919), Davie expresses his surprise at the 'discrepancy between the straightforward obviousness of what *Homage to Sextus Propertius* has to say, and the intricacy of what commentators have to say about it'.⁴⁸ The *Homage* is so clearly 'not and cannot be in any sense a translation', for Davie, that it is actually 'the easiest of Pound's poems, and it has been treated as one of the hardest'.⁴⁹ Hoping to apply a similar

⁴⁵ Donald Davie, 'T. S. Eliot: The End of an Era', in *T. S. Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Hugh Kenner (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 192-205 (192).

⁴⁶ Davie, 'End of an Era', 200.

⁴⁷ Ezra Pound, quoted in Donald Davie, *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), 82.

⁴⁸ Davie, *Pound: Poet as Sculptor*, 82. On Eliot's attitude towards the 'Homage', see also Elizabeth F. Judge, 'Make it Pound: Translation, Professionalism and the Right to Propertian Discourse in "Homage to Sextus Propertius"', *Paideuma* 33.1 (2004), 127-63.

⁴⁹ Davie, *Pound: Poet as Sculptor*, 85.

logic to ‘The Dry Salvages’, the complication of the poem’s ‘badness’ is suddenly simplified, when slotted into the scheme of the ‘mask’ of parody.

Helen Gardner sought to squash Davie’s thesis before it had a chance to take hold in the critical consciousness. She used the self-assertion of Eliot’s poetic amelioration – ‘I *do* think the writing improves toward the latter part’ – to ‘explode’ Davie’s assertion of the *deliberate* ‘badness’ of ‘The Dry Salvages’.⁵⁰ But her dismissive swipe at Davie in the cavern of a footnote flattens what has since become an important thread in the criticism of *Four Quartets*. Indeed, despite Davie’s disavowal of the theory of parody in a later essay, “‘The Dry Salvages’: A Reconsideration’ (1991), citing the ‘intimate’ nature of the personal material in the poem, the criticism has not entirely accepted his retraction.⁵¹ In 2007, Roger Bellin was still channelling Davie in his exploration of parody, asking ‘How are we to take seriously the conceptual discourse that makes up so much of T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*?’⁵² With the criticism still seemingly in the grip of this tension, the issue under discussion in this chapter is not merely how we can understand the perceived stylistic ‘badness’ of these poems once and for all, but what it is about Eliot’s reputation that makes these attempts at reconciliation attractive – and even possible – in the first place.

Sincerity, Parody, and Bathos in *Four Quartets* and ‘The Thorn’

It is surprising that when he took up the argument of ‘The Dry Salvages’ as a parody, the charge of insincerity against Eliot did not enter Donald Davie’s mind. Davie is, though, too

⁵⁰ Gardner, *Composition of ‘Four Quartets’*, 4.

⁵¹ Donald Davie, “‘The Dry Salvages’: A Reconsideration’, in *Modernist Essays: Yeats, Pound, Eliot* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2004), 216-227 (226).

⁵² Roger Bellin, ‘The Seduction of Argument and the Danger of Parody in the *Four Quartets*’, *Twentieth-Century Literature* 53.4 (2007), 421-441 (421).

preoccupied with making the case for parody in the first instance, targeting passages to critique their composition, and subsuming that critique into his framework that the poem is intentionally ‘bad’. He singles out the opening to ‘The Dry Salvages’ for comment:

I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river
Is a strong brown god – sullen, untamed and intractable,
Patient to some degree, at first recognised as a frontier;
Useful, untrustworthy, as a conveyor of commerce;
Then only a problem confronting the builder of bridges.
The problem once solved, the brown god is almost forgotten
By the dwellers in cities – ever, however, 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.⁵³

‘[W]ho could conceivably start a conversation like that’, asks Davie, ‘without condemning himself from the start as an uncomfortable poseur?’⁵⁴ There is much that sounds like it would satisfy Eliot’s definitions of badness in his essays; the strange phrases, ‘conveyor of commerce’, ‘builder of bridges’, ‘dwellers in cities’, and even the Hardyian adjectives ‘untamed’, ‘unhonoured’, ‘unpropitiated’. But the tone of the ‘uncomfortable poseur’ – or ‘lecture-stigmata’, as Geoffrey Faber called it – is not isolated to this passage, nor even to ‘The Dry Salvages’.⁵⁵ It appears just as frequently in ‘East Coker’ (1940) when the speaker confides: ‘That was a way of putting it—not very satisfactory: / A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion’.⁵⁶ Leavis would claim that these passages must be viewed in the context of the ‘vital organization’ of the entire poem, where they contribute to the attempt at ‘an apprehension of an assured reality’.⁵⁷ But the question remains how Eliot thought it made sense for a speaker to begin a poem with ‘I do not know much about gods’ (I, 1) and proceed to wonder ‘if that is what Krishna meant’ (III, 1) without seeming insincere, if not contradictory.

⁵³ ‘The Dry Salvages’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 1, 193.

⁵⁴ Davie, ‘End of an Era’, 193.

⁵⁵ See Gardner, *Composition of ‘Four Quartets’*, 133.

⁵⁶ ‘East Coker’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 1, 187.

⁵⁷ Leavis, ‘Reflections on the Above’, 75.

The problem of tone is often a sticking point for critics of *Four Quartets*. Leonard Diepeveen, like Higinbotham, finds issues of insincerity: ‘Eliot’s directness, though, a sort of breaking frame via the poetry’s reference to its own processes, can make one uneasy, as if something else is going on, hiding behind the directness.’⁵⁸ Early readers discovered the same issue. One of the newest additions to Eliot’s Faber list, Vernon Watkins, offered his opinion of a similar frame-breaking line:

the only criticism I can make of ‘The Dry Salvages’ is in the middle of the passage succeeding the rhymed section of Section 3 where you use ‘I have said before’. There’s nothing wrong in this. Beethoven uses a similar device for standing outside his music [...] It’s used in the Gospels, too, and in a way it’s a weapon of sincerity against the possible seduction of art.⁵⁹

Watkins raises an intriguing point, the aside appearing to him ‘a weapon of sincerity’ against the artifice of the poem. But he also asserts that the poem aspires to a form of Scripture, and that standing aside from it is to shatter its meditative power:

I’m almost certain that in a poem like this it breaks the devotion. A poem is a supreme act of faith. [...] I think your parenthetical phrase tends to suspend the process of faith in the poem while there is a re-entry of the spectre of frame. You are, in that half-line, bringing an audience back. It is better to speak to nobody. The audience will always hear.

Eliot was profoundly interested in the criticism: ‘It is very likely that you are right: all I can say about it at the present time is that as my phrase was quite deliberate and conscious I don’t propose to change it now.’⁶⁰ Watkins’ argument sounds like that of Kathleen Raine; the poem is spiritual in its capacity to enchant its readers, and for it to turn back on itself is to break the spell. *Four Quartets* can’t seem to decide whether it is a poem, or a commentary that stands outside of a poem, or both, with drastic consequences for the ostensible sincerity of its speaking voice.

⁵⁸ Leonard Diepeveen, *Modernist Fraud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 163.

⁵⁹ Vernon Watkins, quoted in ‘To Vernon Watkins, 9 July 1941’, *Letters*, ix, 859n.

⁶⁰ ‘To Vernon Watkins, 9 July 1941’, *Letters*, ix, 859.

Watkins is not the only reader to have taken issue with the asides within the larger structure of the poem.⁶¹ When Ronald Bush picked up the argument in 1984, however, he claimed instead that the breakage of frame through the use of direct address is purposeful. Focusing on ‘Burnt Norton’, Bush selected for special attention the aside: ‘And do not call it fixity, / Where past and future are gathered’ which interrupts the meditative passage on the ‘still point of the turning world’.⁶² The authorial intervention does not correspond to ‘a drama of consciousness’ for Bush, but an indication of dishonest ‘stage-manage[ment]’. He calls the aside ‘a tipoff. It signals that the verse is not what it seems. Instead of a strenuous attempt at philosophical rigour, the line speaks of a smugness on the other side of a struggle. It cautions us that philosophy will never get to the root of reality’s conundrums.’⁶³ While Watkins asserts that the authorial asides are better removed to help maintain the ‘faith’ of the poem, Bush finds such a faith to have been empty in the first place, and the asides function only to prove it as such. Otherwise, Bush claims, why would Eliot so obviously ‘weaken’ the poetic intensity with prosaic asides, ‘dilut[e]’ the ‘prose precision’ with ‘metaphor’, and give seemingly endless lists of ‘unqualified certainties’.⁶⁴ For Bush, then, ‘Burnt Norton’ is a parody of the idea that philosophical exegesis could provide any insight into personal experience. However, like Davie’s assertion of ‘parody’ in the tone of ‘The Dry Salvages’, Bush’s framework also suffers from the problem of ‘insincerity’; why write a long poem that seems so committed to its own masquerade?

Parody, naturally, implies a target, that something – or someone – is being made fun of. What often goes unnoticed in *Four Quartets* is just how much laughter there is in the poems.

⁶¹ See also the problems Geoffrey Hill has with Eliot’s use of the second person in ‘Dividing Legacies’, in Geoffrey Hill, *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 366-79 (377-78).

⁶² ‘Burnt Norton’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 1, 181.

⁶³ Ronald Bush, *T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 202.

⁶⁴ Bush, *T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style*, 202.

There is that of the unseen children in 'Burnt Norton': 'There rises the hidden laughter / Of children in the foliage' (v, 35-36). There is the dancing troupe in 'East Coker': 'Rustically solemn or in rustic laughter / Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes' (I, 35-36), and in Part III: 'The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy / Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony / Of death and birth' (III, 31-33). Finally, in 'Little Gidding', we listen as the 'parched eviscerate soil / Gapes at the vanity of toil, / Laughs without mirth' (II, 14-15) and as the Dantean figure complains of the 'laceration / Of laughter at what ceases to amuse' (II, 83-84). So, what is *Four Quartets* laughing at? The arguments of Davie and Bush lead us to assume it is the reader who falls for Eliot's parody of 'the American' – in Davie's view – or of the philosophical tone – in Bush's. But we also notice that when we put these two masks together, the American and the philosopher, we arrive at the life that Eliot was supposed to lead had he not decided to remain in England. With this in mind, it is not only Whitman who we sense sitting behind the voice of the asides in *Four Quartets*, but also the voices of Eliot's own poetry.

The echoes of laughter which underpin the philosophical ruminations may remind us of the pompous poseurs of Eliot's earlier poems, where the laughter was supplied by irony rather than the 'hidden children'. Indeed, in this line of argument, *Four Quartets* starts to read as the poem that Prufrock might have written, had he been able to encourage himself to actually do anything. We may remember this voice from Eliot's light verse, where he similarly laughed at the stereotypes that coalesced around his public image:

How unpleasant to meet Mr. Eliot!
[...]
And his conversations, so nicely
Restricted to What Precisely
And If and Perhaps and But.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ 'Five-Finger Exercises', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 143.

In the opening of ‘The Dry Salvages’ we see a number of clauses that pertain to ‘What Precisely / And if and Perhaps and But’. We get the ‘What Precisely’ in the string of adjectives: ‘sullen, untamed and intractable [...] useful, untrustworthy [...] implacable [...] Unhonoured, unpropitiated’, we get the ‘perhaps’: ‘to some degree’, and even the ‘But’: ‘But I think that the river / Is a strong brown god’. In his study of light verse elements in the poetry of Wordsworth, Matthew Bevis conceives of self-parody as a defence mechanism: ‘Humoring yourself is like parenting yourself. Self-mockery becomes a form of self-care by establishing a framework for how you wish to be mocked, which is itself a confession about the person you want to be.’⁶⁶ Though the poem laughs at ‘Mr. Eliot’, it was a character which had taken decades to construct, and thereby connects *Four Quartets* to the discussion of Eliot’s ‘seriousness’ unearthed in the previous chapter.

Eliot is not the first writer whose ‘bad poetry’ has been subject to a rescue mission by labelling it an intentional parody, but a look elsewhere helps to isolate what makes the problems of insincerity so difficult to resolve in the case of *Four Quartets*. Aside from Pound’s ‘Homage to Sextus Propertius’, one of the most famous instances still under active discussion, yet stuck in a critical rut that will feel all too familiar to scholars of *Four Quartets*, is that of Wordsworth’s ‘The Thorn’, first published in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). Although the entire poem has come under close examination, it is the third stanza – and especially its concluding couplet – that has received the most intense scrutiny:

High on a mountain’s highest ridge,
Where oft the stormy winter gale
Cuts like a scythe, while through the clouds
It sweeps from vale to vale,
Not five yards from the mountain path,
This Thorn you on your left espy;
And to the left, three yards beyond,

⁶⁶ Matthew Bevis, *Wordsworth’s Fun* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 233.

You see a little muddy Pond
 Of water never dry;
 I've measured it from side to side:
 'Tis three feet long, and two feet wide.⁶⁷

The poem's various detractors include Southey and Coleridge, the latter finding such lines as those concluding this stanza to be 'sudden and unpleasant sinkings from the height to which the poet had previously lifted them'.⁶⁸ Coleridge warns Wordsworth in exactly the same terms that Davie put to 'The Dry Salvages': 'it is not possible to imitate truly a dull and garrulous discourser, without repeating the effects of dullness and garrulity.' Some of the poem's commentators have found an oasis in characterisation, just as it has proved for 'The Dry Salvages', as Keston Sutherland reports: 'Everything unfamiliarly tedious or idiotic in the poem is nothing but an expert imitation of somebody else's familiarly tedious or idiotic habits of speech.'⁶⁹ Wordsworth himself threw weight behind this argument. Adding a note to the poem in 1800, he admitted that contextual information designed 'to give this Poem its full effect' was missing: 'The Reader will perhaps have a general notion of it, if he has ever known a man, a Captain of a small trading vessel for example, who being past the middle age of life, had retired upon an annuity or small independent income to some village or country town'.⁷⁰ Seemingly intended as a parody of this sort of speaker, Wordsworth explains the poem's diction: 'Such men having little to do become credulous and talkative from indolence; [...] It was my wish in this poem to show the manner in which such men cleave to the same ideas; and to follow the turns of passion, always different, yet not palpably different, by which their conversation is swayed.'⁷¹

⁶⁷ William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed R. L. Brett and Alun R. Jones (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2005), 115.

⁶⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Adam Roberts (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 240-41.

⁶⁹ Keston Sutherland, 'Wrong Poetry', *Textual Practice* 24.4 (2010), 765-782 (771).

⁷⁰ William Wordsworth, 'Note to "The Thorn"', in *Lyrical Ballads*, 331-32.

⁷¹ Wordsworth, 'Note to "The Thorn"', 331-32.

Wordsworth's note – and his subsequent revision of the couplet – have led some to assert that 'The Thorn' is simply a bad dramatic monologue. But it has also inspired more complex interpretations, and in his essay, 'Wrong Poetry' (2010), Keston Sutherland uses the poem as a basis for a meta-critical meditation on reader response. Sutherland declares the final line of the original third stanza (''Tis three feet long, and two feet wide') to be 'the best moment in either version of "The Thorn", and that the long history of derision, equivocation, and apology provoked by this unfamiliarly unpoetic line is proof of its surpassing power.'⁷² But how can such a superficially 'tedious' line have 'surpassing power'? Launching into analysis of its capacity to incite debate, Sutherland conceives of it as a 'powerfully wrong line', describing it as 'words that ought to be more than they are, and that ought to be liked but could not be.' Much hinges on that modal verb 'ought', and this is the key to Sutherland's theory: 'What I hear sounded under the confrontationally literal language of "The Thorn" is not the direct echo of a norm or value, exactly, but an argument about the social and cognitive experience of owning wrong or perverse values and insisting on them.'⁷³ Sutherland continues, locating within the unapologetic speaker who 'insists' on his own tediousness a political argument: 'Specifically, I hear in the measurements of the pond an unfamiliar flourish of *intransigence*; more specifically yet, a flourish of intransigence that once was and that cannot yet *not* be a Republican intransigence.' In other words, our blind insistence on reading this 'tedious' line as significant betrays the signs of 'Republican' ideology. But just as the political reading is invoked, it renders itself problematic: 'it cannot possibly be, because the disproportion is so hilariously immense that the slightest effort to accept that it is mimetic must turn the lines instantly into the worst sort of ersatz alternative to direct political commentary.'⁷⁴ And yet this reading persists: 'But how else can I possibly like the lines, if not by interpreting

⁷² Sutherland, 'Wrong Poetry', 773.

⁷³ Sutherland, 'Wrong Poetry', 776.

⁷⁴ Sutherland, 'Wrong Poetry', 777.

Wordsworth's insistence, and my own impression, too, that I am obliged to like them, and by finding in their bid for absolute literalness a dislocated expression of revolutionary thinking and intransigence?' It is this tension that underpins the critical appreciation of 'The Thorn', and it is one that we may argue also exists in *Four Quartets*.

We are forced by Donald Davie and Ronald Bush to keep both the straightforward argument – that *Four Quartets* is a 'bad' poem – and their alternative explanations – that it is 'intentionally bad' – in tension in just the same way that is argued for 'The Thorn'. 'Wrong Poetry', Sutherland concludes, is a useful category in which to situate writing that resists simple explanations:

If it means anything, 'wrong poetry' means just that: a trial of doubt that confounds identification, the loss of confidence in being right, and unease about what will qualify or matter, a compulsion to sublimate first reactions under the pressure of sheer insistence on whatever most emphatically escapes them, and a passionate resistance of whatever thought seems most nearly conclusively acceptable or is in any measure already familiar and satisfying.⁷⁵

Sutherland uses that key term that Eliot employed to speak about 'good writing' in 'The Social Function of Poetry', 'doubt', as well as others which approximate Eliot's 'ambiguity': 'unstable', 'counterintuitive', 'arbitrary', 'unease', 'loss of confidence in being right'. In its demand that we keep both interpretations alive simultaneously, *Four Quartets* squeezes its way into Sutherland's category of 'Wrong Poetry'.

But how does establishing *Four Quartets* as a 'wrong poem' help us to make sense of its divisiveness? On the one hand, Sutherland implies the need for authorial intention when composing a 'wrong poem'; Wordsworth wanted to make a comment on the nature of reader response and Republicanism, and that's why – initially – he stood fiercely by the poem despite its reception. But a 'wrong poem' need not have been made intentionally so. Indeed, while Sutherland interpreted 'The Thorn' as inspiring a discussion about the *need* to read into

⁷⁵ Sutherland, 'Wrong Poetry', 778.

something in political terms, the debate incited by the ‘wrongness’ of *Four Quartets* can be read in terms relating to Eliot’s own reputation. The pressure to read the poem as ‘good’ reveals not a Republican intransigence, but a critical one, because Eliot was too celebrated a writer to read it as anything else.

What unites *Four Quartets* and ‘The Thorn’ in their classifications as ‘Wrong Poetry’ is not just an expectation about the writing needing to be ‘good’, it is also dependent on our interpretation of bathos. Wordsworth’s poem relies on an incongruous fall from the heights of the sublime: ‘High on a mountain’s highest ridge, / Where oft the stormy winter gale / Cuts like a scythe’, to the banality of the ‘little muddy Pond / Of water never dry.’ This is a trait that Eliot had isolated as typical of the Romantic poet: ‘we may think that Wordsworth, in attempting to recover the social idiom, sometimes oversteps the mark and becomes pedestrian: but it is often true that only by going too far can we find out how far we can go.’⁷⁶ Wordsworth’s path to ‘greatness’, somewhat ironically, seems interwoven with the threat of being ‘bad.’

In the opening of ‘East Coker’, we notice a similarly bathetic movement from the gnomic to the dull:

In my beginning is my end. In succession
Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,
Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place
Is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass.

(I, 1-4).

We catch the premise of the opening line without much difficulty: out of one thing comes another. The noun ‘by-pass’ gives this idea lexical embodiment, created out of two older words fused together. Yet the trochaic stress of this new compound – the *OED* citing its first appearance in 1922 – placed at the end of the line only makes it stick out further, the thorn of

⁷⁶ ‘The Music of Poetry’, *Complete Prose*, VI, 310-25 (319).

the passage.⁷⁷ Its presence gives this important sentence, which promises to elucidate the ambiguous ‘In my beginning is my end’, an anti-climactic cadence, its odd specificity jarring against ‘Houses rise and fall’ just as the measurement of Wordsworth’s pond proved a bathetic concluding line. The practical function served by a ‘by-pass’, to offer a diversion around an otherwise busy route, also seems to jar with the message of much of the poem, which advises that ‘the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time’ (v, 27-29). ‘East Coker’ is not a poem about short-cuts.

‘By-pass’ is not a word commonly seen in poetry, but its potential for bathos was exploited by an associate of Eliot’s, John Betjeman, whose poem ‘Mortality’ (1966) narrates the death of a civil servant in a car crash:

The first-class brains of a senior civil servant
Shiver and shatter and fall
As the steering column of his comfortable Humber
Batters in the bony wall.
All those delicate little re-adjustments
‘On the one hand, if we proceed
With the *ad hoc* policy hitherto adapted
To individual need...
On the other hand, too rigid an arrangement
Might, of itself, perforce...
I would like to submit for the Minister’s concurrence
The following alternative course,
Subject to revision and reconsideration
In the light our experience gains...’
And this had to happen at the corner where the by-pass
Comes into Egham and out of Staines.
That very near miss for an All Souls’ Fellowship
The recent compensation of a ‘K’-
The first-class brains of a senior civil servant
Are sweetbread on the road today.⁷⁸

In ‘Mortality’, the ‘by-pass’ is integrated into the poem’s ironic comedy, this ‘*had* to happen at the corner where the by-pass / Comes into Egham and out of Staines’; a glance at ‘East

⁷⁷ See ‘bypass’, n. sense 3: ‘A road diverging from and re-entering a main road, *esp.* one constructed as an alternative route to relieve congestion of traffic in a town.’ *OED Online* <oed.com> [accessed 15/06/22].

⁷⁸ John Betjeman, ‘Mortality’, in John Betjeman, *Collected Poems* (London: John Murray, 2006), 288.

Coker', perhaps, with its insistence on the inevitability of 'Houses rise and fall'. There is more uncanny similarity to Eliot; the 'very near miss for an All Souls Fellowship', and the strangely Eliotic structure of suggesting changes to governmental policy: 'Subject to revision and reconsideration / In the light of our experience gains...' Whether Betjeman is alluding to Eliot consciously or not, Davie or Bush might suggest that the comedy is already latent in Eliot's use of 'by-pass', which is a tedious enough detail to be part of the parody. Indeed, Edward Lobb undertakes such a reading, scenting in the 'wonderful flatness of these lines' in 'East Coker' a kind of 'dark irony', one which inclines us 'to read the whole poem as a black comedy, a Beckettian version of "dung and death"'.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, Lobb struggles to reconcile such a reading with the presence of a contrasting mood: 'On the other hand, the echoes of Ecclesiastes later in the passage [...] seem to imply a divine context for human activities, and the consequent possibility of their being meaningful'. As in Eliot's own assessment of Wordsworth in 'The Music of Poetry' (1942), it becomes difficult to tell whether he has 'overstep[ped] the mark' of his stylistic intentions and become 'pedestrian' on purpose, or if the poem is simply 'bad'.

After the opening of 'East Coker', we notice a bathetic banality once again, as Eliot co-opts the kind of countryside scene that appears throughout Wordsworth's poetry:

Now the light falls
 Across the open field, leaving the deep lane
 Shuttered with branches, dark in the afternoon,
 Where you lean against a bank while a van passes,
 And the deep lane insists on the direction
 Into the village, in the electric heat
 Hypnotised. In a warm haze the sultry light
 Is absorbed, not refracted, by grey stone.
 The dahlias sleep in the empty silence.

(I, 14-22)

This is not the structural logic that we expect from Eliot's poetry; indeed, the figure who 'lean[s] against a bank while a van passes' seems only a few steps removed from the banality

⁷⁹ Edward Lobb, 'Limitation and Transcendence in "East Coker"', in *Words in Time*, 20-37 (27).

of measuring a pond in 'The Thorn'. The repetition of 'deep lane', and the odd qualification of 'sultry light' being 'absorbed,' but 'not refracted, by grey stone' gives the impression of a speaker intent on performing a capacity for acute observation. Seemingly devoid of any obvious objective correlative, we wonder what motivated the Wordsworthian 'spot of time' to become a part of his verse procedure for 'East Coker'.⁸⁰ In doing so, we are reminded of Auden, who argued in his memorial essay for Eliot that 'like Wordsworth, his inspiration for nearly all he wrote arose out of a few intensely visionary experiences, which probably occurred quite early in life'.⁸¹ Eliot hinted at the same thing in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, when he discussed methods of composition:

There might be the experience of a child of ten, a small boy peering through sea-water in a rock-pool, and finding a sea-anemone for the first time: the simple experience (not so simple, for an exceptional child, as it looks) might be dormant in his mind for twenty years, and re-appear transformed in some verse-context charged with great imaginative pressure.⁸²

In mainstream criticism, Wordsworth's is not a presence that is often seen to hang over Eliot's final major poems. Nevertheless, when we look to Eliot's description of the 'personal saturation value' of certain 'imagery' for the poet, we cannot help but think of Wordsworth's 'spot of time':

The song of one bird, the leap of one fish, at a particular place and time, the scent of one flower, an old woman on a German mountain path, six ruffians seen through an open window playing cards at night at a small French railway junction where there was a water-mill: such memories may have symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell, for they come to represent the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer. We might just as well ask why, when we try to recall visually some period in the past, we find in our memory just the few meagre arbitrarily chosen set of snapshots that we do find there, the faded poor souvenirs of passionate moments.⁸³

⁸⁰ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850: Authoritative Texts, Contexts and Reception, Recent Critical Essays*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), 429.

⁸¹ W. H. Auden, 'T. S. Eliot, O.M.: A Tribute', in *W. H. Auden: Prose: Volume v: 1963-1968*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 122-124 (123).

⁸² *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, Complete Prose*, IV, 574-694 (632).

⁸³ *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, 688.

You may struggle to find a more Eliotic phrase than ‘the faded poor souvenirs of passionate moments’, which could be straight out of ‘Gerontion’ or the speech of the compound ghost in ‘Little Gidding’. But in the opening of ‘East Coker’, we receive an image which does not seem concentrated enough to possess much meaning; we remain on the outside of its ‘personal saturation value’ looking in at the figure ‘lean[ing] against a bank while a van passes’. If the 1930s saw Eliot move towards a Wordsworthian model of composition, then, the question arises as to whether the intensely personal ‘spot of time’ can be reconciled with the problems of ‘sincerity’ and parody in *Four Quartets* that we have already established.

‘Impulse’ vs. ‘Impetus’: The Contradictory Revision of *Four Quartets*

When Eliot described certain memories as being ‘the faded poor souvenirs of passionate moments’, he pre-empted a contradiction that runs throughout the composition of *Four Quartets*. In the poems, the Wordsworthian sanctity of an original experience is haunted by the impossibility of its recovery in language. The theme dominates Eliot’s letters to Emily Hale written contemporaneously with the *Quartets*, with particular reference to another word from his description in *The Use of Poetry*, ‘snapshot’. In 1935, he reminds Hale of an afternoon spent in a Cotswold village: ‘I don’t know yet why the Blockley tea was so important; but that inn yard, and the iron teatable on a slant, and the holly-hocks, are snapshotted on my memory charged with great significance.’⁸⁴ This specific ‘snapshot’ becomes an important image in ‘East Coker’, when we read of ‘snowdrops writhing under feet / And hollyhocks that aim too high’ (II, 4-5). So, too, does his memory of ‘that summer star-evening under the yew-tree’ find its way into ‘Burnt Norton’: ‘Will [...] Chill / Fingers of yew be curled / Down on us?’ (IV, 3-

⁸⁴ ‘To Emily Hale, 11 August 1935’, *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/l403>.

8) and ‘Little Gidding’: ‘The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree / Are of equal duration’ (v, 19-20).⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the ability for language to approximate these experiences in the speaker’s memory is a key preoccupation of the *Quartets*: ‘Words strain, / Crack and sometimes break under the burden, / Under the tension, slip, slide, perish, / Will not stay.’ (‘Burnt Norton’, v, 13-16). What this section seeks to demonstrate is the way in which this contradiction – the desire to preserve an original experience from the past in a language which takes us further and further away from it – has informed some of the charges against the poems’ perceived ‘badness’.

Throughout his writing life, Eliot placed a great deal of emphasis on lexical precision when describing a thought or an experience. He shows his fondness for the word ‘exact’ most clearly in his thinking about the metaphysical poets: ‘this is perhaps one of the healthier reasons why their poetry is popular today; by a healthy reaction against vagueness’.⁸⁶ It is from this tradition that Swinburne is said to have hailed:

It is a postulate implicit in all metaphysical poetry that nothing is ineffable, that the most rarified feeling can be exact and exactly expressed. If you cease to be able to express feelings you cease to be able to have them, and sensibility is replaced by sentiment, in the end by the vague expression of the vague, and poetry degenerates into a diversity of noises.⁸⁷

In advising apprentice poets, Eliot would often recommend searching for a specific word: ‘I have read through your poems with some care’, he told Terence Lawson in 1932, concluding that: ‘if [...] you always know exactly what the words you use mean, and that the words mean what you want them to mean, you will be able to do a good deal better’.⁸⁸ Eliot’s early poetry is full of words that we sense aspire to this kind of ‘exactness’. As early as ‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night’ (1915) we read: ‘Held in a lunar synthesis, / Whispering lunar incantations’.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ ‘To Emily Hale, 13 December 1935’, *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/l433>.

⁸⁶ ‘Cowley and the Transition’, in *Complete Prose*, II, 725-41 (736).

⁸⁷ ‘Cowley and the Transition’, 735-36.

⁸⁸ ‘To Terence Lawson, 11 August 1932’, *Letters*, VI, 401.

⁸⁹ ‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 18.

In Eliot's second collection, 'exactness' takes on a different function, often marshalled in the name of characterisation. 'Mr Eliot's Sunday Morning Service' (1920) begins memorably: 'Polyphiloprogenitive / The sapient sutlers of the Lord', and proceeds to utter the words 'Superfetation', 'piaculative', 'staminate', 'pistalate', 'epicene' as part of its parody of theological language.⁹⁰ Relatedly, 'Gerontion' (1920) compensates for the communicative deficiencies of senility by floundering in over-exactness:

These with a thousand small deliberations
Protract the profit of their chilled delirium,
Excite the membrane, when the sense has cooled,
With pungent sauces, multiply variety
In a wilderness of mirrors.⁹¹

'Gerontion' takes specificity to the point of absurdity, something Eliot elsewhere considered a trait of 'bad writing'. He advised Allen Tate in the summer of 1926 that

you are tempted to look for the strongest word in every place; whereas the strong word ought to be led up to and followed by words which do not demand so much attention. This effort for exactness is good, but the result goes beyond exactness and overreaches itself.⁹²

The logical side-effect of over-exactness was its opposite, incomprehensibility. 'Exactness', then, has a paradoxical relationship with sincerity. On the one hand, the pursuit of the more precise word implies the most accurate description of experience; but, on the other, by constantly looking for a better word, it places distance between the speaker and the experience. It was a problem Eliot had previously diagnosed in himself, empathising with Sydney Schiff's writer's block in August 1922: 'I think that it is partly the anxiety and desire to express it exactly that form the obstacle; then a moment of self-forgetfulness arrives and released the inspiration.'⁹³ When one is trying too hard to write, it seems, the artificiality of the attempt

⁹⁰ 'Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 49.

⁹¹ 'Gerontion', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 33.

⁹² 'To Allen Tate, 22 June 1926', *Letters*, III, 191-92.

⁹³ 'To Sydney Schiff, 15 August 1922', *Letters*, I, 725-26.

makes it difficult to write at all, an assertion we may associate more closely with Wordsworth and Coleridge.

When it came to *Four Quartets*, the mania of exactness comes into profound contact with the intention to represent original experience. We think first of the lines towards the end of ‘Little Gidding’ which struggle in their pursuit of ‘the strongest word in every place’:

And every phrase
And sentence that is right (where every word is at home,
Taking its place to support the others,
The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
An easy commerce of the old and new,
The common word exact without vulgarity
The formal word precise but not pedantic,
The complete consort dancing together)

(v, 3-10).

That so many lines are spent trying to find the ‘sentence that is right’ almost seems, somewhat ironically, to enact its own problems: does such a sentence even exist? Those words that Nabokov quoted in *Pale Fire* show how Eliot’s pursuit of exactness undid him: ‘grimpen’, ‘chthonic’, ‘sempiternal’, were worthy of parody.

Eliot’s letters reveal an intense interest in etymologies during the composition of *Four Quartets*. He responded to A. L. Rowse’s feedback on ‘The Dry Salvages’ that his recommended substitutes for certain phrases were not specific enough:

As for ‘probably quite ineffable’, you may prefer ‘hardly expressible’, but it does not say the same thing. I mean much more than that: I don’t mean that you can’t express it very well, but that *I* can’t express it at all and therefore doubt whether it can be brought into relation to words at all, and I know that my words are not approximate at all.⁹⁴

Rowse was not the only reader to find Eliot’s desire for the ‘right’ words in *Four Quartets* confounding. The first recipients of each of the poems, John Hayward and Geoffrey Faber, also found themselves counselling a brick wall, begging the question why Eliot sought their help in

⁹⁴ ‘To A. L. Rowse, 22 March 1941’, *Letters*, ix, 777-78.

the first place. On numerous occasions, Eliot stuck intransigently by words he had initially selected, despite objections from his consultants. In the first draft of the final section of 'The Dry Salvages', he wrote 'haruspicate with sand', which Hayward pointed out was wrong; 'coscinomancy' was the correct term for divination by passing sand through a sieve.⁹⁵ But in his process of revision, Eliot stuck by his original verb, which refers to the telling of the future using the entrails of sacrificed animals. His decision to preserve the word rather than the meaning he first intended is significant, and might remind us of the lexical anomaly 'juvescence' (19) in 'Gerontion'. We assume that Eliot probably meant 'juvenescence', 'the state of becoming young or youthful', cutting a syllable for the metre, but we can't be sure; the monologue gives the error to the 'little old man', not to Eliot.⁹⁶ While, in the earlier poems, Eliot's pursuit of 'exactness' through obscure, often Latinate words was employed as part of a process of characterisation, in *Four Quartets* the excuse of 'character' is lost in the voice of 'Mr. Eliot'. We flounder in such passages as this from 'Burnt Norton':

Erhebung without motion, concentration
Without elimination, both a new world
And the old made explicit, understood
In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
The resolution of its partial horror.

(II, 28-32).

Kathleen Raine may argue that such language approximates what is indefinable, the *via negativa* of 'the still point of the turning world', but, if this is the case, what was the point in trying? Eliot had told Allen Tate ten years earlier that when 'exactness [...] overreaches itself', it is impossible to arrive 'at the rhythm and harmony of Baudelaire', and if 'harmony' is what *Four Quartets* aspires towards, why approach the composition of the poem with such a mania of specificity?⁹⁷ Why try to capture something which cannot be caught?

⁹⁵ See Gardner, *Composition of 'Four Quartets'*, 143.

⁹⁶ 'juvenescence', n. 'The state of becoming young or youthful; youthful state or condition, youth', *OED Online* <oed.com> [accessed 01/07/2022].

⁹⁷ 'To Allen Tate, 22 June 1926', *Letters*, III, 191-92.

‘Haruspicate’ was not the only word to cause problems in ‘The Dry Salvages’. ‘[S]cry’ had puzzled Geoffrey Faber, too, and forced him to the pages of his dictionary.⁹⁸ So did ‘ailantus’, the definition of which, unlike ‘scry’, he was unable to discover, unaware that an ‘ailanthus’ tree had stood in Eliot’s childhood schoolyard.⁹⁹ Hayward similarly questioned the echo-chamber of the poems, complaining about the jingling rhymes of: ‘At any time, the day time or the dark time, / Or any season, the dead time or the may time’, where ‘There is just a faint suggestion here, I think, of your parodying yourself’.¹⁰⁰ But Eliot was insistent in these references to his earlier poems and experiences, including words meant to ‘tie up New Hampshire and Burnt Norton’, and another phrase, ‘Autumn weather’ which was intended to ‘throw back to Figlia che piange’.¹⁰¹ Eventually, Hayward and Faber stopped questioning these esoteric words, though ‘groaner’ received the curious gloss in the epigraph to ‘The Dry Salvages’: ‘*Groaner*: a whistling buoy’.¹⁰² On another occasion, both Eliot and Hayward were caught out; ‘On the edge of a grimpen’ in ‘East Coker’ has its only previous use in Conan Doyle’s *Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902), and Helen Gardner relates how ‘Hayward and Eliot, who were addicted to the Holmes cycle, being familiar with the story, did not recognize that “grimpen” was a nonce word.’¹⁰³

The fundamental tension around which the language of *Four Quartets* pivots is that of intentionality. If Eliot was consciously channelling lexical obscurity as part of the parodic characterisation of his speaking voice, or to indicate the futility of language to capture the divine, then the poem is good; if he didn’t, it is an insincere form of ‘true bad poetry’. Had

⁹⁸ See Gardner, *Composition of ‘Four Quartets’*, 143.

⁹⁹ See Gardner, *Composition of ‘Four Quartets’*, 123. For the ‘huge ailanthus tree’ in Eliot’s schoolyard, see ‘Address at the Centennial Celebration of the Mary Institute’, *Complete Prose*, VIII, 372-77 (373).

¹⁰⁰ ‘John Hayward to T. S. Eliot, 1 August 1941’, quoted in *Letters*, IX, 882n.

¹⁰¹ ‘To John Hayward, Undated: 5 August, 1941’, *Letters*, IX, 883-84.

¹⁰² See ‘The Dry Salvages’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 193.

¹⁰³ See Gardner, *Composition of ‘Four Quartets’*, 103.

Eliot, in his refusal to ‘approximate’, lapsed into the terms of ‘badness’ that he diagnosed in ‘Swinburne’? Had he written ‘sham’ poems?

That Eliot’s pursuit of hyper-specificity baffled the poems’ first responders is a significant fact, but the content of their responses ought not to distract us from the oddity of Eliot’s decision to consult them in the first place. The friends to whom he appealed, John Hayward, Geoffrey Faber, Frank Morley, Bonamy Dobrée, Herbert Read, and A. L. Rowse, represented different versions of his ideal reader. Promising to show Hayward’s criticisms to Faber, Eliot confessed: ‘I find it useful, not merely to conscript three or four friends (not more) to criticise, but to get them to criticise each other’s criticisms. Thus one gets something like a notion of how the thing might strike a person of equal intelligence and sensibility who did not know the author.’¹⁰⁴ The identity of this ideal reader had altered definitively since his consultation of Pound for *The Waste Land*; the lone expert is exchanged for a committee of colleagues. Nevertheless, in his responses to their criticisms, Eliot is constantly inviting them to be harsher. He criticises Dobrée for the ‘leniency of the beginner’, claiming that ‘John Hayward, who has had the longest training in this difficult and exacting art, has now got to the point of making quite drastic criticism’.¹⁰⁵ The mention of ‘training’ implies that Eliot knew what he was looking for: the increasingly ‘drastic’ recommendations of Hayward perhaps betray a longing for Pound’s assertive pencil strokes.

But the *Four Quartets* were poems of a different kind, and Eliot’s behaviour during the process of revision reveals a different kind of poet, with different priorities. He now conceived of a fine balance between revising a poem *towards* perfection, as was the case with *The Waste Land*, and revising one *away* from it. He worried that the laboured revision of ‘Little Gidding’

¹⁰⁴ ‘To Geoffrey Faber, 22 August 1941’, in *Letters*, IX, 896.

¹⁰⁵ ‘To Bonamy Dobrée, 6 August 1941’, in *Letters*, IX, 887.

was leading him into the problems of ‘badness’ he had first diagnosed in Swinburne: ‘I think that there is a point beyond which one cannot go without sacrifice of meaning to euphony, and I think I have nearly reached it.’¹⁰⁶ Here, we observe the introduction of a crucial new anxiety into his compositional process, that of sincerity to an experience: ‘to spend much more time over this poem might be dangerous. After a time one loses the feeling of the original impulse, and then it is no longer safe to alter.’¹⁰⁷ It is here that we scent something of a Romantic sensibility enter into Eliot’s compositional consciousness. Waiting too long to consider the experience leads only to stagnation, sharing Coleridge’s anxiety about the ‘person on business from Porlock’, who interrupted the reminiscence of his dream vision in ‘Kubla Khan’.¹⁰⁸

Eliot frequently worried that leaving a poem for too long might cause problems of such a nature. The prolonged writing of *Sweeney Agonistes* offered no fresh inspiration for the play, despite his repeated attempts to take it up again, and the advice he sought from another curious consultant, Arnold Bennett.¹⁰⁹ During the composition of *Four Quartets*, Eliot’s pursuit of refinement through a process of revision was beginning to conflict with a distinctly Romantic desire to preserve an unadulterated account of original experience, as with his recounting of ‘permanent moments’ to Emily Hale.¹¹⁰ He displays a degree of self-consciousness about such a struggle: ‘as my natural way of writing verse seems to require a long period of germination for each poem before I address myself to the machine, I have been afraid that I have been overproducing, and at last trying to make poetry out of unseasoned material.’¹¹¹ The mention

¹⁰⁶ ‘To John Hayward, 19 September 1942’, quoted in Gardner, *Composition of ‘Four Quartets’*, 27; 196.

¹⁰⁷ ‘To John Hayward, 19 September 1942’, quoted in Gardner, *Composition of ‘Four Quartets’*, 27; 196.

¹⁰⁸ See ‘Of the Fragment of Kubla Khan’, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Vol. 16: *Poetical Works: Part 1*, ed. J. C. C. Mays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 512.

¹⁰⁹ See ‘To Arnold Bennett, 11 October 1923’, *Letters*, II, 250; ‘To Arnold Bennett, 13 July 1924’, *Letters*, II, 465; ‘To Arnold Bennett, 10 August 1924’, *Letters*, II, 471; ‘To Arnold Bennett, 8 October 1924’, *Letters*, II, 505; ‘To Arnold Bennett, 23 October 1924’, *Letters*, II, 520-21; ‘To Arnold Bennett, 18 April 1925’, *Letters*, II, 634; ‘To Arnold Bennett, 9 June 1925’, *Letters*, II, 672; ‘To Arnold Bennett, 28 December 1925’, *Letters*, II, 809.

¹¹⁰ ‘Our being in the rose-garden at Burnt Norton is one of the permanent moments for me. and for the moment in the garden at Stamford House in the evening, and all such moments, I can never express my gratitude’, ‘To Emily Hale, 10 September 1935’, *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/l411>.

¹¹¹ ‘To Bonamy Dobrée, 6 August 1941’, in *Letters*, IX, 887.

of ‘overproduction’ hints at his abandonment of the strategy that had brought him his early acclaim by ‘writing very little’, but there is also a theoretical element to Eliot’s change of approach. The ‘original impulse’ is a phrase that appears again in this context, when he admitted to Emily Hale after completing the first draft of ‘The Dry Salvages’ that ‘the original impulse has eluded me like a dream on waking, and the verse has not gained its own impetus.’¹¹² But if you believe in the ‘original impulse’, it is surely a contradiction to claim that a work can ‘gain impetus’, implying that it develops as it goes along. Eliot seems to be mixing two opposing theories of revision, the Coleridgean and the Wordsworthian, and is unable to reconcile the two.

Eliot’s commitment to the pursuit of so ambiguous a phrase as ‘original impulse’ implies the reverse of the paradox that troubles Wordsworth studies, that even while asserting the ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling’, Wordsworth was content to revise his own original compositional impulses for the 1850 *Prelude*.¹¹³ The contradiction is explored by Andrew Bennett, who claims that there is ‘an acute, indeed an irresolvable tension in Wordsworth’s practice and conception of writing as it comes into conflict with a poetics of inspiration and spontaneity.’¹¹⁴ In this way, then, Eliot allies himself more closely with Coleridge’s view on fidelity to a quasi-divine original vision. Even ‘Little Gidding’, the poem which gave Eliot the most trouble, undergoes markedly little drastic change between the first and final versions. Of the 262 lines in the first draft that Eliot sent to Hayward in July 1941, Eliot deleted only fifty-one – less than a fifth – and almost half of those were deleted from a single passage in the *terza rima* section. That means that just over 80% of the lines in the first draft survived in some form – often with slight tweaks – into the final version, despite Eliot claiming to have been ‘dissatisfied’ with this ‘generally inferior’ poem.¹¹⁵ If we compare this

¹¹² ‘To Emily Hale, 10 December 1940’, *Eliot-Hale Letters*, <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/l769>.

¹¹³ William Wordsworth, ‘Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*’, in *Lyrical Ballads*, 286-314 (291; 307).

¹¹⁴ Andrew Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 12.

¹¹⁵ ‘John Hayward to Frank Morley, July 1942’, quoted in Gardner, *Composition of ‘Four Quartets’*, 24.

with *The Waste Land*, where 41% of the total lines were excised, we understand how reluctant Eliot became to throw things away. Of the lines that do survive into the final version of ‘Little Gidding’, we see the tampering to which the ‘original impulse’ was subjected; over 20% of those lines are altered in some form, either on the level of the word or phrase. In his drafts of ‘Little Gidding’, then, we witness Eliot desperately trying to preserve an ‘original impulse’, while also hoping paradoxically that the poem will ‘gain impetus’.

That Eliot’s approach to the composition of *Four Quartets* was inherently contradictory is one way of accounting for the charge of insincerity levelled against the poems. For, if they are truly attempts to capture the essence of an experience, then surely ‘Words, after speech, reach / Into the silence.’ (‘Burnt Norton’, v, 3-4). But this need not have been the case. For another writer even more than Wordsworth, it is not the ‘original impulse’, but the *recollection* of it, which is the richest source of creativity. Henry James uses the word ‘impulse’ memorably in the opening sentence of his Preface to ‘The Aspern Papers’ (1908), which was written to accompany the revised version of the text published in his New York Edition: ‘I not only recover with ease, but I delight to recall, the first impulse given to the idea of “The Aspern Papers”’.¹¹⁶ For James, it is not only possible to recapture the initial ‘impulse’, but also to extract intense pleasure from it: ‘a mixture that on the faintest invitation I rejoice again to inhale’. James does, though, acknowledge the problems inherent in any process of recollection:

With more moves back the element of the appreciable shrinks – just as the charm of looking over a garden-wall into another garden breaks down when successions of walls appear. [...] We are divided of course between liking to feel the past strange and liking to feel it familiar; the difficulty is, for intensity, to catch it at the moment when the scales of the balance hang with the right evenness.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Henry James, ‘Preface to “The Aspern Papers”’, in *The Art of the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 159-179 (159).

¹¹⁷ James, ‘Preface to “The Aspern Papers”’, 164.

James's image of the 'scales' may remind us of Eliot's quandary of *Four Quartets*: the point at which the poem departs too far from its original impulse. But, in the Preface to *The Golden Bowl* (1909), James indicates how a fresh look 'over a garden-wall' can breathe new life into the text: 'my exploring tread, for application to [the snow], had quite unlearned the old pace and found itself naturally falling into another'.¹¹⁸ The 'high spontaneity' of these deviant footsteps in the snow became 'things not of choice, but of immediate and perfect necessity'. In fact, James's description leads us into thinking that the first version of a text serves no purpose other than to act as a mnemonic tool, designed to allow inspiration to accrue at some later point of revision.

For James, as for Wordsworth, it is perfectly legitimate to leave a text open to the future, reflecting as it will the 'growth of the poet's mind' to incorporate the unravelling present.¹¹⁹ Wordsworth's theory of 'emotion recollected in tranquillity', too, implies a repeated process like James', with all recollections being equivalent and valid.¹²⁰ Meanwhile, in *Four Quartets*, Eliot, like Coleridge and Plato, ascribes to the primacy of the initial recollection, what Hannah Sullivan has called 'the infinite regress'.¹²¹ Indeed, we remember what Eliot had to say about 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919):

it is neither emotion, nor recollection, nor, without distortion of meaning, tranquillity. It is a concentration, and a new thing resulting from the concentration, of a very great number of experiences which to the practical and active person would not seem to be experiences at all; it is a concentration which does not happen consciously or of deliberation.¹²²

Rather than an iterative process of inspiration re-enacted each time with new results, Eliot subscribes to a single moment of 'concentration', the accumulation of data up to that point crystallising at the moment of composition. Of course, Eliot goes on to say more in 'Tradition

¹¹⁸ James, 'Preface to *The Golden Bowl*', in *The Art of the Novel*, 327-48 (336).

¹¹⁹ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, Or Growth of a Poet's Mind* (London: Edward Moxon, 1850).

¹²⁰ Wordsworth, 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*', 307.

¹²¹ Hannah Sullivan, *The Work of Revision* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 79.

¹²² 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *Complete Prose*, II, 105-114 (111).

and the Individual Talent', including another definition of 'the bad poet', who is 'usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious, and conscious where he ought to be unconscious.'¹²³ The key distinction between Eliot's pursuit of the 'original impulse' and that of James and Wordsworth, though, is that while the latter see the passage of time as positive movement towards an ideal future recollection, Eliot sees only the disintegration of memory.

That there is an anxiety of experience in *Four Quartets* may go some way towards explaining Eliot's desperate attempt to cling to 'original impulse'; to Hayward he admitted that 'The defect of the whole poem, I feel, is the lack of some acute personal reminiscence (never to be explicated, of course, but to give power from well below the surface.)'¹²⁴ Despite our new awareness of the role of Eliot's relationship with Emily Hale as creative stimulus for 'Burnt Norton', no amount of additional biographical insight can undo a significant strand of criticism which has found the poem to be somewhat hollow. Ronald Bush wrote of the syntax of 'Burnt Norton' that 'its language constantly asks us to cast a cold eye on experience', meaning that 'we never have the sense of becoming part of a drama'.¹²⁵ For Bush, the 'passionate moment' that informed the poem is replaced with an overwrought meditation on its consequences; the poem resembles 'a pile of precisions untested in the fires of emotional honesty'.¹²⁶ Similarly, Denis Donoghue writes that 'the fundamental motive of "Burnt Norton" is to void the claim of spontaneity; to represent as vulgar any immediate response to an event; to imply a form of life in which the meaning of an event comes long after its mere occurrence'.¹²⁷ In my reading, the poem is much more at odds with itself about 'spontaneity', desiring it while instinctively withdrawing from it. While one cannot ignore the idealised imagery of 'roses', the 'garden', and the 'children', they are met with images of sterility: 'Along the empty alley, into the box

¹²³ 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', 111.

¹²⁴ 'To John Hayward, Undated: 5 August 1941', *Letters*, IX, 884.

¹²⁵ Bush, *T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style*, 200.

¹²⁶ Bush, *T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style*, 202.

¹²⁷ Denis Donoghue, 'On "Burnt Norton"', in *Words in Time*, 1-19 (13).

circle, / To look down into the drained pool. / Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged' (I, 32-34). Paired with the authorial asides that Vernon Watkins felt destroyed the spiritual spell of the poem, it is almost as if Eliot is purposefully tainting the vision he creates. Unlike Coleridge, who abandoned his dream-fragment of 'Kubla Khan' when it became apparent the memory had disappeared, 'Burnt Norton' is allowed to fester, dramatizing Eliot's scramble for the 'original impulse' in the aridity of the landscape.

Stylistic Middleness

For Eliot, the paradoxical attempt to preserve a compositional 'impulse' while also hoping that a work will 'gain impetus' was closely tied to a crisis in his personal life. Eliot admitted that his reluctance to mark 'Little Gidding' as complete was largely a result of his age: 'I seem to need other people's opinions (or those of a small number of people) more than I once did: I suppose it comes partly from the different way of working appropriate to middle age, which becomes more deliberate and painstaking.'¹²⁸ Critics have noticed the way *Four Quartets* resists questions of finality; Jewel Spears Brooker argued that 'The challenge was to complete what was in essence always in progress, to close what was always open'.¹²⁹ Even the poems situate themselves as still in a process of composition; 'East Coker II' begins 'That was a way of putting it', as if Eliot were back in Copeland's Harvard writing class trying out different forms until he finds one that works. Eliot's alliance of 'middle age' with the movement towards 'deliberate and painstaking' composition is especially pertinent, then, to a discussion of the problems that haunt the criticism of the style of the poems. The second part of this chapter will

¹²⁸ 'To Bonamy Dobrée, 6 August 1941', in *Letters*, IX, 887.

¹²⁹ Jewel Spears Brooker, 'From *The Waste Land* to *Four Quartets*', in *Words in Time*, 84-106 (97).

examine whether it is possible to connect the issues of tone in *Four Quartets* with Eliot's self-awareness as a middle-aged writer who had already achieved significant fame.

The 'mid-life crisis', Pamela Druckerman claims, 'was invented in London in 1957. That's when a 40-year-old Canadian named Elliott Jaques stood before a meeting of the British Psycho-Analytical Society and read aloud from a paper he'd written.'¹³⁰ Druckerman admits, however, that Jaques was not the first person to notice such a phenomenon, only the first to give it form in a scientific paper. Centuries earlier, Dante had established a mid-life shift in the opening lines of the *Inferno*: '*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*'.¹³¹ In his essay on 'Dante' (1929), Eliot translated these lines as: 'In the middle of the journey of our life I found myself in a dark wood having lost the straight way', and they are an important precursor to the lines in 'East Coker': 'In the middle, not only in the middle of the way / But all the way, in a dark wood, in a bramble, / On the edge of a grimpen, where is no secure foothold' (II, 39-41).¹³² Despite his opening image of the mysterious 'dark wood', even Dante could not resist imposing a structure onto the development of the literary life. In *Il Convito*, he partitioned the 'arc' of life into four stages, 'youth', 'early adulthood', 'middle age', and 'old age'.¹³³ While the first stage is designed to last for 'twenty-five years', 'early adulthood' is said to last for 'twenty', during which 'the zenith of our arc is age thirty-five, the upward phase of this period of life must be as long as the downward phase'. Although Ben Hutchinson dates Eliot's 'mid-life crisis' to 1927, that crucial year when the thirty-nine-year-old poet became an Anglo-Catholic and a British citizen, I want to push his meditation on what it meant to be 'in the middle' to almost a decade later.¹³⁴ Indeed, by the time Eliot was writing, life expectancy had changed

¹³⁰ Pamela Druckerman, 'How the Midlife Crisis Came to Be', *The Atlantic* (29 May 2018), <theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/05/the-invention-of-the-midlife-crisis/561203/> [accessed 30/05/2022]

¹³¹ Dante, *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri*, ed. Herman Oelsner, trans. John Aitken Carlyle (London: J. M. Dent, 1900), 2-3.

¹³² 'Dante' in *Complete Prose*, III, 700-745 (703).

¹³³ Dante, *Convivio: A Dual Language Critical Edition*, ed., trans., Andrew Frisardi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 327.

¹³⁴ See Ben Hutchinson, *The Midlife Mind: Literature and the Art of Aging* (London: Reaktion Books, 2020).

drastically from the time of the *Divine Comedy*, with men expected to live until around sixty-five, and Eliot's own parents having lived to seventy-five and eighty-five. With this in mind, it becomes possible to locate in *Four Quartets* an anxiety of middleliness, the resolution of which Eliot sought in researching the creative development of other 'middle-aged' writers.

In his criticism of the 1930s, Eliot studied a number of figures who offered possible paths through the 'dark wood' of mid-life. In 'Milton I' (1936), he analysed the very stylistic problem that he warned may lie in wait if the process of revision for 'Little Gidding' was allowed to go on for too long: 'euphony'.¹³⁵ Deteriorating health is shown to have had a stylistic impact on Milton, who began *Paradise Lost* in his early fifties: 'for a man whose sensuousness, such as it was, had been withered early by book-learning, and whose gifts were naturally aural, [the loss of his eyesight] mattered a great deal'.¹³⁶ The result of this 'hypertrophy of the auditory imagination', according to Eliot, was that 'the inner meaning is separated from the surface, and tends to become something occult, or at least without effect upon the reader until fully understood'.¹³⁷ Eliot's assessment may remind us of what Yeats has to say about Hopkins in the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936): 'His meaning is like some faint sound that strains the ear, comes out of words, passes to and fro between them, goes back into words'.¹³⁸ Proceeding to quote from *Paradise Lost*, Eliot traces the boundary between word and sense that he had first drawn in the 'bad poet' of his essay on Swinburne:

Thrones, dominations, principedoms, virtues, powers,
If these magnific titles yet remain
Not merely titular, since by decree
Another now hath to himself engrossed
All power, and us eclipsed under the name
Of King anointed, for whom all this haste
Of midnight march, and hurried meeting here,
This only to consult how we may best

¹³⁵ 'To John Hayward, 19 September 1942', quoted in Gardner, *Composition of 'Four Quartets'*, 27; 196.

¹³⁶ 'Milton I', *Complete Prose*, v, 371-79 (372).

¹³⁷ 'Milton I', 376.

¹³⁸ W. B. Yeats, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892-1935* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1936), v-xlii (xxxix).

With what may be devised of honours new
 Receive him coming to receive from us
 Knee-tribute yet unpaid, prostration vile,
 Too much to one, but double how endured,
 To one and to his image now proclaimed?¹³⁹

Unlike Swinburne, whose language was ‘not, like the language of bad poetry, dead’, Eliot claims that Milton ‘writes English like a dead language’, precluding the possibility of infusing ‘new life into the word, as Shakespeare does’.¹⁴⁰ We can’t help but notice that Eliot did not choose the best quotation to prove his point; Satan, attempting to persuade the other angels against God’s Annunciation of the Son, steals many of his words from God’s earlier speech: ‘Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers, / Hear my Decree, which unrevok’t shall stand’, ‘to him shall bow / All knees in Heav’n’.¹⁴¹ Satan’s speech, immediately labelled ‘bold discourse, without controule’ by the poem, and proclaimed by the angels as ‘argument blasphemous, false and proud!’, is intentionally evasive, designed by Satan to give the impression of persuasiveness.¹⁴² The ‘demand of verbal music’ over ‘sense’ described by Eliot seems to be Satan’s plan, to intoxicate his listeners and bring them over to his side.¹⁴³

While Satan’s ‘tortuous style’ is achieved for the purpose of duplicity, then, Eliot chooses to compare it with that of James, whose complex mature style is mobilised in pursuit of fidelity to experience. Eliot quotes a formidable sentence from *The Ivory Tower* (1917):

However, he didn’t mind thinking that if Cissy should prove all that was likely enough their having a subject in common couldn’t but practically conduce; though the moral of it all amounted rather to a portent, the one that Haughty, by the same token, had done least to reassure him against, of the extent to which the native jungle harboured the female specimen and to which its ostensible cover, the vast level of mixed growths stirred wavingly in whatever breeze, was apt to be identifiable but as an agitation of the latest redundant thing in ladies’ hats.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ See ‘Milton I’, 374.

¹⁴⁰ ‘Swinburne as Poet’, 184.

¹⁴¹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, quoted in ‘Milton I’, 374; see John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), III.320-21 (185-86).

¹⁴² Milton, *Paradise Lost*, V.803ff. (333-34).

¹⁴³ ‘Milton I’, 374.

¹⁴⁴ Henry James, *The Ivory Tower*, quoted in ‘Milton I’, 374.

Eliot writes that ‘the complication, with James, is due to a determination not to simplify, and in that simplification lose any of the real intricacies and by-paths of mental movement’.¹⁴⁵ Those ‘by-paths’ here manifest themselves in a tangle of clauses; the containment of the ‘if’-clause within the already dependent ‘however’ requires a deal of mental compartmentalisation on behalf of the reader, made only more complex with the addition of a further ‘though’. For Eliot, it represents James’s refusal to flatten the impressions that aggregate as the sentence progresses, and it is this action that distinguishes James’ style from Milton’s. Eliot writes, conversely, how ‘the complication of a Miltonic sentence is an active complication, a complication deliberately introduced into what was a previously simplified and abstract thought.’¹⁴⁶ Without considering that such an ‘active complication’ may have been a device of Satan’s to encourage greater probing of God’s decree, Eliot sets up a binary between Milton and James; while James’ instinct was complication in the pursuit of sincerity in character, Milton’s was insincere, simplicity artificially manufactured into complication.

What Eliot’s research into the ‘tortuous’ style of Milton and James demonstrated was the way in which ageing writers ask increasing amounts of their readers, something shared by Eliot’s correspondence with his *Four Quartets* consultants. By the mid-1930s, he had become interested almost exclusively in this question, and found himself dwelling on one writer in particular. Only recently made available to critics, we are now aware that Eliot conducted two surveys of Shakespeare scholarship, ‘The Study of Shakespeare Criticism’ (1933) and ‘Shakespearian Criticism I. From Dryden to Coleridge’ (1934) within a few months of each other.¹⁴⁷ As Gordon McMullan has shown, the modern understanding of Shakespeare’s development was founded on a Romantic model, one which asserted ‘a direct connection

¹⁴⁵ ‘Milton I’, 375.

¹⁴⁶ ‘Milton I’, 375.

¹⁴⁷ See ‘The Study of Shakespeare Criticism’, *Complete Prose*, IV, 837-39; ‘Shakespearean Criticism. I. From Dryden to Coleridge’, *Complete Prose*, V, 67-79.

between the progress of the artist's life and that of the artist's style from youth to maturity'.¹⁴⁸ This understanding informed the critics that Eliot held in especially high esteem, underpinning Edward Dowden's anti-Adornian portrait of the late Shakespeare as 'serene, joyful, benign, the consummate artist at the height of his spiritual engagement with art', as well as G. Wilson Knight's *Wheel of Fire* (1930) for which Eliot wrote the introduction.¹⁴⁹ In fact, for Eliot, the key discovery of *The Wheel of Fire* concerned the plays that Shakespeare wrote in his late forties, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*:

The old theory, current in my youth, of a Shakespeare altering and deteriorating his form and style to suit a new romantic taste, would not do; or if Shakespeare did this, then it became a remarkable coincidence that he should be able in middle life to turn about and give the public what it wanted – if these strange plays could conceivably be what any public would want – and at the same time remain steadfast in such integrity of exploration.¹⁵⁰

By connecting Shakespeare's 'middle life' with a shifting attitude towards his 'audience', Eliot's essay constructs a debate that also underpins the reception of *Four Quartets*. The fundamental issue concerns whether the famous, middle-aged writer supposed to 'give the public what it wanted', or to 'remain steadfast in such integrity of exploration'. This distinction may remind us of another assessment, closer in time to Eliot, of what modern poets were to do after already achieving acclaim. In his review of *Homage to Clio* (1960), 'What's Become of Wystan', Philip Larkin noted of Auden's latest collections: 'They read like the reflections of a practised and celebrated writer with no particular worries who is free to indulge his tastes in reading and travel, and as such we can accept them.'¹⁵¹ Larkin argued that Auden had abandoned his public, retreating into a style all for himself. Eliot would give a similar warning

¹⁴⁸ Gordon McMullan, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing: Authorship in the Proximity of Death* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2-3.

¹⁴⁹ Edward Dowden, *Shakspeare: A Critical Study of his Art and Mind* (London: H. S. King, 1875); see McMullan, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing*, 162, and G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare's Sombre Tragedies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930).

¹⁵⁰ 'Introduction to *The Wheel of Fire*', *Complete Prose*, IV, 145-54 (149).

¹⁵¹ Philip Larkin, 'What's Become of Wystan?', *The Spectator* 205.6890 (15 July 1960), 104-05.

in ‘Yeats’ (1940) about the problem of middle-aged fame on style, but seems to arrive at the opposite conclusion: ‘There is another and even worse temptation: that of becoming dignified, of becoming public figures with only a public existence – coat-racks hung with decorations and distinctions, doing, saying, and even thinking and feeling only what they believe the public expects of them’.¹⁵² Although their positions arrive at opposite ends, Larkin’s and Eliot’s warnings possess the same core, that the middle-aged poet is unable to evoke the kinds of passionate responses from their audiences that they once had, either because the material is uninteresting – in Auden’s case – or simply repetitive – in the case of Eliot’s ‘public figure’.

However, in Eliot’s assessment of Shakespeare’s mid-life, something special is seen to occur, with particular relevance to *Four Quartets*. In ‘The Development of Shakespeare’s Verse’ (1937), Eliot once again brings up the problem of ‘giv[ing] the public what it wanted’, but he doesn’t see Shakespeare as participating in such a demand:

In his later work, he was not tending to write for a small group: he tended to write for himself. It is one thing to do this at the beginning, and quite another to do it after you have mastered the art of popular appeal. For Shakespeare was not turning away from the theatre, but taking it with him onto a plane where the majority of the audience can never follow.¹⁵³

This is an ambiguous final statement, but it is one on which Eliot elaborates with recourse to the term ‘ultra-dramatic’, defined as being: ‘when the author is interested in the use of language for its own sake, in the beauty of words and in what we may call their incantatory value; interest in language beyond the limited needs of expressing the thoughts and shades of feeling of a particular character at a particular moment’.¹⁵⁴ Here, we have all of the comments on Swinburne, Milton, and James distilled into a theory of style, a style defined by its nature as being attempted in ‘middle life’. Mature works, in Eliot’s understanding, appear to leave the audience behind in their pursuit of ‘language for its own sake’.

¹⁵² ‘Yeats’, *Complete Prose*, VI, 78-90 (83).

¹⁵³ ‘The Development of Shakespeare’s Verse: Two Lectures’, *Complete Prose*, V, 535-561 (535).

¹⁵⁴ ‘The Development of Shakespeare’s Verse: Two Lectures’, 537.

Eliot's presentation of middle age in *Four Quartets* puzzles over the relationship between poetic style and audience. In the opening of the final section of 'East Coker', he breaks frame in a way that Vernon Watkins almost certainly would have resented:

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years –
 Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre deux guerres* –
 Trying to use words, and every attempt
 Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
 Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
 For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
 One is no longer disposed to say it.

(v, 1-7).

Eliot once again summons the paradox of attempting to capture in words an experience which has happened in the past. As a result, the communicative act has become a 'failure'; the speaker will never be able to relay the experience to a listener. And yet, the passage couches itself in language of accessibility; there is something incongruously clichéd about 'So here I am, in the middle way'. This is not the kind of poetry which plunges the audience into regions 'where the majority of the audience can never follow', but takes them by the hand, explaining the problems this middle-aged speaker is having.

Social Middleness

Eliot's study of the stylistic development of Shakespeare, Milton, and James in his criticism might have presented him with a possible route through the 'dark forest' of mid-life by leaving his audience behind, but during the period of *Four Quartets*, his crisis of stylistic middleness came into conflict with a crisis of social middleness, one which we can see directly impacting his approach to 'giv[ing] the public what it wanted'. In 1953, modernism's 'high-priest' was accused of having contributed to a 'tepid, flaccid Middlebrow culture that threatens to engulf

everything in its spreading ooze.’¹⁵⁵ The success of *The Cocktail Party* (1949) on Broadway, Dwight Macdonald claimed, demonstrated how ‘Mass Culture takes on the color of both varieties of the old High Culture, Academic and Avantgarde, while these latter are increasingly watered down with Mass elements.’ Others have followed in Macdonald’s footsteps; Tom Perrin has claimed that Eliot’s ‘descent into the middlebrow’ was due to a realisation that modernism’s ‘aesthetic of indeterminacy’ was not a ‘solution to the problems of modern life’, leading him to write an ‘allegorical work with a single, determinate meaning’.¹⁵⁶ What I want to argue, however, is that Eliot began to meditate on the middlebrow long before the opening night of *The Cocktail Party*, with *Four Quartets* offering the crucial intersection point that dramatizes his crises of stylistic *and* social ‘middleness’.

Eliot was familiar with the ideas in Macdonald’s essay on ‘Mass Culture’ (1953); it was adapted from an earlier version, ‘A Theory of Popular Culture’ (1944), which Eliot had consulted for *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948). There, Macdonald recounted the history of manufacturing art to satisfy the emerging middle class: ‘Capitalist enterprise found a profitable market in the cultural demands of the newly awakened masses, and the advance of technology made possible the cheap production of books, periodicals, pictures, music and architecture in sufficient quantity to satisfy this market.’¹⁵⁷ The culture consumed by this new demographic is encapsulated by Clement Greenberg in another term, *Kitsch*, defined by its relation to ‘true’ high culture:

ersatz culture, *kitsch*, destined for those who, insensible to the values of genuine culture, are hungry nevertheless for the diversion that only culture of some sort can provide. Kitsch, using for raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture, welcomes and cultivates this insensibility.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Dwight Macdonald ‘A Theory of Mass Culture’, in *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1957), 59-73, (63-64).

¹⁵⁶ Tom Perrin, *The Aesthetics of Middlebrow Fiction: Popular US Novels, Modernism, and Form, 1945-75* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 45.

¹⁵⁷ Dwight Macdonald, ‘A Theory of Popular Culture’, *Politics* 1.1 (1944), 20-23 (20).

¹⁵⁸ Clement Greenberg, ‘Avant-Garde and Kitsch’, in *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, 98-111 (102).

The lexis of the insincere clusters around the term: *Kitsch* is ‘the epitome of all that is spurious’, the tool of the capitalist authority who exploits the aspirations of the middle class towards ‘high-mindedness’ by giving the appearance of self-improvement.¹⁵⁹ The emphasis on marketability is a crucial trait of *Kitsch*, writes Macdonald: ‘There seems to be a Gresham’s Law in culture as well as currency circulation: bad stuff drives out the good, and the worst drives out the bad. For the bad is more easily enjoyed than the good’.¹⁶⁰ This description of ‘badness’ is intriguing to put into dialogue with Eliot’s; ‘bad’ writing is here synonymous with the pleasant and popular, duplicitously entrapping the consumer. This notion introduces an extra dimension to Eliot’s definitions of the ‘true bad poet’. Is ‘great’ poetry, by contrast, actually that which is dissatisfying, brave enough to confront uncomfortable topics? Milton and Shakespeare were both seen to access ‘greatness’ by way of being ‘bad’ in a different sense, producing a style that was entirely their own, written as if with a disregard to comprehensibility for the audience. The ‘peculiarity of Blake’, we remember Eliot asserting, ‘is an honesty against which the whole world conspires, because it is unpleasant. Blake’s poetry has the unpleasantness of great poetry’.¹⁶¹

The nature of ‘middlebrow’ culture as a ‘bad’ version of true culture had reached Eliot’s London circles long before he read about it in Macdonald’s work. It is a trait that Virginia Woolf isolated in her letter, ‘Middlebrow’ (1932), which went unsent to the *New Statesman*: ‘what are the things that middlebrows always buy? Queen Anne furniture (faked, but none the less expensive); first editions of dead writers, always the worst; pictures, or reproductions from pictures, by dead painters; houses in what is called “the Georgian style” – but never anything

¹⁵⁹ Greenberg, ‘Avant-Garde and Kitsch’, 102.

¹⁶⁰ Macdonald, ‘A Theory of Popular Culture’, 21.

¹⁶¹ ‘William Blake’, in *Complete Prose*, II, 187-192 (187). See Seamus Perry, ‘Eliot, Blake, Unpleasantness’, in *The T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, Vol. 2, ed. John D. Morgenstern (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), 47-66.

new.¹⁶² ‘Sham’, we noted, was an important term in Eliot’s assessment of Swinburne’s potential ‘badness’ (‘bad verse is a sham’), just as ‘bogus’ was in the discussion of those hunting for the sources to *The Waste Land*. Eliot uses it in his own explorations of the middlebrow in his review of ‘Marianne Moore’ (1923): ‘the middle-class art [...] is much more artificial than anything else; it plays with sham ideas, sham emotions, and even sham sensations’.¹⁶³ As with Woolf’s description of the mass consumption of ‘never anything new,’ the only art which can certainly avoid being labelled ‘middlebrow’ is that which has never been done before, as in Eliot’s analysis of Shakespeare’s late plays.

Quickly manufactured according to a compositional formula, ‘sham’ culture can be more easily disseminated among consumers because, as Macdonald indicated, it is ‘more easily enjoyed’. With this in mind, then, how is an artist to disseminate their work without the threat of becoming ‘popular’? Should they, as Shakespeare seems to have done, leave the mass audience behind? For Lionel Trilling, as for the early Eliot, this was the ‘Function of the Little Magazine’. In his essay on the topic collected in the *Liberal Imagination* (1950), Trilling writes of the ‘heroic response’ of such magazines to the rise of mass culture: ‘they have kept our culture from being cautious and settled, or merely sociological, or merely pious.’¹⁶⁴ They do this by keeping a cultural ‘countercurrent moving which perhaps no one will be fully aware of until it ceases to move.’¹⁶⁵ However, we might observe that Trilling struggles to reconcile his liberal politics with such a position: how can he claim that ‘more and more people insist, as they should, on an equality of cultural status’ while avoiding the formulaic mass culture that this is seen to produce?¹⁶⁶ To rely on a small number of editors to keep a counterculture running,

¹⁶² Virginia Woolf, ‘Middlebrow’, in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1942), 176-87 (183-84).

¹⁶³ ‘Marianne Moore’, in *Complete Prose*, II, 495-499 (495).

¹⁶⁴ Lionel Trilling, ‘The Function of the Little Magazine’, in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), 93-103 (97).

¹⁶⁵ Trilling, ‘The Function of the Little Magazine’, 97.

¹⁶⁶ Trilling ‘The Function of the Little Magazine’, 103.

ready to refresh mass culture when it eventually turns stale, privileges the perspective of the minority. It also implies a certain condescension to the consumers of mass culture, which is permitted to circulate as a distraction to most readers while ‘genuine’ culture survives in the little magazines read by a cultural élite.

If the preservation of minority culture is the key to avoiding artistic sterility, then it follows that there may come a point where Eliot’s pursuit of popular acclaim may clash with this ideological purity, a clash we see enacted in *Four Quartets*. In *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932), Q. D. Leavis investigated what makes a bestseller, and why such a category is often mutually exclusive with ‘great novels’. In the midst of her research, she locates an illuminating comparison for ‘a great novel and a bestseller’ with ‘good poetry and successful bad poetry’ that is worth quoting in full:

[A poem may be bad for two reasons: because it fails to be a good one – *e.g.* some of Shelley and Wordsworth; or because it does with complete success something that is not beneficial – most popular poems come in here, *e.g.* the work of successful bad poets like Chesterton, Kipling, Ella Wheeler Wilcox.] Great novels are frequently doing something like good poetry, the bestsellers of verse and of fiction are also doing something comparable, but quite different from the effect of the great novel and good poem – if they were not doing something for the class of reader who forms the general public they would not be bestsellers. They are, in brief, engaged in establishing undesirable attitudes.¹⁶⁷

Leavis’ assessment of the ‘bestseller’ and ‘bad poem’ is clustered around three descriptions, they are doing ‘something that is not beneficial’, are ‘engaged in establishing undesirable attitudes’, but the key is that they are nevertheless ‘doing something for the class of reader who forms the general public’. In other words, this kind of ‘bad’ culture constantly has its audience in mind; it doesn’t go ‘where they cannot follow’, as Shakespeare did in middle age, but seeks to placate them. Leavis’ remedy is to cultivate a sense of minority culture, like Trilling, to

¹⁶⁷ Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932), 211-12.

encourage artists to ‘refuse to compete’, as Macdonald put it, in the commercialisation of art, or to indulge the desires of their unthinking reader.

In his review of Leavis’s book for the *Criterion*, Eliot took issue with her tone, questioning whether clinging with ‘monastic tenacity to values which the world has repudiated’ was an effective way forward.¹⁶⁸ The truth is, however, that he absorbed much of her view for his own *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, where he focuses on the relationship between culture and the élite. There, Eliot similarly conceives of the need for High Culture to be produced in solitude, ‘where the audience cannot follow’, designed not for the mass consumer but for the minority. He compares the growing demands for culture to be put ‘at the disposal of everybody’ to the disappearance of the life of the hermit:

This assumption and its consequences remind us of the Puritan antipathy to monasticism and the ascetic life: for just as culture which is only accessible to the few is now deprecated, so was the enclosed and contemplative life condemned by extreme Protestantism, and celibacy regarded with almost as much abhorrence as perversion.¹⁶⁹

There is an obvious relevance for *Four Quartets* here; the quotations from Julian of Norwich and the *Cloud of Unknowing* summon the ‘contemplative life’ that is here the ideal environment for the production of culture. Similarly, ‘East Coker’, ‘The Dry Salvages’, and ‘Little Gidding’ were published first in *New English Weekly*, the same place in which the first three chapters of *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* were published in January and February 1943. ‘Little Gidding’ had appeared just months before, in October 1942, and so it would have been reasonable for readers of that periodical to consider his next contributions through the lens of that poem. Recently, David Chinitz has compounded this idea by discovering in the *Complete Prose* that Eliot began drafting portions of the *Notes* as early as October 1941: ‘The inception of Eliot’s concentrated thinking about culture thus substantially precedes his completion of

¹⁶⁸ ‘A Commentary (July 1932)’, *Complete Prose*, IV, 488-496 (489).

¹⁶⁹ *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, *Complete Prose*, VII, 194-287 (210).

“Little Gidding” in the late summer of 1942 – a fact that bolsters the arguments of scholars who have detected traces of Eliot’s socio-cultural theories in that poem.¹⁷⁰

Nevertheless, there are issues with mapping the *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* directly onto the composition of the *Quartets*. Eliot’s conscription of middlebrow colleagues to engage in the drafting process implies a consideration of future readers, and how the poem may be received by a mass audience. Eliot could conceivably have asked other correspondents more in touch with contemporary poetic composition for help – Auden, Spender, perhaps even Pound, but instead he chose a focus-group of friends and colleagues. It clashes, too, with the turn in Eliot’s criticism in the period before and during the Second World War towards the increasingly public role of poetry. In such essays as ‘Literature and the Modern World’ (1935) and ‘The Social Function of Poetry’ (1943; 1945) Eliot seems to resist the pull of context: ‘The artist may, as Rémy de Gourmont profoundly says, “in writing himself, write his age”; but I think that we should add that he may sometimes in writing his age, write himself: which will come to the same thing’.¹⁷¹ Nevertheless, Eliot could not control the way in which ‘East Coker’ and ‘Little Gidding’ were read as war poems, nor would he presumably undo the comfort they gave to the tens of thousands who bought the poems when they first appeared.

That is not to say, though, that Eliot did not consciously cater to a wider audience for *Four Quartets*, even hypocritically so. Indeed, while he condemns the middlebrow ‘mass’ consumer in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, there are episodes in his life too significant to overlook in which he participated wholeheartedly in the production of culture for the general public. Eliot’s time as an Extension Lecturer in the 1910s may be construed as the young poet in need of money, but his decision to record talks at the BBC (that organ of self-improving

¹⁷⁰ David Chinitz, ‘A Major Minor Document’, *T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, Vol. 2 (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), 129-32 (131).

¹⁷¹ ‘Literature and the Modern World’, *Complete Prose*, v, 196-204 (199).

culture that Woolf dubbed the ‘Betwixt and Between Company’) in the 1930s is of a different tenor.¹⁷² His talks were often couched in the language of accessibility. He began his first commission on ‘The Tudor Translators’ (1929) by appealing to audiences put off by dense academic studies: ‘In talking about some of the great prose writers of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, I do not mean to follow the method of history books.’¹⁷³ Upon completion, Eliot asked his producer, Charles Siepmann, whether the talk was ‘too high- or alternatively too low-brow’, with the implication being that he needed something in the middle.¹⁷⁴

Eliot’s role at Faber also called for a need to tolerate – even to indulge – the middlebrow consumer. The poems that make up *Four Quartets* were printed at a time when Eliot was one of the firm’s biggest assets, and after their publication in the relatively low-circulation *New English Weekly*, ‘East Coker’, ‘The Dry Salvages’, and ‘Little Gidding’ were published as separate pamphlets with print runs of 9,030, 11,223 and 16,775 copies respectively.¹⁷⁵ After the success of this format, ‘Burnt Norton’ – which had originally been published as the final poem in the *Collected Poems 1909-1935* (1936) – was reissued as a paper pamphlet in a run of 4,000. Eventually published together as *Four Quartets* in 1943 (in the US) and 1944 (in Britain), more than 10,000 copies were printed, which, in a time of paper rationing, indicates the strength of Eliot’s popularity.

However, any discussion of print culture and the middlebrow must take account of another major debate emerging just after *Four Quartets* had been collected together in a cloth-bound volume. The paperback book was a contentious object in literary discussion in the 1950s. Allowing the general public to access authors whose texts had previously been offputtingly

¹⁷² See Ronald Schuchard, ‘T. S. Eliot as an Extension Lecturer, 1916-1919’, *Review of English Studies* 25.98 (1974), 163-73; ‘T. S. Eliot as an Extension Lecturer, 1916-1919. (Concluded)’, *Review of English Studies* 25.99 (1974), 292-304; Woolf, ‘Middlebrow’, 184.

¹⁷³ ‘The Tudor Translators’, *Complete Prose*, III, 625-633 (625).

¹⁷⁴ ‘To Charles Siepmann, 21 May 1929’, *Letters*, IV, 500.

¹⁷⁵ See Cooper, *Ideology of ‘Four Quartets’*, 29.

expensive, Nicola Humble has claimed that once books were issued in paperback, it ‘effectively transmuted them into the middlebrow, as they became widely available, widely read and commodified.’¹⁷⁶ In ‘The Problem of the Paper-backs’ (1953), Cecil Hemley outlined the business model for the publishing houses: ‘The tendency of paperback publishing has been to disseminate the best from the past and the most mediocre from the present’, because when it came to ‘contemporary writing’, ‘the reprinter must perforce follow fashion – and not coterie fashion, it should be remembered, but large popular currents of taste.’¹⁷⁷ We observe, again, the distinction that Q. D. Leavis had drawn between ‘bestsellers’ and ‘great novels’, with the latter usually failing to acquire widespread popularity. If High Culture was often not selected for a paperback edition on this basis, other ways had to be found to get the books to the readers. The Readers’ Subscription founded by Auden, Trilling, and Jacques Barzun in 1951 was devised as a means of providing a highbrow alternative to the Book-of-the-Month Club. In his plans for the project, Auden saw its biggest rival not as the mainstream Club it sought to replace, but: ‘paperback series such as Anchor Books and Penguins, which traded in intellectual wares’.¹⁷⁸

But Faber & Faber was ahead of the curve in this dissolution of the boundary between high- and middlebrow. According to Toby Faber, the firm was ‘possibly the first general publisher in the UK’ to print its own paperbacks, rather than continuing to sell the rights to the likes of Anchor and Penguin.¹⁷⁹ First introduced as a pilot scheme in 1958, Faber chose twelve of their bestselling titles to issue as experimental paperbacks. Initially, the company catalogue tried to rebrand the move away from its ‘middlebrow’ credentials:

¹⁷⁶ Nicola Humble, ‘Sitting Forward or Sitting Back: Highbrow v. Middlebrow Reading’, *Modernist Cultures* 6.1 (2011), 41-59.

¹⁷⁷ Cecil Hemley, ‘The Problem of the Paper-backs’, in *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, 141-146 (141).

¹⁷⁸ Arthur Krystal, ‘Introduction: Club Work’, in *A Company of Readers: Uncollected Writings of W. H. Auden, Jacques Barzun, and Lionel Trilling*, ed. Arthur Krystal (New York: The Free Press, 2001), xix-xxx (xxv).

¹⁷⁹ Toby Faber, *Faber & Faber: The Untold Story* (London: Faber & Faber, 2019), 200.

Here is no series of books stream-lined to a uniform shape and type size to sit pretty on the bookshelf. They are cheap editions in paper covers of worth-while books and in most cases they are reprinted in the size and style considered to be most suitable for the particular book when first published.¹⁸⁰

Among the twelve titles chosen were Eliot's *Collected Poems 1909-1935* (1936) and *The Cocktail Party* (1949), alongside Faber's bestselling titles for a mass audience: *Who Moved the Stone?* (1930), *Best Science Fiction Stories* (1958), and Don Marquis's *Archy and Mehitabel* (1960). The success of the experiment meant that Faber expanded their paperback list within months, and *Four Quartets* was one of the first books to be printed outside of the experiment in a fully-fledged 'Faber Paper Covered Edition' of a staggering 58,460 copies.¹⁸¹

There appears, then, to be something of a contradiction when we apply this crisis of the middlebrow to *Four Quartets*. How can Eliot assert in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* of the need to maintain minority culture in order to protect art from a corrupting 'popularity', while also allowing his poem to be packaged as a quintessential middlebrow commodity? How could he, in his criticism, praise the middle-aged Shakespeare for leaving his audience behind, while also including authorial asides in *Four Quartets* which seemed designed to appeal to BBC listeners, to 'explain' the complicated, self-referential passages of the poems? It is a problem that we have noticed stalking Eliot his entire career, the desire for popular acclaim jarring against the maintenance of the luxury appeal of High Culture. However, it should not be considered a coincidence that the *Criterion*, a 'little magazine' that Trilling would have seen as an effective tool for countering middlebrow culture, was discontinued just as this debate was swirling. Without his own tool of counterculture, Eliot was forced to use other means to explore the topic, and *Four Quartets* offered a crucial dramatization of the debate not only in the history of its dissemination, but also in the structure of the poem itself.

¹⁸⁰ 'Faber and Faber Book Catalogue, Spring & Summer 1958', quoted in Faber, *The Untold Story*, 248.

¹⁸¹ Cooper, *Ideology of 'Four Quartets'*, 26.

Four Quartets embodies a crisis of two forms of middleness simultaneously, that of the social ‘middlebrow’, and of Eliot’s own mid-life. As the formerly controversial apprentice of Ezra Pound, Eliot’s rebranding as a figure at the centre of the literary establishment in the 1930s connects to the rebranding of his poetry and its target audience, now becoming increasingly popular with middle-class consumers. With the crisis of midlife and middlebrow moving along parallel lines, *Four Quartets* both enacts and critiques Dwight Macdonald’s diagnosis of ‘midcult’ artefacts as ‘the products of lapsed avant-gardists who know how to use the modern idiom in the service of the banal’.¹⁸² Having made an investment in luxury avant-garde culture as a young poet, the Eliot of *Four Quartets* was experiencing the belated success of his early writing in real-time; he had become the ‘lapsed avant-gardist’ who, like Wordsworth, was struggling to produce something new. In response, he wrote a series of poems that gestured towards multiple stages in his own career, the only unifying voice of *Four Quartets* seems to be the character of ‘Mr. Eliot’ himself.

It is a habit of Eliot’s critical prose, and especially that aimed at a middlebrow audience, to split concepts into constituent parts to make them more accessible, as we saw with his ‘two types of true bad poet’ in ‘The Social Function of Poetry’. In ‘Little Gidding’, we sense the emergence of that voice once more:

There are three conditions which often look alike
 Yet differ completely, flourishing in the same hedgerow:
 Attachment to self and to things and to persons, detachment
 From self and from things and from persons; and, growing between them, indifference
 Which resembles the others as death resembles life,
 Being between two lives – unflowering, between
 The live and the dead nettle.

(III, 1-7).

¹⁸² Dwight Macdonald, ‘Masscult and Midcult’, in *Masscult and Midcult: Essays Against the American Grain*, ed. John Summers (New York: New York Review of Books, 2011), 3-71 (48).

This rhetorical device, designed to give the impression of authority to an audience he seeks to instruct, also conceals a deeper insecurity about the strength of that same authority. If we were to ascribe one of these ‘three conditions’ to the Eliot of *Four Quartets*, putting aside the ‘indifference’ to which he likely aspires, we would struggle to decide which is the best fit.

Despite outlining the choice between so many interrelated binary oppositions, Eliot can’t seem to decide what kind of poet that of *Four Quartets* should be. Is he middlebrow or highbrow? A ‘virtuoso’ or a ‘preacher’? Personal or impersonal? Private or public? Is he in favour of ‘original impulse’ or compositional ‘impetus’? Exactness or vagueness? Parody or sincerity? According to ‘The Social Function of Poetry’, ‘ambiguity’ about such questions was the key criterion for isolating the work of a ‘good poet’. Certainly, we ‘doubt’ the ‘attitude of the poet’ of *Four Quartets*, who ‘appears to be both inside and outside of his beliefs and interests’, as Eliot recommends in his essay. But whether or not this poet, like Swinburne, wriggles out of the charge of ‘badness’, is a question Eliot clearly hoped would be answered in the affirmative: ‘I’d like to feel that they get better as they go on’, he told Donald Hall, ‘[t]he second is better than the first, the third is better than the second, and the fourth is the best of all’.¹⁸³ The final image of ‘Little Gidding’ attempts to bring two oppositions together, ‘the fire and the rose are one’, but the extent to which this image is able to – or even tries to – reconcile the conflicting positions of the poem makes it a far more inconclusive conclusion than Eliot could have ever predicted.

¹⁸³ Eliot and Hall, ‘T. S. Eliot’, in *Paris Review Interviews*, 79.

Lastness

Introduction

When T. S. Eliot died in January 1965, the question of which lines to affix to his memorial plaques proved fairly straightforward. For the tablet at St Michael's in East Coker, Eliot had chosen words from the poem he named after the village itself: 'in my beginning is my end', 'in my end is my beginning'.¹ So often quoted as to have become clichéd, the sentiment chimed perfectly with the committal service during which his ashes were interred in the north-west corner of the church. At St Stephen's, Gloucester Road, where Eliot had worshipped for decades, appeared lines from another part of 'East Coker': 'We must be still and still moving / Into another intensity / For a further union a deeper communion' (v, 33-35). That final word must have seemed especially apt to commemorate the man who had acted as the representative for the congregation – as churchwarden – for twenty-five years. Meanwhile, at Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey, the plaque unveiled by Valerie Eliot in 1967 looked to another of the *Four Quartets*, 'Little Gidding': 'the communication / Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living'.² It was *Four Quartets*, the poem largely considered his 'last great

¹ 'East Coker', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 185; 192.

² 'Little Gidding', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 202.

work', that provided what Aaron Jaffe has called 'an impossible cache of instructions for his own burial ceremonies.'³

The snag, of course, is that when Eliot collected these supposedly epitaphic quotations together in 1943 as *Four Quartets*, he still had twenty-two years left to live, two fifths of a writing life that began in 1905 with his classroom lyrics. Turn to critical studies of Eliot's life's work, however, and you would be forgiven for thinking that his career ended with 'Little Gidding'. Ronald Bush's *Study in Character and Style* (1983) stops at *Four Quartets*, as does Ronald Schuchard's *Intersections of Life and Art* (1999).⁴ Of those that do acknowledge the post-*Quartets* writing, it often receives little more than token consideration. Hugh Kenner donates eighteen of the three hundred and forty-two pages in *The Invisible Poet* (1965) to the material after the *Quartets*, and in *Thomas Stearns Eliot: Poet* (1979), A. D. Moody gives his discussion of the period between 1945 and 1965 a revealing subtitle: 'Afterwords'.⁵ Even biographies shrink the final two decades to unnatural size. Robert Crawford spends 788 pages discussing Eliot's life up to 'Little Gidding', and only 123 on the following twenty years, meaning only 13% of Crawford's biography is taken up with nearly 30% of Eliot's life.⁶ Student primers tell a similar story. In David Chinitz's *Blackwell Companion* (2009), only one chapter contains a discussion of the creative writing after *Four Quartets*, compared to twelve on the earlier material.⁷ John Xiros Cooper's *Introduction to T. S. Eliot* (2008) devotes sixty-two pages of explanation to the poems, and just one to the plays.⁸ It is a critical ratio that survives today despite the recent inundation of primary material, much of it weighted towards

³ Aaron Jaffe, "'T. S. Eliot rates socko!': Modernism, Obituary, and Celebrity', in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. David Chinitz (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 423-35 (426).

⁴ Ronald Bush, *T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Ronald Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁵ Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot* (London: Methuen, 1959); A. D. Moody, *Thomas Stearns Eliot: Poet*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁶ See Robert Crawford, *Young Eliot: from St Louis to 'The Waste Land'* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2015) and *Eliot After 'The Waste Land'* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2022).

⁷ David Chinitz, ed., *A Companion to T. S. Eliot* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

⁸ John Xiros Cooper, *The Cambridge Introduction to T. S. Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

the end of Eliot's life. Jewel Spears Brooker's *T. S. Eliot and the Dialectical Imagination* (2018) boasts its access to 'the full range of his writing', allowing it 'to illustrate the coherence between Eliot's mind and art based on a reading of virtually all of his philosophical and religious writing'.⁹ Despite seemingly having access to everything, Eliot's 'creative life' ends, in Brooker's study, with the joining of 'the fire and the rose' in 'Little Gidding', twenty years before he actually died.

Many critical studies imply that Eliot's significance as a creative writer ended with *Four Quartets*. In the years immediately after their publication, two events seemed designed to nudge Eliot towards that conclusion himself. In January 1947, Eliot's first wife, Vivien, from whom he had been separated since 1933, died suddenly in her medical facility. The effect of Vivien's death on her widower was profound, encompassing not just shock, but what Eliot described as an entire psychological reset. He wrote to Emily Hale on Valentine's Day, three weeks after Vivien had died, that 'when the coffin was settled in the grave, and I turned away, I felt – without *emotion*, in the usual sense – that a great deal of myself was dead.'¹⁰ All of a sudden, he claims, the years caught up with him, having lived in a dream-like suspension of time ever since their separation: 'at that moment I became my chronological age – not a young man to whom opportunities are open, but a senior who had lived his life, such as it was, a man getting on for fifty-nine, with limited possibilities for the remaining years, and no resiliency or capacity for fresh adaptation.' As the weeks went by, this ambivalence about the remainder of his life did not improve, and he turned increasingly towards what lay beyond it:

I no longer want anything in *this* world except to do the best writing I can in the ten or twelve years of some degree of creativity that I may hope for, to meet all coming external vicissitudes in a spirit of Christian fortitude and faith in the Christian hope

⁹ Jewel Spears Brooker, *T. S. Eliot and the Dialectical Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 3-4.

¹⁰ 'To Emily Hale, 14 February 1947', *Eliot-Hale Letters*, ed. John Haffenden (Online: T. S. Eliot Estate, 2023), <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/11002>.

of eternity, and I no longer feel any vitality over and above that need to carry out those duties.¹¹

In practical terms, this was an oxymoronic premonition of productive anti-creativity: ‘sometimes one has just the strength to go on the same course, whereas if one stopped for a moment, or tried to change the course, one would drop.’¹² Compared with his usual habit of undergoing drastic stylistic shifts following episodes of personal crisis, this lacklustre commitment to ‘sameness’ enacts the lack of vitality he describes. If this was Eliot living beyond his allotted time, he would go out with a whimper, not a bang.

Just over a year later, Eliot’s crisis of lastness received fresh stimulation. In November 1948, it was announced that he had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. On hearing the news, John Berryman congratulated Eliot, adding that it was ‘High time!’ the award went to the poet.¹³ The implication was that Eliot had deserved recognition for some time; if anything, this announcement – made while Eliot was busy finishing *The Cocktail Party* at Princeton – came far too late. Eliot, meanwhile, thought that it was ‘too soon’: ‘The Nobel is a ticket to one’s funeral. No one has ever done anything after he got it.’¹⁴ Having just turned his attention wholeheartedly to drama and with an invaluable creative opportunity at Princeton’s Institute for Advanced Study, Eliot now seemed to resist the notion that his best days were behind him. Perhaps sensing the sparks, Berryman tried to stoke the fire, and cited a poet who had bucked the trend with a successful last burst of creativity: ‘All of Yeats’s great poetry was written after he received the award. Can’t one therefore look on the prize as a recognition of promise?’ Eileen Simpson, Berryman’s wife at the time, reported how Eliot ‘was delighted’ at being reminded of Yeats, and had said in response: ‘That’s how I shall try to look on it.’¹⁵ But what seemed optimistic ‘delight’ can easily be read otherwise, and there is something distinctly

¹¹ ‘To Emily Hale, 1 March 1947’, *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/11004>.

¹² ‘To Emily Hale, 1 March 1947’, *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/11004>.

¹³ See Eileen Simpson, *Poets in their Youth: A Memoir* (London: Faber & Faber, 1982), 173.

¹⁴ Eliot quoted in Simpson, *Poets in their Youth*, 173.

¹⁵ Eliot quoted in Simpson, *Poets in their Youth*, 173.

unconvincing in Eliot's 'try'. Epitaph or 'recognition of promise', it was his instinct to be filled with anxiety: how would Eliot approach a moment that had – in almost all cases – signalled the end of a writer's productive life? Would he, as he claimed immediately after Vivien's death, continue exhausted 'on the same course', or was he to follow Yeats in attempting something 'great'?

Certainly, Eliot's crisis of lastness in the late-1940s posed both a stylistic and a reputational challenge. But the function of this chapter is to seek a radical reassessment of the significance of Eliot's work after 1947 not only for its own sake, but for its relevance to our thinking about much broader questions, including philosophies of time, the chronology of modernism, and the notion of end-of-life style. In studies of other authors who live to an old age, the final quarter of life usually finds itself affixed with a particularly slippery label. However, the critical establishment has been slowly falling out of love with 'lateness', and much has been done in recent years to explore its limitations as a literary-critical concept. The essays in a 2016 collection edited by Gordon McMullan and Sam Smiles, for instance, seem to think the days of 'lateness' are numbered, agreeing only that 'There are as many late styles as there are late artists'.¹⁶ In Eliot's case, the problems with 'lateness' as a category are especially clear to see. Those who have applied the term to his work have used it variously for *Four Quartets*, the drama, the post-Nobel writing, and, in one case, to all of the writing after his conversion in 1927, exactly half-way through his life.¹⁷ According to one model, Eliot seems to have been 'late' during *Four Quartets*, and then, in the plays, becomes somehow 'post-late'

¹⁶ Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, 'Historicizing Late Style as a Discourse of Reception', in *Late Style and its Discontents: Essays in Art, Literature, and Music*, ed. Gordon McMullan and Sam Smiles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 51-68 (68).

¹⁷ On late style and *Four Quartets*, see Sarah Kennedy, *T. S. Eliot and the Dynamic Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); on lateness and Eliot's drama, see E. Martin Browne, *The Making of T. S. Eliot's Plays* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969); on post-conversion lateness, see Helen Gardner, 'The "Aged Eagle" Spreads His Wings. A 70th Birthday Talk with T. S. Eliot', *Contemporary Reviews*, 571-73 (571).

or ‘later’, by making conscious use of an out-dated dramatic style.¹⁸ The term has, by all accounts, lost some of its specificity.

With special reference to Eliot, but with the potential for application to other writers, this chapter suggests a new framework – and a new word – for thinking through the writing after *Four Quartets*. As Eliot’s letter to Hale concerning the ‘faith in the Christian hope of eternity’ makes clear, ‘lastness’ has a significance for Eliot that ‘lateness’ simply does not encompass. It is a preoccupation that goes back at least as far as *Ash-Wednesday* (1930), to the poignant ‘last desert between the last blue rocks’, and to *Sweeney Agonistes* (1926-27), to the ‘lost trains that bring in the last souls after midnight’, but perhaps most memorably to *Four Quartets* which evokes the doctrinal ‘last shall be the first’ in its eschatological rumination over ends and beginnings.¹⁹ In his exploration of Romanticism’s obsession with ‘last things’, Ben Hutchinson considers ‘lastness’ to be ‘a particular kind of lateness’.²⁰ So effective is his delineation of ‘lastness’, however, that it arguably begs consideration as its own critical concept:

lastness affords the opportunity to view history progressively in a way that is foreclosed to the more regressive sense of lateness: the last man may be the conclusion, but he is also the culmination of a given tradition or race. While the belated perspective is one of diminishing returns, the last man – however elegiac his position may be – has a perspective of privileged interpretation, since he can see a now complete tradition laid out before (or rather behind) him.²¹

This account brings together what was fundamental to Eliot’s crises of the late-1940s, notably the paradox of progress and conclusion that underlined his anxieties about the future of his writing. There is also a literary-critical precedent for favouring ‘lastness’ over its problematic cousin. Although Edward Said uses ‘last’ and ‘late’ interchangeably, the former used to be the

¹⁸ See Jeffrey M. Brown, ‘Enacting the Obituary: The “Successful Failure” of T. S. Eliot’s *The Elder Statesman*’, *Modern Drama* 56.2 (2013), 165-85.

¹⁹ *Ash-Wednesday*, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 1, 95; *Sweeney Agonistes*, added scene, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 1, 806; see ‘East Coker’, ‘In my beginning is my end’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 1, 185.

²⁰ Ben Hutchinson, *Lateness and Modern European Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 46.

²¹ Hutchinson, *Lateness and Modern European Literature*, 46.

more popular term; Kenneth Muir's *Last Periods of Shakespeare, Racine and Ibsen* (1961) and David Grene's *Reality and the Heroic Pattern: Last Plays of Ibsen, Shakespeare and Sophocles* (1967) both make thorough use of the subtleties of 'last'.²² Grene, for instance, employs it to emphasise ideas of directionality – something to which Eliot and Hutchinson are especially sensitive – as well as 'atonement', the desire to prepare for the afterlife with a clean conscience.²³ After many years of trying to make 'lateness' work, this chapter advocates for the field – in true Eliotic fashion – to return to where it began, in the hope of finding a new framework with which to connect different writers' end-of-life style.

Hutchinson's thinking about the 'last man' also hints at a practical quality of 'lastness' that is acutely relevant to this chapter. Eliot outlived the vast majority of his friends, family members, work colleagues, and artistic contemporaries. Even by the time of Vivien's death in 1947, he was an old hand at memorial pieces, having penned notices for James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Paul Valéry, and W. B. Yeats.²⁴ With the exception of Pound – whose isolation after 1945 offers its own exception – by 1960 Eliot came to think of himself as the last surviving writer of his generation. After his brother Henry's death, also in 1947, he would be the last living male member of his immediate family, and would eventually be the last surviving Eliot sibling.²⁵ In taking that fact further, his interests after the *Four Quartets* can be seen to channel a version of the cultural *topos* of the 'last of the race', something yet to be explored in the context of 'late modernism'. In her study of the phenomenon, Fiona Stafford writes how being 'last' comes with special responsibilities:

²² See Edward Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006); Kenneth Muir, *Last Periods of Shakespeare, Racine, Ibsen* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1961); David Grene, *Reality and the Heroic Pattern: Last Plays of Ibsen, Shakespeare, and Sophocles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

²³ Grene, *Reality and the Heroic Pattern*, 7-8.

²⁴ See 'A Message to the Fish', *Complete Prose*, VI, 158-61; 'Virginia Woolf', *Complete Prose*, VI, 169-72; 'Homage to Paul Valéry', *Complete Prose*, VI, 653-54; 'Leçon de Valéry', *Complete Prose*, VI, 753-58; 'Yeats', *Complete Prose*, VI, 78-90.

²⁵ His last-surviving sister, Marian, would die in 1963.

The same mysterious reverence is accorded to last works and last words, in the belief that they must have a special significance, must somehow provide the definitive statement. It suggests a desire to find at the close of a life some revelation of purpose – an ‘end’ in both senses of the word. When an individual represents the end of a race, there is thus a sense of expectation, as if some explanation will be forthcoming to justify its disappearance and very often, the last survivor feels compelled to memorialize the vanished group.²⁶

Eliot always took representative roles especially seriously, and one fundamental objective of this chapter is to examine his participation in the memorialisation of modernism as a public expression of his ‘lastness’.

However, as in the previous chapters, ‘lastness’ will also be used to make separate, specific claims about style. Distinct from Adorno’s model of ‘bitter and spiny’ ‘late style’, it will be argued that Eliot’s ‘last style’ does something different entirely, which justifies the search for a related, though alternative, theoretical category.²⁷ An examination of his plays will reveal an inability to embrace a sense of closure, with the narratives of his dramatic work constantly looking for ways to prolong themselves. Eliot’s dramatic line became increasingly prosaic as his career in the theatre progressed. By *The Elder Statesman* (1959), E. Martin Browne took notice of complaints that it was no longer verse at all, and that the ‘rationing’ of poetry was so extensive that it ‘diminished the peculiar contribution which Eliot as a poet could have made to the stage.’²⁸ In his poetry-proper, the lack of vigour manifested itself in another way, as the line-endings in ‘The Cultivation of Christmas Trees’ (1954) and other ‘last poems’ borrow the laboured weak stress from the *terza rima* in ‘Little Gidding’. The impact of ‘lastness’ on Eliot’s style, it will be argued, is intimately connected to the questions of ‘failure’ that have interested such critics as Gavin Jones.²⁹

²⁶ Fiona Stafford, *The Last of the Race: The Growth of a Myth from Milton to Darwin* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 3.

²⁷ Theodor Adorno, ‘Late Style in Beethoven’, in *Essays on Music*, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2002), 564-68 (564).

²⁸ Martin Browne, *Making of Eliot’s Plays*, 192.

²⁹ See Gavin Jones, *Failure and the American Writer: A Literary History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Wrapped up in ‘lastness’, too, then, is the careful negotiation between the public duties and the private anxieties of an ageing artist. The twin crises of Vivien’s death and the Nobel Prize make this negotiation especially apparent, both of which provoked Eliot to embark on a confrontation with the past. Motivated by these two events, this chapter is careful to remember that Eliot’s impulse to pursue a sense of ‘wholeness’ after 1947 was as much a desire for personal and religious satisfaction in the years before his death as it was to give the impression of a ‘major poet’, one ‘the whole of whose work we ought to read, in order to fully appreciate any part of it’.³⁰

‘Labour of Penelope’: Revision and Development in the Post-*Quartets* Prose

When Eliot spoke after Vivien’s death of possessing only ‘the strength to go on the same course’, he was aware that the ‘course’ of his life had changed many times. He enclosed in a letter to Emily Hale a review by Cyril Connolly, later the editor of *Horizon*, who wrote of the *Collected Poems 1909-1935* (1936) how:

The work of any great writer is like a train running through various stations. At each station some admirers get out and begin to say, ‘Such a pity the train ever went on to the next station.’ Sometimes if they say this loud enough they do actually stop the train from going any further, and then all is over with it. This is particularly true of Eliot, who has one lot of passengers still waiting at the terminus of the Waste Land, and another which is not willing to follow him into the Drama, with his two Church of England plays, ‘Murder in the Cathedral’ and ‘The Rock’.³¹

This section will ask not just whether Eliot thought that the rails of his *oeuvre* joined up, but whether, from an outside perspective, they even needed to. In Eliot’s own poetry, railway

³⁰ ‘What is Minor Poetry?’, *Complete Prose*, VI, 566-80 (574).

³¹ Cyril Connolly, ‘A Major Poet: The Influence of Mr. Eliot’, in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 357-59 (359). The clipping is found in ‘Emily Hale Letters from T. S. Eliot, 1895-1965’, Firestone Library, Princeton University (C0686), Box 14, Folder 11: ‘Clippings and Photographs, dates not examined’.

stations often trigger meditations on coherence. We may think of the moment in ‘East Coker’, ‘when an underground train, in the tube, stops too long between stations (III, 18). It is in ‘The Dry Salvages’, however, that the motif takes on the greatest significance with relation to ideas of ‘lastness’:

You are not the same people who left that station
Or who will arrive at any terminus,
While the narrowing rails slide together behind you;
And on the deck of the drumming liner
Watching the furrow that widens behind you,
You shall not think ‘the past is finished’
Or ‘the future is before us’.³²

In her analysis of the section, Helen Gardner is interested in these passengers who, ‘find no meaning in the present, it is only a stop between where they have come from and where they are going to.’³³ Only by disconnecting themselves from the past and the future, Eliot argues, will they attain a state of inner peace.

While this mantra may have suited an Eliot who constantly pushed forward in his creative development, it is haunted by an acute awareness that – by virtue of being an object of popular interest – he was constantly being compared to a past version of himself. In a discussion of mysticism in the *Clark Lectures* (1926), Eliot had claimed that ‘the human mind, when it comes to a terminus, hastens to look up the next train for almost anywhere.’³⁴ This eschatological imagination is stalked by a fear of finality, of having nowhere else to turn. In *The Elder Statesman*, a text considered at length later in this chapter, Lord Claverton compares his retirement from public service to a train station late at night:

But waiting, simply waiting,
With no desire to act, yet a loathing of inaction.
A fear of the vacuum, and no desire to fill it.
It’s just like sitting in an empty waiting room
In a railway station on a branch line,

³² ‘The Dry Salvages’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 197.

³³ Helen Gardner, *The Art of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber & Faber, 1949), 161-62.

³⁴ ‘Lecture III; Donne and the Trecento’, *Complete Prose*, II, 648-668 (651).

After the last train, after all the other passengers
 Have left, and the booking office has closed
 And the porters have gone. What am I waiting for
 In a cold and empty room before an empty grate?
 For no one. For nothing.³⁵

Seemingly at the ‘terminus’ of his life, Claverton ‘hastens to look up the next train for almost anywhere’, but finds the timetable empty.

So, what was Eliot to do when he found himself in the waiting room after the ‘last train’? He tried to answer this question in his letters to Emily Hale immediately after Vivien’s death, when he wrote that the ‘real shock’ was the realisation that ‘I am my past, and the whole of it, whether I like it or not; and that I meet myself face to face as a stranger whom I have got to live with, and make the best of, whether I like him or not’.³⁶ But becoming ‘whole’ meant a reckoning with the man that he used to be, a task Eliot had always shunned. He was not fond of revisiting past work; once a piece of writing had been published, it was to be left alone. He proved especially resistant to face his prose: ‘I have always found the re-reading of my own prose writings too painful a task’, he wrote in ‘Goethe as the Sage’ (1955).³⁷ Even when – as was often the most practical thing to do – he re-used a lecture for multiple occasions, this philosophy got in the way, producing yet more ‘pain’: ‘when I have undertaken to deliver an address for the second time I have usually found it a painful experience’.³⁸ In *Decisions and Revisions* (2003), Christopher Ricks characterised Eliot as a critic preoccupied by ‘second thoughts’: ‘not only by having been repeatedly moved to a later opinion, self-impelled to judge anew his own judgments as to some of the greatest writers, but also by openly discussing and pondering this process itself.’³⁹ But ‘openly’ and ‘self-impelled’ give an impression that does not accord with Eliot’s attitude. While Ricks was right to claim that there was at least a

³⁵ *The Elder Statesman*, in *Collected Plays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1962), 293-355 (302).

³⁶ ‘To Emily Hale, 14 February 1947’, *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/l1002>.

³⁷ ‘Goethe as the Sage’, *Complete Prose*, VIII, 62-84 (74).

³⁸ ‘The Influence of Landscape upon the Poet’, *Complete Prose*, VIII, 387-90 (387).

³⁹ Christopher Ricks, *Decisions and Revisions in T. S. Eliot* (London: British Library, 2003), 6.

willingness to revise his prose post-publication in a way that simply was not the case for the poetry, the dedication of an entire series of lectures to this practice makes it seem as if it came more naturally to Eliot than it did. In fact, it was in his prose that Eliot questioned whether it was even possible to access a version of himself from the past in the first place.

In keeping with his letters to Hale, we can locate one especially telling instance of Eliot's private reckoning with his past self in the pencilled annotations to a book from his library now held at John Hayward's archive at King's College, Cambridge.⁴⁰ In 1930, Eliot wrote an introduction for G. Wilson Knight's *Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy*. In 1949, a revised edition of the book appeared, along with a reprint of Eliot's original preface. To this preface, written nearly two decades earlier, Eliot added a series of judgemental remarks. At the head of the piece, he has written in pencil: 'Too many patterns. Evidently I wrote this during my pattern phase.'⁴¹ Subsequently, in the body of the introduction, he has underlined almost every appearance of the word 'pattern', a total of twelve, and pencils an 'X' in the margin next to each. By introducing the idea of a 'pattern phase', Eliot conceives of his literary career as episodic, consisting of self-contained units that are difficult to access, and easy to parody, once closed. Soon, the first-person identification with his past self breaks down entirely, and Eliot begins to consider his 1949 self to be a separate person. To the sentence 'our first duty as either critics or "interpreters", surely, must be to try to grasp the whole design, and read *character* and *plot* in the understanding of this subterrene or submarine music', he has underlined 'subterrene', and added 'Very TSE in one period.'⁴² This reference to 'periods', like 'phases', emphasises a sense of disconnect between episodes of development, and gives us a rare view of a writer's own structuring of his career. Throughout the introduction, Eliot takes

⁴⁰ G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy*, 4th ed. (London: Methuen, 1949), with pencil annotations by T. S. Eliot, Hayward Bequest, King's College Cambridge (H/8/54).

⁴¹ Eliot and Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, Hayward Bequest (H/8/54), xiii.

⁴² Eliot and Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, Hayward Bequest (H/8/54), xix.

aim at the use of language in this earlier ‘period’, and one passage in particular captures his interest:

Dante will be taken as a mere paraphraser of Aquinas, occasionally bursting through his rigid frame into such scenes as Paolo and Francesca, but neither by his admirers nor by his detractors credited with anything like the freedom of Shakespeare. Shakespeare will be still worse traduced, in being attributed with some patent system of philosophy of his own, esoteric guide to conduct, yoga-breathing or key to the scripture.⁴³

Adjacent to ‘detractors’, Eliot has written ‘typically TSE word’, and by ‘traduced’, he has pencilled ‘ditto’. Making use of ‘TSE’ as the character for this earlier self, Eliot marks the separation between the public text and the private act of handwritten commentary, dividing himself along both dispositional and chronological lines. In this vein, Eliot’s annotations do not only consist of critiques of his choice of language, but also his tone. To the sentence which reads: ‘Now it is only a personal prejudice of mine, that I prefer poetry with a clear philosophical pattern’, Eliot adds in the margin another curious third-person judgement ‘Handsome of him to admit it’.⁴⁴ Perhaps the most intriguing annotation, though, appears next to a sentence which describes the relationship between meaning and understanding: ‘It is also the prejudice or preference of anyone who practises, though humbly, the art of verse, to be sceptical of all “interpretations” of poetry, even his own interpretations.’⁴⁵ Alongside the underlined phrase, Eliot has written ‘Tartuffe’. Referencing Molière’s infamously hypocritical villain, the Eliot of post-1949 brands this earlier ‘TSE’ of 1930 an insincere con-artist.

As far as attempts to reconnect with a former self go, Eliot’s annotations to *The Wheel of Fire* are not the most congenial. In subsequent years, however, he searched harder for common ground, in the hope of forging a sense of ‘wholeness’. The title essay of his final collection of prose, *To Criticize the Critic* (1961), proposes to do exactly that, to evaluate the

⁴³ Eliot and Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, Hayward Bequest (H/8/54), xvi.

⁴⁴ Eliot and Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, Hayward Bequest (H/8/54), xv.

⁴⁵ Eliot and Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, Hayward Bequest (H/8/54), xvi.

success of his critical output over the last forty-five years from the vantage point of the very end. The task went against all of his instincts: 'it was so long since I had read many of my essays that I approached them with apprehension rather than with hopeful expectations.'⁴⁶ Upon beginning his research, he found a mixture of 'statements with which I no longer agree', 'views which I maintain with less firmness of conviction', and 'statements the meaning of which I no longer understand'. As far as his retention of information was concerned, he discovered 'areas in which my knowledge has evaporated', and 'matters in which I have simply lost interest, so that, if asked whether I still hold the same belief, I could only say "I don't know" or "I don't care"'.⁴⁷ As in his marginal comments in *The Wheel of Fire*, the style of his youth was jarring to his older ears: 'there are errors of tone: the occasional note of arrogance, of vehemence, of cocksureness or rudeness, the braggadocio of the mild-mannered man safely entrenched behind his typewriter'. Nevertheless, the most revealing sentence is that which concludes the passage: 'Yet I must acknowledge my relationship to the man who made those statements, and in spite of all these exceptions, I continue to identify myself with the author.'⁴⁸

This final statement would have seemed impossible to the attitude with which Eliot annotated *The Wheel of Fire*, with the priority now being continuity with the past, rather than detachment. But that did not mean that this impulse towards 'wholeness' that he described in his letter to Emily Hale had completely altered his stance on his former self. In 'To Criticize the Critic', he complains for comparatively much longer about the blurring of time often made between his different critical phases: 'I find myself constantly irritated by having my words, perhaps written thirty or forty years ago, quoted as if I had uttered them yesterday.'⁴⁹ This was a sentiment he had vocalised previously, in 'Author and Critic (1955), a talk which would be revised to become 'The Frontiers of Criticism' (1956):

⁴⁶ 'To Criticize the Critic', *Complete Prose*, VIII, 456-474 (458).

⁴⁷ 'To Criticize the Critic', 458.

⁴⁸ 'To Criticize the Critic', 458.

⁴⁹ 'To Criticize the Critic', 458.

I am accustomed to critics tracing the rise and decline of my creative powers from poem to poem and play to play. But when it comes to my critical essays, the criticism of *them* seems to assume that I wrote them all at once, and that each was designed to take its place in an orderly structure. That is when the critic is favourable. When he is more severe, he is more given to pointing out the inconsistencies between statements in essays written perhaps twenty years apart. Now if one were to aim at complete consistency, and if one re-wrote, or suppressed every statement which one no longer believes, or would no longer put in the same way, one would be occupied in a labour of Penelope, incessant and endless.⁵⁰

A 'labour of Penelope' implies a willingness to *unweave*, as much as to weave, a Jamesian act that was incompatible with Eliot's attitude towards the past. The words of his criticism had not been uttered simultaneously, or designed with any sense of premeditation, and to alter them was anachronistic; to flatten the sense of development over the course of his career.

Although Eliot's impulse after Vivien's death was the pursuit of continuity with the past, that did not mean ignoring it *as* the past, as the train passengers in 'The Dry Salvages' may have done. Indeed, it is in the interest of contextualisation that Eliot struggled to put himself in the mindset of his past self. In 'To Criticize the Critic', he reminds us of his lecture on Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, in which he argued that 'in appraising the judgments of any critic of a past age, one needed to see him in the context of that age, to try to place oneself at his point of view. This is a difficult effort for the imagination; one, indeed, in which we cannot hope for more than partial success.'⁵¹ Any attempt to capture the past, in this view, relies on a degree of 'imagination', rather than direct reproduction, connecting to that important word 're-enactment' in *Four Quartets*, about which I have written elsewhere.⁵² When it came to 're-enacting' his own prose, however, Eliot declared that he 'cannot myself bring to mind all these circumstances, reconstruct all the conditions under which I wrote'.⁵³ To reinhabit the mind of a critic at the moment at which they were writing is an especially useful activity, Eliot

⁵⁰ 'Author and Critic', *Complete Prose*, VIII, 53-61 (57).

⁵¹ 'To Criticize the Critic', 460.

⁵² See Nicholas Smart, 'T. S. Eliot and the Problem of the Archive', *ELH* 90.3 (2023), 851-81.

⁵³ 'To Criticize the Critic', 460-61.

claims, but to do it for himself was another question entirely: ethical and emotional, as much as practical.

There is a key word that looms behind Eliot's attempts to reconcile his instinct to keep the 'painful' past locked away in 'phases' with the new impetus (after 1947) towards 'wholeness'. 'Development' is the theme that links all of the essays in his final book of prose, *To Criticize the Critic*. Be it the 'training of the mind' in 'The Aims of Education' (1950), or the 'metamorphosis of Latin' in 'American Literature and the American Language' (1953), Eliot's interest in 'growth' and 'decline' is everywhere in this collection.⁵⁴ In 'To Criticize the Critic', his aim – beyond a survey of his own literary criticism – is to extrapolate his individual experience into broader significance:

how far, and in what ways do the critic's own tastes and views alter in the course of his lifetime. To what extent do such changes indicate greater maturity, when do they indicate decay, and when must we consider them merely as changes – neither for better nor for worse?⁵⁵

According to this model, the 'unweaving' that is necessary for a revisionary 'labour of Penelope' would destroy all notion of 'change', the way the stitches develop over time and reflect the 'maturity' of the artist's powers. Applying this to himself, Eliot references his essays on Milton (1936; 1947), and fought back against those who called the second essay 'a recantation'.⁵⁶ Instead, he argued that it was 'a development of the fact that there was no longer any likelihood of his being imitated, and that therefore he could be profitably studied.'⁵⁷ The image is not one of unpicking, but of evolution, and Eliot chastises critics who refuse him the ability to grow in a different direction to that which was originally expected.

⁵⁴ 'The Aims of Education', *Complete Prose*, VII, 511-63 (522); 'American Literature and the American Language', *Complete Prose*, VII, 792-810 (797).

⁵⁵ 'To Criticize the Critic', 465.

⁵⁶ See 'Milton I', *Complete Prose*, V, 371-79; 'Milton II', *Complete Prose*, VII, 21-43.

⁵⁷ 'To Criticize the Critic', 466.

When Eliot turns to ageing writers other than himself, the emphasis is still on ideas of development. In ‘Goethe as the Sage’, the interest in the subject is twofold. Firstly, there is his fascination with Goethe’s ability to have continued developing until the very end, voicing admiration for the youthful power of growth shown in a ‘facsimile of a drawing of Goethe in old age’.⁵⁸ Eliot describes how ‘although the body may be weakened by infirmities, it is obviously still ruled by a vigorous mind. [... W]e are in the presence of a man who combines the vitality of youth with the wisdom of age.’ The second area of ‘development’ in ‘Goethe as the Sage’ is Eliot’s own appreciation of the poet. He wonders ‘what is the process by which one becomes reconciled to those great authors to whom in one’s youth one was indifferent or antipathetic – not only why it takes place, but why it ought to take place; not only the process but the moral necessity of the process.’⁵⁹ There is a danger – as with his views on Milton – of being accused of changing his mind because of some external factor, but Eliot once again turns to the idea of ‘development’, this time as a weapon against ‘suspicion of insincerity’: ‘I must give some account of the evolution of my own mind’.⁶⁰ Without the knowledge of that ‘evolution’, Eliot’s pivot on his appreciation of Goethe reads as an attempt to curry favour with the audience at Hamburg where he first gave the speech. Instead, ‘development’ has an ethical imperative: ‘the moral necessity of the process.’ In other words, maturity is defined by a willingness to turn back and reassess – but significantly not to erase – past opinions that one once held to be true.

The hint at past ‘failure’ that comes out of ‘Goethe as the Sage’ has an important relevance to the self-criticism that appears in his annotations to *The Wheel of Fire*. In this later essay, though, Eliot is more willing to engage with his past self, than to chastise him. There are two moments in the ‘Goethe’ essay where Eliot addresses disagreements with his previous

⁵⁸ ‘Goethe as the Sage’, 62.

⁵⁹ ‘Goethe as the Sage’, 63.

⁶⁰ ‘Goethe as the Sage’, 65.

critical positions. In the discussion of 'Wisdom', he refers to a sentence that he printed two decades earlier: 'Of Goethe perhaps it is truer to say that he dabbled in both philosophy and poetry and made no great success of either'.⁶¹ In a habitual manoeuvre, Eliot claims not to remember having written this comment, reminded only by 'Mr. Michael Hamburger', who serves as his 'authority for attributing this sentence to myself'.⁶² The Eliot of the present moment agrees with Hamburger: 'It is an interesting sentence: interesting because it enunciates so many errors in so few words'. Later in the essay, Eliot once again takes aim at the critic he used to be: 'There arises, at this point, a question which cannot be left unanswered: partly because I have raised it myself, in a somewhat different form, many years ago, and am no longer satisfied with my own account of it'.⁶³ Eliot continues: 'Some of what I said then I would not now defend, and some I should now be inclined to qualify or put differently'.⁶⁴ What Eliot had 'said' concerns a poet's sincerity of belief: 'Does the poet hold an "idea" in the same way that a philosopher holds it; and when he expresses a particular "philosophy" in his poetry, should he be expected to believe this philosophy, or may he legitimately treat it merely as suitable material for a poem?' As to whether the poet needs to believe what he says, Eliot had given an earlier opinion in 'Dante' (1929), and seems to have implied not: 'we can distinguish between Dante's beliefs as a man and his beliefs as a poet'.⁶⁵ In 'Goethe as the Sage', however, his own desire to avoid appearing 'insincere' requires yet another recourse to 'development':

Now in so far as anything I have written on the subject in the past says or suggests that the poet need not believe in a philosophical idea which he has chosen to embody in his verse, Professor Heller is, no doubt, quite right in contradicting me. For such a suggestion would appear to be a justification of insincerity and would annihilate all poetic values except those of technical accomplishment.⁶⁶

⁶¹ 'Goethe as the Sage', 74.

⁶² 'Goethe as the Sage', 74-75.

⁶³ 'Goethe as the Sage', 76.

⁶⁴ 'Goethe as the Sage', 77.

⁶⁵ See 'Dante', *Complete Prose*, III, 700-45 (717-18; 727-28).

⁶⁶ 'Goethe as the Sage', 77.

‘Sincerity’ of poetic belief is now a key criterion for Eliot in this final critical phase, and in ‘development’ he finds a theoretical construct which allows him to emphasise his own sincere credentials, while still allowing for a marked difference between his past and present selves.

The significance of a poet’s ‘sincerity’ of belief leads us to Eliot’s last major essay, ‘George Herbert’ (1962). That this turned out to be his final critical subject has been remarked on numerous times, including by Ronald Schuchard, who ends his analysis of Eliot’s life with the affiliation with Herbert’s poetry.⁶⁷ Although one would usually rush to claim that such determinism is self-defeating, Eliot seems to have seen the link himself:

The great danger, for the poet who would write religious verse, is that of setting down what he would like to feel rather than be faithful to the expression of what he really feels. Of such pious insincerity Herbert is never guilty. We need not look too narrowly for a steady progress in Herbert’s religious life, in an attempt to discover a chronological order. He falls, and rises again. Also, he was accustomed to working over his poems; they may have circulated in manuscript among his intimates during his lifetime. What we can confidently believe is that every poem in the book is true to the poet’s experience.⁶⁸

It would be ‘pious insincerity’, Eliot claims, for Herbert to have refused the truth of lived experience, just as it would have been ‘insincere’ of Eliot to revise his past work in the hope of making it better in the present. However, Eliot’s idea of ‘development’ in Herbert’s poems could be undermined by the fact that ‘we cannot date the poems exactly’; how is one to claim evolution – if not ‘progression’ – when the ordering is unknown?⁶⁹ But Eliot works his way around the problem: ‘they have another order, that in which Herbert wished them to be read.’ *The Temple*, as a collection, lies upon a different kind of developmental ‘structure’; ‘one which may have been worked over and elaborated, perhaps at intervals of time, before it reached its final form.’⁷⁰ This reading chimes with the self-professed ‘phases’ and ‘periods’ in Eliot’s own

⁶⁷ See Ronald Schuchard, *Eliot’s Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 195ff.

⁶⁸ ‘George Herbert’, *Complete Prose*, VIII, 498-528 (514).

⁶⁹ ‘George Herbert’, 506.

⁷⁰ ‘George Herbert’, 506.

career, which are marked out by stylistic and personal crises. When it comes to ‘sincerity’, though, there is an interesting contradiction concerning Herbert’s practice of ‘working over his poems’, and the faithfulness to the ‘expression of what he really feels’. But it need not be a contradiction, as Eliot explains: ‘*The Temple* [...] [i]s a record of the spiritual struggles of a man of intellectual power and emotional intensity who gave much toil to perfecting his verses’.⁷¹ Now, the ‘toil’ of overwork is part of the fidelity to expression, the ‘spiritual struggle’ of the poet, rather than to the ‘original experience’ that seemed to consume the compositional process of *Four Quartets*. For Eliot’s own attempts to construct a sense of ‘wholeness’ in his work and himself after 1947, then, this notion of a sincere and progressive ‘spiritual struggle’ works better than any other structure for explaining how he sought to make everything fit together.

Repetition and Closure in *The Cocktail Party* and *The Confidential Clerk*

If the twin crises of Vivien’s death and the Nobel Prize provoked Eliot to pursue a sense of ‘wholeness’ in his critical prose, the question remains as to why the creative work that he produced after 1947 has been considered so unnecessary for an understanding of everything that came before it. When Stephen Spender was asked about Eliot’s writing after *Four Quartets*, he argued: ‘The rest of his work was an epilogue [...] with] something of the grace and urbanity of a “distinguished guest” who rises at the end of a banquet.’⁷² In reality, Eliot’s after-dinner speech was hardly shorter than the dinner itself, either in terms of volume or the number of contemporary reviews. The 305 pages of verse up to and including ‘Little Gidding’

⁷¹ ‘George Herbert’, 509.

⁷² Stephen Spender, *Eliot* (London: Fontana, 1975), 242.

in the *Complete Poems and Plays* (1969) – including two full-length plays – exceed the 222 pages that make up *The Cocktail Party* (1949), *The Confidential Clerk* (1954), and *The Elder Statesman* (1959) by only 27%. Despite this fact, fresh scholarship of these three plays is so rare as to be functionally extinct, the product of a long-held critical bias. Jewel Spears Brooker's *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews* (2004) prints 152 of the 366 total reviews for the creative work up to and including the *Four Quartets*, around 40%. For Eliot's last three plays, it prints 26 of 249 reviews, just over 10%.⁷³ The purpose of this section is to ask whether we are right to consider the plays as an 'epilogue', offering nothing new in the way of Eliot's creative development, or to think of them anew as 'last words', the stylistic embodiment of an entirely different and conclusive phase in his creative career.

There is much that links the creative work after 1947 with the impulse in Eliot's prose towards retrospection. Indeed, the relationship between the present and the past does not just drive the various plots of his plays, but also guides his thinking about dramatic theory in broader terms. In a lecture given at Harvard in November 1951, Eliot paused to consider all he had said about drama up to that point:

Reviewing my critical output for the last thirty-odd years, I am surprised to find how constantly I have returned to the drama, whether by examining the work of the contemporaries of Shakespeare, or by reflecting on the possibilities of the future. It may even be that people are weary of hearing me on this subject. But, while I find that I have been composing variations on this theme all my life, my views have been continually modified and renewed by increasing experience; so that I am impelled to take stock of the situation afresh at every stage of my own experimentation.⁷⁴

As we have noted, to 'take stock of the situation afresh at every stage of my own experimentation' is not something that came naturally to Eliot. While discussing his drama, though, there is none of the 'pain' with which he was forced to re-enact his prose; he seems to

⁷³ See *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). It is important to note that the vast majority of reviews pertain to *The Cocktail Party*.

⁷⁴ 'Poetry and Drama', *Complete Prose*, VII, 589-610 (589).

enjoy thinking back through the compositional process. In ‘Poetry and Drama’, he proceeds by discussing *The Cocktail Party*, a play which only received its debut at the Edinburgh Festival a year earlier: ‘I have not yet got to the end of my investigation of the weaknesses of this play, but I hope and expect to find more than those of which I am yet aware.’⁷⁵ The finding of weaknesses is a productive exercise for Eliot: ‘I say “hope” because while one can never repeat a success, and therefore must always try to find something different, even if less popular, to do, the desire to write something which will be free of the defects of one’s last work is a very powerful and useful incentive.’⁷⁶ A fundamental problem we encounter when we turn to the plays themselves, then, is why so many critics have found them to be distinctly *non*-progressive, repetitive, and stilted.⁷⁷ The desire to show ‘development’ in his career – so crucial to Eliot’s post-*Quartets* essays – seems to have been a marked failure in his drama after 1947. For the first time, this analysis seeks to reconcile this charge with the fact that the texts enact the very problems of repetition and closure that critics have located in the relevance of the plays to Eliot’s wider *oeuvre*.

When Eliot accepted an invitation by Princeton University to attend the Institute for Advanced Study in the Autumn of 1947, he viewed it as a chance to flee the emotional turmoil of life in London following Vivien’s death.⁷⁸ At the time, the germ of *The Cocktail Party* had not yet taken root in Eliot’s mind; he would not send his first drafts of a number of scenes to E. Martin Browne until June of the following year.⁷⁹ By the time he arrived at Princeton in September 1948, the composition of the play was in full swing, only to be interrupted by the second of

⁷⁵ ‘Poetry and Drama’, 602.

⁷⁶ ‘Poetry and Drama’, 602.

⁷⁷ Anthony Cuda offers a useful survey of such opinions in “‘A Precise Way of Thinking and Feeling’: Eliot and Verse Drama”, in *The New Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. Jason Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 116-30.

⁷⁸ See ‘To Emily Hale, 8 October 1947’, *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/11026>.

⁷⁹ See Martin Browne, *Making of Eliot’s Plays*, 172.

Eliot's crises of the late 1940s, when news of the Nobel Prize reached him only a month into the post. As the text on which Eliot was hard at work during this significant period, it is not surprising to see *The Cocktail Party* integrate his research on 're-enactment' and 'wholeness' that defines his contemporary critical prose. What Eliot produced was a play which went on to become his most commercially successful, watched by more than 1.5 million people in Britain and the United States.

The action of *The Cocktail Party* pivots fundamentally on the idea that in any act of retrospection, the past is not completely accessible to a present perspective. Upon the sudden departure of his wife the day before they were due to give a cocktail party, Edward Chamberlayne is forced to entertain the guests in Lavinia's absence. The opening Act is a catalogue of forgetfulness. On three occasions, Edward asks the Unidentified Guest whether he would like a drink: 'Whisky?', and every time the same response is given: 'Gin' with 'a drop of water'.⁸⁰ In between these conversations, another guest, Julia, reappears twice having forgotten first her umbrella and then her glasses. Meanwhile, the interaction which is interrupted by Julia dwells fundamentally on more complex ideas of memory and self-identification. Edward is discussing with the Unidentified Guest why Lavinia's sudden abandonment has affected him so profoundly:

her going away
At a moment's notice, without explanation,
Only a note to say that she had gone
And was not coming back – well, I can't understand it.
Nobody likes to be left with a mystery:
It's so... unfinished.⁸¹

The Unidentified Guest responds that what troubles Edward is something more than 'mystery': 'you've lost touch with the person / You thought that you were.' Immediately, we might

⁸⁰ *The Cocktail Party*, in *Collected Plays*, 123-214 (131; 132; 135).

⁸¹ *The Cocktail Party*, 134.

diagnose a similar malady to that which plagued Harry in *The Family Reunion*, or the passengers in the tube train of 'The Dry Salvages', that one's past and present selves may become disconnected. But *The Cocktail Party* introduces a new problem which concerns not only the inaccessibility of the past, but of its potential deceptiveness.

When Peter confides in Edward that he and Celia have started to grow distant, he views the problem within the parameters of truth and falsehood:

But I must see Celia at least to make her tell me
What has happened, in her terms. Until I know that
I shan't know the truth about even the memory.
Did we really share these interests? Did we really feel the same
When we heard certain music? Or looked at certain pictures?
There was something real. But what is the reality...⁸²

The versification enacts Peter's struggle to piece together the past: 'at least to make her tell me / What has happened' lays the stress on the verbs in this complicated sentence, jostling between the subjects of Celia, Peter, and the past itself. Edward counsels that memories often degrade, ('There's no memory you can wrap in camphor / But the moths will get in'), but Peter's idea of the problem is more complicated than simple forgetfulness: 'what is the reality / Of experience between two unreal people?'⁸³ In *The Cocktail Party*, the past is not available for accurate evaluation in the present, but is corrupted by false memories, desires, and the constant development of the individual personality.

This language of 'dreams' and 'unreality' will be heard again by Edward later in the play, applied to the breakdown of his relationship with Lavinia. When his wife eventually reappears in the third scene of Act One, she explains why she thought it was necessary to abandon him:

I thought that if I died
To you, I who had been only a ghost to you,

⁸² *The Cocktail Party*, 143.

⁸³ *The Cocktail Party*, 143.

You might be able to find the road back
 To a time when you were real – for you must have been real
 At some time or other, before you ever knew me.⁸⁴

There is something metrically and thematically Hardyesque about the ‘I who had been only a ghost to you’, and, like Hardy, Edward seems unable to move on from his wife’s departure.⁸⁵ When the Unidentified Guest announces that Lavinia will soon make her return, he uses the language of death to argue that the past is intrinsically unknowable to the present: ‘Ah, but we die to each other daily. / What we know of other people / Is only our memory of the moments / During which we knew them.’⁸⁶ Our ‘memory’ cannot be relied upon for a truthful account of the past, he claims, and Edward uses this knowledge to argue that Lavinia is not the person he thought she was: ‘Since I saw her this morning when we had breakfast / I no longer remember what my wife is like.’⁸⁷ When he and Lavinia have a candid conversation about their relationship, he uses this argument to elucidate the distance between them:

Twice you have changed since I have been looking at you.
 I looked at your face: and thought that I knew
 And loved every contour; and as I looked
 It withered, as if I had unwrapped a mummy.⁸⁸

Eliot had used this image of the ‘withered mummy’ only a year before, but it was not known to scholars until 2023: ‘an Egyptian mummy is preserved in its wrappings exactly as it was at the moment of embalming, and that when it is exposed and unwrapped, we see it for a moment as it was four thousand years ago – and that then it crumbles into dust in a few moments’.⁸⁹ Writing to Emily Hale immediately after Vivien’s funeral in 1947, Eliot – like Edward –

⁸⁴ *The Cocktail Party*, 168.

⁸⁵ See ‘The Voice’, in Thomas Hardy, *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 2, ed. Samuel Hynes (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 56-57.

⁸⁶ *The Cocktail Party*, 156-57.

⁸⁷ *The Cocktail Party*, 135-36.

⁸⁸ *The Cocktail Party*, 154.

⁸⁹ ‘To Emily Hale, 14 February 1947’, *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/l1002>.

struggles to make the past and the future join up: ‘Suddenly I felt as if I had been preserved in a mummified youth, and at that moment I became my chronological age’.⁹⁰

In recalling the moment that Vivien was laid to rest, *The Cocktail Party* has an important relationship with the notion of lastness. It is pertinent to observe, then, the trouble that Eliot had ending the play, and the way in which it became consumed with the idea of repeating itself. In a letter to Martin Browne in July 1949, Eliot confessed that the ‘last half-line is the trickiest bit of all’:

One or two lines looked promising, but rather suggested that E[dward] and L[avinia] didn’t want to be left together – which would spoil the relation I had so laboriously built up between them. I should like to leave it open as long as possible, in the hope of what Julia would call an inspiration; but failing that, perhaps the enclosed is at least harmless.⁹¹

It is this ‘harmless’ last line that would survive into the published version of the play: ‘Oh, I’m glad. It’s begun.’⁹² But by ending with a beginning, Eliot denies closure to the characters; their problems with the coherence of the self may well be replayed again tomorrow. Indeed, in ‘Poetry and Drama’, Eliot criticised *The Cocktail Party* for this very reason: ‘the last act of my play only just escapes, if indeed it does escape, the accusation of being not a last act but an epilogue’.⁹³ The implication is that the play is structurally over-ended, that the final Act in which Edward and Lavinia give another cocktail party, and the fate of many of the other characters is reported, takes some of the sting out of the climax. Martin Browne claimed that Eliot often struggled with last words, deferring the problem to the future: ‘The curtain-lines had always been hopefully subject to revision.’⁹⁴ In her book *Poetic Closure* (1968), Barbara Herrnstein Smith offers Eliot as an example of a poet who favours ‘weak’ or even ‘anti-

⁹⁰ ‘To Emily Hale, 14 February 1947’, *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/l1002>.

⁹¹ Eliot, quoted in Martin Browne, *Making of Eliot’s Plays*, 231.

⁹² *The Cocktail Party*, 212.

⁹³ ‘Poetry and Drama’, 602.

⁹⁴ Martin Browne, *Making of Eliot’s Plays*, 231.

closure', something she sees as characteristic of modernist aesthetics.⁹⁵ 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', Herrnstein Smith claims, has an intrinsic inability 'to be resolved', requiring an outside force – the 'human voices' – to interrupt.⁹⁶ The end of *The Cocktail Party*, meanwhile, is an incongruous mixture of different types of ending. While Eliot was worried that Edward and Lavinia's second dinner party felt too much like a victory lap, Celia's end happens far too abruptly: 'then they found her body, / Or at least, they found traces of it'.⁹⁷ Last words, for Eliot, were the ones which he constantly felt the need to open back up again.

Last words may have been the 'trickiest bit' of *The Cocktail Party*, but in Eliot's next play, *The Confidential Clerk*, the very idea of lastness, where events are allowed to settle into a permanent state, is defied at every turn. Begun in 1951, the *Clerk* premiered at Edinburgh in 1953, only four years after *The Cocktail Party*'s opening night. At the start of the play, the parentage of three young people appears to be fixed. First, we meet Colby Simpkins, who has just entered the employment of Sir Claude Mulhammer, the man he has been told is his estranged father. Having been secretly supporting Colby financially since his birth, Sir Claude plans to have his new 'confidential clerk' introduced to his wife, Lady Elizabeth, in the hope that 'she will want us to adopt him'.⁹⁸ Next, Lucasta Angel is introduced as the orphaned daughter of one of Sir Claude's friends, and is rumoured to be his lover, having become his ward since the death of her parents. Lucasta has been set up for marriage to the third of the young characters, B. Kaghan, a businessman who works with Sir Claude, and believes himself to be a 'foundling' of uncertain parentage. As the play progresses, the parentage of all three young characters is revealed to be false. First, we learn from Lucasta herself that she is in fact

⁹⁵ Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 147.

⁹⁶ Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 146.

⁹⁷ *The Cocktail Party*, 206.

⁹⁸ *The Confidential Clerk*, in *Collected Plays*, 215-92 (221).

the illegitimate child of Sir Claude, a secret shared with his wife, but not with polite society. The issue of Colby's parentage is more complicated. Upon meeting Colby, Lady Elizabeth refuses to believe that he is another of Sir Claude's illegitimate children, and becomes convinced that he is her own long-lost child, having given birth to a son some decades earlier from whom she was mysteriously separated. However, a conclusive meeting with Colby's foster mother, Mrs Guzzard, informs them that Colby is the son of neither Sir Claude nor Lady Elizabeth, but Mrs Guzzard herself, who lied about his parentage in order to extract child support payments from Sir Claude. The lost son of Lady Elizabeth, meanwhile, is also revealed by Mrs Guzzard, who once cared for a baby boy that was entrusted to her after the death of his father. This baby turns out to be B. Kaghan, who then finds himself engaged to his step-sister, Lucasta.

In this play where the past is inherently unstable, the future of each of the younger characters defies inevitability. *The Confidential Clerk* opens with Lucasta having been fired from her job for an administrative error. She reveals how her boss requested a letter that she was supposed to have filed,

he got suspicious
And asked for things I'm sure he didn't want –
Just to make trouble! And I couldn't find one of them.
But they're all filed somewhere, I'm sure, so why bother?'⁹⁹

That the play should begin with this brief mention of a filing error seems insignificant, but the validity of documentary evidence from the past comes to drive the entire plot. When Mrs Guzzard confesses Colby's true parentage, Eggerson asks to see 'records': 'Not that we doubt your word, Mrs. Guzzard: / But in a matter of such extreme importance / You'll understand the need for exact confirmation.'¹⁰⁰ Even when presented with the 'Registration of birth' for Colby

⁹⁹ *The Confidential Clerk*, 224.

¹⁰⁰ *The Confidential Clerk*, 286.

Guzzard, the evidence is rejected: 'I shall not believe it. I'll not believe those records.'¹⁰¹ Colby, however, likes the idea of using 'documents' to reconstruct the past. Before he has been told the identity of his real father, Colby ruminates on a number of possibilities, resembling Pip's conjectures at the graves of his parents in *Great Expectations* (1861):

I should like a father
Whom I had never known and couldn't know now,
Because he would have died before I was born
Or before I could remember; whom I could get to know
Only by report, by documents –
The story of his life, of his success or failure...
Perhaps his failure more than his success –
By objects that belonged to him, and faded photographs
In which I should try to decipher a likeness;
Whose image I could create in my own mind,
To live with that image.¹⁰²

However real the 'documents', they are being used to create something not real at all: an 'image [...] in my own mind'. In other words, Colby seeks to deposit real information into his memory, where he will be able to combine it with his imagination, desires, and regrets to create a father that never existed.

As in *The Cocktail Party*, the unreliability of memory as a storage facility is exploited by Eliot as a plot device. However, in *The Confidential Clerk*, things take a more sinister turn, as characters accuse each other of forgetting in order to make their version of events appear the more authentic. Throughout the play, Sir Claude and Lady Elizabeth attempt to persuade each other that they remember incorrectly. On one of the more innocent occasions, Lady Elizabeth claims that she was the one who told her husband to hire Colby: 'This is not the first sign that I've noticed / Of your memory failing. I must persuade you / To have a course of treatment with Dr. Rebmann'.¹⁰³ What initially seems marital bickering has important consequences, as

¹⁰¹ *The Confidential Clerk*, 286.

¹⁰² See Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, ed. Margaret Cardwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3; *The Confidential Clerk*, 285.

¹⁰³ *The Confidential Clerk*, 232.

they both accuse the other of inventing memories to claim Colby as their own child; ‘the best one can do is to guide her delusions / In the right direction.’¹⁰⁴ When Lady Elizabeth becomes convinced that Colby is her son – after hearing some details about his upbringing – Sir Claude persuades her against the evidence of her own memory:

What has happened is that, brooding on the past,
You began to think of Colby as what your son would be,
And then you began to see him as your son,
And then, any name you heard would have seemed the right one.¹⁰⁵

Sir Claude enforces the mutual exclusivity of the false memory and reality by creating a distinction between ‘what has happened’, a concrete assertion associated with his own perspective, and the conditional perfect ‘would have seemed’. Of course, the great irony about the play is that they are both wrong; neither of their versions of events are correct.

Although the notion of the past as false reaches its climax at the revelation of Colby’s parentage, suspicions are rife throughout the play. Early on, Colby bonds with Sir Claude – his presumed father – over their shared aspirations to be artists. Colby, an organist, is excited to discover that Sir Claude had a passion for pottery (conveniently close to ‘poetry’), although the latter confesses that his aspirations have been abandoned: ‘I should never have become a first-rate potter.’¹⁰⁶ In gifting Colby a piano at which to practise, Sir Claude hopes to allow his son to entertain a life where he had become an organist after all, to ‘go through the private door / Into the real world, as I do, sometimes.’¹⁰⁷ Later, Lucasta will borrow this image when encouraging Colby to continue his hobby: ‘You have your secret garden; to which you can retire / And lock the gate behind you.’¹⁰⁸ Unlike Sir Claude, however, Colby’s ambition to be

¹⁰⁴ *The Confidential Clerk*, 234.

¹⁰⁵ *The Confidential Clerk*, 260.

¹⁰⁶ *The Confidential Clerk*, 237.

¹⁰⁷ *The Confidential Clerk*, 237.

¹⁰⁸ *The Confidential Clerk*, 245.

an artist persists, along with the suspicion that he has not become the man he was supposed to be:

And yet from time to time, when I least expect it,
When my mind is cleared and empty, walking in the street
Or waking in the night, then the former person,
The person I used to be, returns to take possession.¹⁰⁹

Loading the clauses with qualifying information, Colby's ruminations try to push away his instinct to be an organist. In fact, that alternative path is revealed to be the one Colby should have taken, when Mrs Guzzard confesses that Colby's father was actually 'Herbert Guzzard. / You are the son of a disappointed musician'.¹¹⁰ Colby takes it as a sign that the alternative timeline must be pursued: 'I thought I didn't want to be an organist / When I found I had no chance of getting to the top – / [...] But my father was an unsuccessful organist.'¹¹¹ Having distanced himself from Sir Claude – who had given up his dreams of being a potter – Colby is free to embrace his paternal inheritance and become the 'unsuccessful' organist at Eggerson's church.

Colby's decision to follow in his real father's footsteps summons an important issue in Eliot's post-*Quartets* work. For if Eliot 'had always been wary of repeating himself', as he testified in 'Poetry and Drama', why would he allow the final Act of *The Cocktail Party* to seem an 'epilogue', and the last words of *The Confidential Clerk* to feature the main character pledging to re-do his father's life?¹¹² The play itself ruminates on the answer. Before Colby's true identity is revealed, Lady Elizabeth is convinced she has met him before, and cites her dalliance with reincarnation: 'I was going to say, if I believed in it / I should have said that we had known

¹⁰⁹ *The Confidential Clerk*, 235.

¹¹⁰ *The Confidential Clerk*, 286.

¹¹¹ *The Confidential Clerk*, 288.

¹¹² Martin Browne, *Making of Eliot's Plays*, 90.

each other / In some previous incarnation.’¹¹³ The ‘if’ clause pushes Elizabeth into the conditional perfect, the tense that her husband had used to convince her that her own memory was deceiving her, but here she is using it to allow a possibility, rather than to deny one. Despite this more ambiguous introduction of the idea by Lady Elizabeth, reincarnation is also a self-fulfilling prophecy in the play. Sir Claude, assuming Colby to be his son, claims of his artistic aspirations that ‘It’s my own experience / That you are repeating.’¹¹⁴ The irony for Sir Claude is that Colby is not his son at all, and he will not be ‘repeating’ his experience. But just as we think Eliot to be pouring cold water on reincarnation, he has Colby proclaim his intentions to become a failed musician just like his father.

In Eliot’s post-*Quartets* writing, repetition is often linked to closure. The endings of both the *Clerk* and *The Cocktail Party* promise a definitive conclusion, only to offer repetition in its place. But repetition does not only replace closure in structure, it also provides an opportunity for deferral on a linguistic level. Eliot’s plays contain a great deal of quotation from his earlier work, with the most frequent allusions being to *The Waste Land*. In *The Cocktail Party*, echoes of Eliot’s most famous poem appear during the opening discussion in the first Act, in which Celia claim that Julia does an excellent ‘Lithuanian accent’, to which Peter asks ‘I thought she was Belgian’ and Alex replies ‘Her father belonged to a Baltic family - / One of the *oldest* Baltic families / With a branch in Sweden and one in Denmark.’¹¹⁵ In this exchange we are reminded of the line in the opening of ‘The Burial of the Dead’: ‘Bin gar keine Russin, stamm’ aus Litauen, echt deutsch’ [‘I am not Russian; I come from Lithuania, a real German’], used to make an ironic statement about European identity in the aftermath of the First World War.¹¹⁶ By inserting the line into drawing-room chatter, Eliot seems to poke fun at

¹¹³ *The Confidential Clerk*, 255.

¹¹⁴ *The Confidential Clerk*, 235.

¹¹⁵ *The Cocktail Party*, 236.

¹¹⁶ *The Waste Land*, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 55.

interpretations of his earlier work.¹¹⁷ Later in the play, Eliot makes another reference to *The Waste Land*, when Reilly counsels Celia to take a long journey: 'Both ways avoid the final desolation / Of solitude in the phantasmal world / Of imagination, shuffling memories and desires.'¹¹⁸ The opposing impulses of 'memory' and 'desire', respectively forwards- and backwards-looking, are rejected in Celia's decision to travel to a Mission in Kinkanja, where she seeks a new – unrepeatable – experience which ultimately leads to her death. In *The Elder Statesman*, phrasing from 'Death by Water' is used to haunt a character with information from the past: 'Poor ghost! Reckoning up its profit and loss / And wondering why it bothered about such trifles.'¹¹⁹ This allusion, to Phlebas's 'profit and loss', appears at a crucial moment. Just as Michael complains that he is tired of being expected to repeat his father's role in public life, 'A kind of prolongation of your existence, / A representative carrying on business in your absence', the quotation from *The Waste Land* reminds Eliot of his own inheritance from an earlier period in his career.¹²⁰

The fundamental reason that Eliot's self-quotation troubles our understanding of his 'lastness', is that it is difficult to decide how to interpret it. On the one hand, we might read self-quotation as an attempt to demonstrate the interconnectedness of his *oeuvre*. By inserting short quotations from earlier work, Eliot may be seen to be forcing a sense of coherence that he had explored in his essays. On the other hand, as Edward Said might argue, repetition could be read as a manifestation of the 'late' Eliot's 'disregard' for the continuity of his body of work, parodying the interpretative possibilities of his earlier writing.¹²¹ Adorno's thinking about Wagner's late work, *Parsifal*, includes the idea that the piece's fanfare motif 'seems as though

¹¹⁷ See also *The Family Reunion*, in *Collected Plays*, 55-122 (57):

I have always told Amy she should go south in the winter.
Were I in Amy's position, I would go south in the winter.
I would follow the sun, not wait for the sun to come here.
I would go south in the winter, if I could afford it.

¹¹⁸ *The Cocktail Party*, 191. See *The Waste Land*, (l. 3).

¹¹⁹ *The Elder Statesman*, 332. See *The Waste Land* (l. 314).

¹²⁰ *The Elder Statesman*, 332.

¹²¹ Said, *On Late Style*, 6.

it were already a quotation from memory’, one of many motifs which are ‘much less interwoven, less implicated in the course of the composition, as well as less varied. Often they are just arranged one after another like little pictures with a kind of deliberate insouciance.’¹²² In this reading, repetition – so often used to tie a piece together – is an agent of fragmentation, something Rose Rosengard Subotnik, in her discussion of Beethoven, argues: ‘repetition in itself is not a quasi-logical technique but an intrinsically arbitrary and contingent technique’.¹²³ Eliot’s re-enactment of motifs from his earlier work can thus be seen to pull in opposite directions, as his plays dramatize the internal struggle between wholeness and fragmentation that consumed him after Vivien’s death.

The Stylistics of Retirement in the Post-*Quartets* Poetry

Repetition and self-quotation in Eliot’s plays constitute two key stylistic manifestations of ‘lastness’ that have a direct correspondence to the pursuit of development in his post-*Quartets* essays. However, it would be remiss of any study of Eliot’s creative work after 1947 to glide over one very simple question: why plays and not poems? Eliot *did* write poems after *Four Quartets*, but given that he received the Nobel Prize for ‘his outstanding, pioneer contribution to present-day poetry’, and voiced admiration for the likes of Yeats’s and Goethe’s final periods, Eliot’s relative lack of poetic output is striking.¹²⁴ In the eighteen months after his own death in 1965, Eliot produced fewer than fifteen poems, only three of which would appear in

¹²² See Theodor W. Adorno, ‘On the Score of Parsifal’, trans. Anthony Barone, *Music & Letters* 76.3 (1995), 384-97 (385).

¹²³ Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 198.

¹²⁴ ‘The Nobel Prize in Literature 1948’, <nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1948/summary/> [accessed 20/10/23].

his *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (1963).¹²⁵ While we may remark that Eliot's creative energies were being redirected largely into his plays, we realise that *The Cocktail Party* was worked on between 1948 and 1949, the *Clerk* between 1951 and 1953, and *The Elder Statesman* in 1956 and 1957. For the large part of this period, Eliot had a reasonable state of health and the leisure time needed to write a good deal of poetry. So what, we might ask, did plays give to his final phase that poetry did not? and how do the poems which he did write inform our understanding of 'lastness'?

The turn to drama had been a long time coming. In Martin Browne's account, the *Four Quartets* are made to seem a diversion, forcing Eliot's playwriting 'into hibernation'.¹²⁶ In many ways, Eliot seemed to agree. After *The Family Reunion*, he had set himself a number of goals for his dramatic verse that were interrupted by the war. In the important essay already discussed, 'Poetry and Drama', he claimed that a poet has to 'approach the writing of a verse play in a different frame of mind from that to which he has been accustomed in his previous work'.¹²⁷ What is striking in this essay, and has been little remarked upon, is the way in which Eliot justifies the writing of further plays as being primarily to solve a succession of problems. The word 'problem' appears fourteen times, and always guides the transition from one play into the next: 'in *Murder in the Cathedral* I had not solved any general problem'; 'Here, then, were two problems left unsolved: that of the idiom and that of the metric'.¹²⁸ One can see how, for a man troubled by a crisis of uncreative 'lastness', the prospect of solving a progressive problem in dramatic verse was more appealing – because more definitively achievable – than the comparatively aimless task of writing poems.

¹²⁵ 'To Walter de la Mare' (1948), 'The Cultivation of Christmas Trees' (1954), and 'A Dedication to my Wife' (1963).

¹²⁶ Martin Browne, *Making of Eliot's Plays*, 152.

¹²⁷ 'Poetry and Drama', 595.

¹²⁸ 'Poetry and Drama', 596-97.

In February 1947, soon after Vivien's death, Eliot was asked to contribute a poem for the *Tribute to Walter de la Mare on his Seventy-fifth Birthday* (1948).¹²⁹ When it was announced that Eliot – de la Mare's junior by 15 years – was to be honoured with a similar volume in 1948, he complained about each of their 'tombstones': 'Even Walter is too young to have such a *festschrift*, and perhaps it will be the death of both of us; but I couldn't well not appear in Walter's book could I?'¹³⁰ This funereal obligation stimulated two different poems, the first, 'Montpelier Row', was unknown until its discovery in 2002, and the second, 'To Walter de la Mare', appeared in the *Tribute* and was later published in the *Collected Poems*.¹³¹ 'Montpelier Row' takes as its subject the street on which de la Mare lived in Twickenham. The poem is a sonnet rooted in, but frequently departing from, an iambic tetrameter line:

DE LA MARE delicate
China tea and porcelain
Matter-of-fact initiate
Leans against the window pane

Vista of Hanoverian trees
His right décor (take care!) which yet
The old enchanter, if he please
May change to haunt of marmoset

Amphisbaena, or ichneumon;
Dissolve the real, make real the dream:
Domestic, alien, kind, aloof —
One moment: And we have the proof
As down the far, invisible stream
There drifts, there drifts the visible swan.¹³²

Despite being a poem intended to commemorate de la Mare, the satiric target of the poem is less its dedicatee than Eliot's own quatrain poems. The opening postponement of the verb and reference to 'window pane' is certainly an echo of 'Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service':

¹²⁹ See *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 1057.

¹³⁰ 'To I. A. Richards, 10 May 1948', quoted in *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 1058.

¹³¹ See 'Montpelier Row', in *The Walter de la Mare Society Magazine* (July 2002), 7-13.

¹³² 'Montpelier Row', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 309-10.

‘Polyphiloprogenitive / The sapient sutlers of the Lord / Drift across the window panes’.¹³³ We are reminded, too, of ‘Whispers of Immortality’ by the ‘haunt of marmoset’ which draws on ‘The couched Brazilian jaguar / Compels the scampering marmoset’.¹³⁴ If any more evidence were needed, the ‘Vista of Hanoverian trees’ may remind us of ‘A Cooking Egg’: ‘*Views of the Oxford Colleges*’.¹³⁵ Such a reading is compounded by the fact that the poem is printed alongside a set of ‘Notes’, one of which singles out its esoteric vocabulary much remarked upon by reviewers of the *Poems* (1920): ‘For the habits of the amphisbaena, see a poem on this subject by A. E. Housman, published in a periodical of London University.’¹³⁶ The reference to Housman’s light verse adds to the parodic tint of this poem, as we are recommended to consult a Classical expert, only to discover a poem about ‘Thomasina’ who has been bitten ‘on the toe and on the heel.’¹³⁷ ‘Montpelier Row’, then, far from being a poem dedicated to de la Mare’s achievement, is consumed by the idea of self-parody. The ‘shock’ of Vivien’s death – which occurred just before this poem was written – clearly demanding the reckoning with the past that we saw in the prose.

Aside from the act of self-parody, ‘Montpelier Row’ also reveals something specific about Eliot’s stylistics of ‘lastness’. The final ‘Note’ that Eliot includes refers to the concluding two lines of the sonnet: ‘As down the far, invisible stream / There drifts, there drifts the visible swan’ (13-14). Eliot glosses them with the following:

Stream is weak, but what can you do with *Thames*? It has no rhyme, for, if I mistake not, an A is too long and an E is too short. The only comparable vowel is the A in Pall Mall, which does not rhyme, and could not have been introduced into this sonnet anyway. The nearest rhyme is the name of the German town *Ems*, and if that is pronounced correctly, it is not the same vowel either. And *Ems* would have been still more remote from the subject than Pall Mall.¹³⁸

¹³³ ‘Mr. Eliot’s Sunday Morning Service’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 49.

¹³⁴ ‘Whispers of Immortality’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 47.

¹³⁵ ‘A Cooking Egg’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 38.

¹³⁶ ‘Montpelier Row’, 310.

¹³⁷ A. E. Housman, ‘Thomasina and the Amphisbæna’, in *The Poems of A. E. Housman*, ed. Archie Burnett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 269.

¹³⁸ ‘Montpelier Row’, 310.

Referring to this ‘Note’, Ricks and McCue wager that ‘the author’s notes were probably not intended for print but for discussion’.¹³⁹ While it certainly reads like one of Eliot’s letters to Hayward during the writing of *Four Quartets* examined in the previous chapter, the impulse here seems to be to parody that process, and, by extension, Eliot’s compositional habits more broadly. He had, of course, found more than one adequate place for ‘Thames’ in *The Waste Land*: ‘Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song’ (183), and: ‘Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street, / The pleasant whining of a mandoline’ (260-61), and even found a half-rhyme in ‘Growltiger’s Last Stand’: ‘From Gravesend up to Oxford he pursued his evil aims, / Rejoicing in his title of “The Terror of the Thames”’.¹⁴⁰ There are – despite his claim – many possible full rhymes: ‘hems’, ‘gems’, perhaps even ‘them’, ‘condemn’. There is something striking, also, about the prosody of the lines to which this ‘Note’ refers. The compression that is needed to make ‘invisible’ three syllables, and ‘visible’ only two is the kind of act that Eliot would never have tolerated in a poem of a different kind. He could easily have rearranged the line so that ‘stream’ would not find itself at the end (which he complains about in the ‘Note’), but either lacks the will to do so, or revels in the ability to mock himself. Either way, Eliot’s awareness that he was writing a poem to commemorate an idea of old age, de la Mare’s seventy-fifth birthday, brings up its own manifestations of a stylistic lastness.

To examine this notion more clearly, we turn to the most important poem with respect to Eliot’s stylistics of ‘lastness’ in this post-1947 period. ‘The Cultivation of Christmas Trees’ (1954) was Eliot’s final poem in the *Ariel* series, written to appear on the Faber & Faber Christmas card just as ‘Journey of the Magi’ (1927), ‘A Song for Simeon’ (1928), ‘Animula’ (1929), ‘Marina’ (1930) and ‘Triumphal March’ (1931) had two decades earlier. Like *The Confidential Clerk*, the poem is centred around generational conflict, presenting the

¹³⁹ Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 1213.

¹⁴⁰ ‘Growltiger’s Last Stand’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, II, 8.

juxtaposition in attitude between a child's first sight of a Christmas tree, and an old man's 'eightieth Christmas / (By "eightieth" meaning whichever is last)'.¹⁴¹ The opening stanza complains about 'several attitudes towards Christmas, / Some of which we may disregard' (1-2), which are labelled as the 'social, the torpid, the patently commercial, / The rowdy (the pubs being open till midnight) / And the childish' (3-5). In early drafts of the poem now residing at King's College, Cambridge, Eliot associated himself with this grinch-like perspective of 'lastness', referencing his previous Christmas poems composed in the 1920s and '30s:

Since I am bidden once more to compose
A set of verses suitable to the season
Or at least not wholly unsuitable, at Christmas,
For an unknown giver and an unknown recipient,
Twenty-odd years later, when the fancy is less fertile,
The mind more discursive: let me say how I feel about it.¹⁴²

The begrudging tone strikes us as being at odds with the message of the poem, of ensuring that the 'reverence and the gaiety' of youth 'may not be forgotten in later experience'. Duly, this opening was replaced with the discussion of the 'attitudes' at Christmas that survives in the published version, but the mention of 'fancy' as 'less fertile' and 'the mind more discursive' can be seen to survive in the poem through its structure and prosody.

The poem's second and final sentence extends over twenty-six knotted lines, deferring the sense of closure as Eliot does in the plays. It begins with the framing for the subsequent remarks: 'The child wonders at the Christmas Tree: / Let him continue in the spirit of wonder' (9-10). After this clause follow four long dependent clauses beginning 'So that', each one detailing the way in which the 'spirit of wonder' is to be preserved and repeated in old age. The second of these clauses consists of a set of lines which could easily have slotted into the *terza rima* section of 'Little Gidding':

¹⁴¹ 'The Cultivation of Christmas Trees', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 109.

¹⁴² 'Drafts of "The Cultivation of Christmas Trees"', Hayward Bequest, King's College, Cambridge; 'Essays, Addresses, and Verses, 1930-1955' (GBR/0272/HB/H/1 E), 9.

So that the reverence and the gaiety
 May not be forgotten in later experience
 In the bored habituation, the fatigue, the tedium,
 The awareness of death, the consciousness of failure,
 Or in the piety of the convert

(18-22).

Also carried over from 'Little Gidding' is the ending of the vast majority of the lines with a trisyllabic word, 'amazement', 'appearance', 'commercial', 'experience', 'tedium', 'emotion', 'failure', 'possessions', 'occasion', all of which encumber the end of the line, stunting its forward momentum. Associating himself with 'the eightieth Christmas / (By "eightieth" meaning whichever is last)', Eliot adds the biographical and the religious connotations of 'lastness' to the stylistic symptoms:

The accumulated memories of annual emotion
 May be concentrated into a great joy
 Which shall be also a great fear, as on the occasion
 When fear came upon every soul:
 Because the beginning shall remind us of the end
 And the first coming of the second coming.

(29-34).

This does not strike us as a very festive end to the poem, with its discussion of 'fear' and 'the second coming', but that is precisely Eliot's point, that the commercialisation of Christmas has disconnected Christians from the Bible story. This incongruous combination of 'joy' and 'fear' links to the eschatological feelings that Eliot voiced to Emily Hale after Vivien's death, and this 'last' Christmas, which should retain the 'wonder' of the first, seems intent on viewing the past within the present: 'accumulated memories of annual emotion'.

The original opening of 'The Cultivation of Christmas Trees', with its begrudging 'Since I am bidden once more to compose / A set of verses suitable to the season', paints an image of an Eliot forced out of poetic retirement by Faber in order to sell a Christmas card. Eliot may have had cause to be annoyed; in 1946, the National Insurance Act introduced a State Pension for all workers on a self-contributory basis, which started for women at sixty and for

men at sixty-five.¹⁴³ Eliot, who turned sixty-five in September 1953, turned to the ‘Christmas Trees’ poem justified for wanting a quiet retirement. At Faber, Eliot had been reducing his responsibilities for some time. As early as 1952, he posited: ‘When I say “retire” for myself, I meant that, if my next play is reasonably successful, I should consider surrendering my salary, and asking (for a few further years) only for a room and a secretary’.¹⁴⁴ Eliot felt that ‘any usefulness I have had for F. & F. is a thing of the past.’¹⁴⁵ The firm at large, Toby Faber claims, was in its own crisis of lastness: ‘the company had no great sense of how it was going to carry on once its current leadership had retired.’¹⁴⁶ The knighthood awarded to Geoffrey Faber in 1954 was ‘confirmation’ of this, according to Toby Faber, placing ‘the seal on his career, and by extension on his company.’¹⁴⁷ Just before turning to the ‘Christmas Trees’ poem, Eliot wrote two short poems to commemorate Faber’s knighthood and impending retirement. The first, ‘AMAZ’D astronomers did late descry’ parodies a Classical inscription lauding the newly appointed knight of the realm: ‘The Heav’ns approved, and all the Muses Nine’.¹⁴⁸ But the versification is not so simple for such an engraving; readers are forced to stress alternate syllables in ‘astronomers’ and ‘luminary’ against their natural cadence in order to retain the iambic pentameter. In the other inscription poem, ‘Verses to Honour and Magnify Sir Geoffrey Faber Kt’, the lines similarly force us into difficult metrical situations.¹⁴⁹ There is the compression of ‘various’ to two syllables, and ‘eximious’ to three, and the disruption of the stress pattern caused by the trochaic ‘Cunning’ and ‘Practis’d’ in an otherwise regular iambic pentameter. In these two poems acutely interested in ideas of retirement, Eliot seems to be

¹⁴³ See W. A. Robinson, ‘The National Insurance Act, 1946’, *The Modern Law Review* 10.2 (1947), 171-79.

¹⁴⁴ ‘To Geoffrey Faber, 18 October 1952’, quoted in Toby Faber, *Faber & Faber: The Untold Story* (London: Faber & Faber, 2019), 209.

¹⁴⁵ ‘To Geoffrey Faber, 26 October 1952’, quoted in Faber, *The Untold Story*, 212.

¹⁴⁶ Faber, *The Untold Story*, 200.

¹⁴⁷ Faber, *The Untold Story*, 200.

¹⁴⁸ ‘AMAZ’D astronomers did late descry’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 312.

¹⁴⁹ ‘VERSES To Honour and Magnify Sir Geoffrey Faber Kt.’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 313.

refusing to play metrical ball. One manifestation of stylistic ‘lastness’, then, seems to be either wilful (if we are kind) or accidental (if we are not) prosodic mismanagement.

The final clutch of poems to be considered here takes this notion of a stylistics of retirement and transplants it into an account of Eliot’s marriage to Valerie in 1957. Although the decision to marry Valerie is often considered the dramatic final act of Eliot’s life, a complete shift in genre and tone to what had come before, her inspiration to his verse seems to have been infinitely less productive than that provided by the dissatisfaction of the relationships with Vivien or Emily Hale. Eliot wrote a total of five poems for Valerie in the late 1950s, three of which remained – until 2015 – in an unpublished exercise book. These previously unknown poems, ‘How the Tall Girl and I Play Together’, ‘Sleeping Together’, and ‘How the Tall Girl’s Breasts Are’ all present a speaker drunk with sexual energy, obsessed with – and subtly jealous of – the youthful vigour of his partner. ‘Sleeping Together’ and ‘How the Tall Girl’s Breasts Are’ are the only two poems in the entirety of their first volume of *The Poems of T. S. Eliot* (2015) that receive no textual commentary from Ricks and McCue at all.¹⁵⁰ We may wonder why this might be; it is not due to propriety, for the *Columbiad*’s obscene innuendoes receive textual commentary elsewhere in the edition.¹⁵¹ One can only assume that the editors felt these poems to be completely devoid of intertextual interest, despite – as we will see – the presence of words like ‘concupiscence’, and phrases which, in any other poem, would be certain of Ricksian commentary, such as ‘Unconscious but aware’ (14), and ‘A happy prisoner’ (17).

The structure of ‘How the Tall Girl and I Play Together’ juxtaposes short, simple statements with joyfully effusive descriptions of sexual intimacy. With the exception of the

¹⁵⁰ ‘How the Tall Girl and I Play Together’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 316; ‘Sleeping Together’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 317; ‘How the Tall Girls’ Breasts Are’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 318.

¹⁵¹ See ‘Improper Rhymes’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, II, 247-90.

fourth stanza, each stanza begins and ends with the same framing sentences, and allows a description of intercourse to extend itself between them:

I love a tall girl. When we lie in bed
 She on her back and I stretched upon her,
 And our middle parts are busy with each other,
 My toes play with her toes and my tongue with her tongue,
 And all the parts are happy. Because she is a tall girl.

(10-14).

Eliot takes the oddly prescriptive rhetorical invitation of its title as an opportunity for self-indulgence. The simplicity of the framing sentences creates an impression of childish glee, of a poet refusing the kind of artfulness that might otherwise characterise a poem with such a title. Nevertheless, there is something strange about the choice of a collaborative verb like ‘Play’, especially as the only person playing is, largely, the speaker. After the beloved assumes various positions, ‘sits on my knee’, and ‘sits astraddle on my lap’, the speaker leads the ‘play’: ‘I can just take her nipple in my lips / And stroke it with my tongue’ (8-9); ‘My toes play with her toes and my tongue with her tongue’ (13); ‘I can stroke her back and her long white legs’ (18). It is her height that Eliot, with his pronounced stoop (much like Goethe’s in the picture at his office) admires above all: ‘I love a tall girl. / I have a tall girl. / I am glad she is not a small girl’ (21-23).

The next poem in the previously unpublished trio, ‘Sleeping Together’, repeats the image of a couple in bed, this time picturing the sleeping partner being caressed by the speaker:

Sleeping together includes a little waking,
 Waking for the joy of watching over the beloved
 Listening for the deep and regular breathing
 That tells me she is sleeping.

(1-4).

What strikes us about the opening is not only the abundance of present continuous verbs, but how inevitably they seem to flow from one into the other, from ‘sleeping’ to ‘waking’, ‘waking’ to ‘watching’, ‘listening’ for the ‘breathing’ and back to where we started, with ‘waking’. The

stress pattern, which emphasises this movement, seems a little too convenient as to be almost awkward, and yet this awkwardness also possesses a certain lack of shame, such as that which allows successive lines to end with the same noun: ‘My fingers move softly below, to her navel / And touch the delicate down beneath her navel’ (9-10). Although the speaker asserts his ‘Confidence / Why should my hand wake her?’, one finds it difficult to move past the gawkiness of his delivery.

It is a mixture of confidence and awkwardness that also colours ‘How the Tall Girl’s Breasts Are’. The descriptive title, as in ‘How the Tall Girl and I Play Together’, implies a similarly prescriptive rhetorical exercise, but Eliot’s speaker takes pleasure in postponing the answer:

When my beloved stands tall and naked
Proud and rejoicing, not in her own beauty
But in the knowledge of the power of her beauty
To quicken my desire (as I stand erect before her
And quiver with the swelling of my concupiscence)
Her breasts look ripe and full
In their summer of perfection.

(1-7).

Something about the unfolding of the clauses may remind us of parts of *Four Quartets* and of the loading of clauses in *The Confidential Clerk*, specifically the additive construction of ‘not.../ But... / To... as...’ which delays the subject of the sentence as Eliot does in the setting of the countryside scene in ‘East Coker’.¹⁵² So too does the termination of the lines with weak stresses and the Latinate ‘concupiscence’, with its theological connotations, encumber the lines with an awkwardness that invades the tableau of the speaker’s bedroom. The resolution of the stanza in the clichéd ‘summer of perfection’ compounds such an impression, as the apparent freedom of the lovers sits oddly with a feeling of self-consciousness. There is more discomfort, this time for the voyeuristic reader, as the speaker describes his beloved’s breasts when she

¹⁵² See ‘East Coker’, I, 14ff.

‘lies upon her back’ as ‘not ripe but as if still ripening / As they must have looked / When she was fifteen’ (10-12). His attraction to her youthfulness is revealing, especially in his choice of ‘ripeness’, given how it chimes with the interest in the beloved’s height, and the fact that Eliot was hardly in his ‘summer of perfection’. In these intimate poems, then, we receive hints of a speaker jealous of the vigour which both he and his verse otherwise seem to lack.

The ‘Tall Girl’ poems may not receive much attention from Ricks and McCue, but another of Eliot’s last poems caused such outrage to F. R. Leavis that he was driven to taping together the relevant pages from his copy of the *Collected Poems 1909-1962*.¹⁵³ The ‘Dedication to my Wife’ was first written as the epigraph to *The Elder Statesman* (1959), before a new version, slightly adapted, appeared in 1963 as the final piece in the *Collected Poems*. Both versions contain the same opening, with a description of a couple in bed together that could have been drawn from one of the ‘Tall Girl’ poems:

To whom I owe the leaping delight
That quickens my senses in our wakingtime
And the rhythm that governs the repose of our sleepingtime¹⁵⁴

By adding ‘time’ onto those awkwardly forced gerunds from ‘Sleeping Together’, Eliot makes them appear even more awkward and childish. The strange formulation that situates that noun ‘sleepingtime’ within a convoluted phrase: ‘rhythm that governs the repose’ is of particular interest. This kind of line, we might argue, betrays an older, exaggeratedly articulate speaker trying his best to embrace an experience of almost childish glee. The main difference between the two published versions of the poem is the conclusion. The *Elder Statesman*-version rounds off with a conventional dedication to Valerie:

To you I dedicate this book, to return as best I can
With words a little part of what you have given me.
The words mean what they say, but some have a further meaning

¹⁵³ See Christopher Ricks, *Decisions and Revisions in T. S. Eliot* (London: British Library, 2003), 93.

¹⁵⁴ See ‘A Dedication to My Wife’, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 219; ‘To My Wife’, in *Elder Statesman*, 294.

For you and me only.

(8-11).

The version in the *Collected Poems*, meanwhile, has a different impulse entirely:

No peevish winter wind shall chill
No sullen tropic sun shall wither
The roses in the rose-garden which is ours and ours only

But this dedication is for others to read:
These are private words addressed to you in public.

(8-12).

What this alternative conclusion offers is a series of allusions to Eliot's earlier work. 'Peevish winter wind', we might argue, echoes the 'peevish gutter' in 'Gerontion', and the multiple images of 'wind' in the poem: 'Gull against the wind, in the windy straits / Of Belle Isle'.¹⁵⁵ 'Tropic', meanwhile, seems consciously drawn from 'Little Gidding', with its description of 'midwinter spring': 'Suspended in time, between pole and tropic' (I, 3). The 'rose-garden', meanwhile, is a clear reference to 'Burnt Norton', *The Family Reunion*, and *The Confidential Clerk*, perhaps co-opting that image so important to his relationship with Emily Hale for this dedication to Valerie, as he did with the nickname 'Tall girl'.¹⁵⁶ These allusions, one might argue, function in a similar way to the repetitions in his plays, seeking to pull all of his work together in this, the final piece of his *Collected Poems*.

Of the many tensions that come out of an examination of Eliot's post-*Quartets* poems, the most pressing for our purposes are those that exist between obligation and self-indulgence, confidence and awkwardness, and retirement and vigour. These are all tensions which manifest themselves stylistically, in the fun Eliot pokes at himself through self-parody, the almost inescapable tendency to repeat, and the encumbering of the ends of lines with weak stresses.

¹⁵⁵ 'Gerontion', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 31-33.

¹⁵⁶ See 'Burnt Norton', *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 179; *The Family Reunion*, 107; *Confidential Clerk*, 245. On Emily Hale as the 'Tall girl', see 'To Emily Hale, 10 January 1939', *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/1442> and 'To Emily Hale, 11 May 1936', *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/1483>.

As was noted earlier, integral to Eliot's experience of 'lastness' is the anxiety of what comes afterwards, and it has been argued above that repetition and self-quotation represented one way of deferring that encounter. By the early 1960s, however, it was becoming increasingly clear to Eliot that his health would not allow him to live and work for much longer. In the final section of this chapter, we turn to the question of how he conceived of the reality of 'lastness' in his final major work, *The Elder Statesman*, by comparing it with the many memorial pieces that he wrote for friends, colleagues, and artistic contemporaries.

Things that Last: Permanence in *The Elder Statesman* and Eliot's Memorial Writing

In 1943, *The Times* contacted Cecil Day-Lewis to ask that he write their stock obituary for T. S. Eliot. Day-Lewis wasn't sure what provoked the newspaper's sudden need for the piece; he told John Hayward that 'they seem oddly apprehensive about our Subject's survival value.'¹⁵⁷ Perhaps it was Eliot's apparent disregard for his own life, fire-watching on Bloomsbury rooftops, or maybe it was 'Little Gidding', published the previous autumn, that represented a sense of artistic finality in the eyes of *The Times*. Whatever the motivation, Day-Lewis solicited Hayward's help with factual information: 'I have abbreviated some of your admirable material to make room for a longish critical paragraph, and patched some of my Utility writing into your beautiful garment, I will not say shroud.' But this premature 'shroud' had its kinks, particularly when discussing Eliot's personal life. Day-Lewis had mentioned Eliot's first wife: 'He married in 19[^] Vivien Haigh-Wood [?Brown], ~~whose long, estranging illness was a deep personal sorrow.~~' There were no children.'¹⁵⁸ The deletion, enacted in Hayward's pen, offers no

¹⁵⁷ Cecil Day-Lewis, 'To John Hayward, 21 June 1943', Hayward Bequest, King's College, Cambridge; 'Times Obituary of T. S. Eliot, 1946-1959' (GBR/0272/HB/M/2), 4.

¹⁵⁸ Cecil Day-Lewis, 'Draft of *Times* Obituary of T. S. Eliot', Hayward Bequest, King's College, Cambridge; 'Times Obituary of T. S. Eliot, (1946-1959)' (GBR/0272/HB/M/2).

substitute for the insight into Eliot's privacy; in fact, the final proof added only that Vivien 'died after a long illness in 1947'.¹⁵⁹ Day-Lewis did not see the problem: 'I hope you may feel that my reference to his private tragedy is passable; I am sure some reference is necessary and mine gives away nothing distastefully personal to the ordinary reader.' But Hayward clearly thought such a statement did not belong here. The published obituary of 1965 – most likely overseen by Valerie – did eventually allude to 'a long-drawn-out private tragedy which darkened his middle years', but the connection to Vivien went unmade.¹⁶⁰

The fuss over Eliot's obituary, more than twenty years before he actually died, reveals something important not only about Eliot, or the guardianship of his friends, but about the act of memorialising more broadly. Day-Lewis infers that some things are simply 'necessary' in a record of a life, but he meets an opposing impulse that qualifies necessity with revisionism. Bridget Fowler's study of the development of obituary writing positions the mid-twentieth-century at a crossroads between 'conventional', often laudatory, obituaries of public figures, and a newer form that encompasses critique and an increasing attention to private life.¹⁶¹ Eliot's own memorial writings seem particularly attuned to this formal inflection point. Although he never undertook to write the kinds of obituaries published by *The Times*, he offered his own kind of memorials, filled with often ambivalent reminiscences. For Eliot, though, memorial writing was not just a practical task involved in the wider ritual of death, it was also a highly theoretical exercise. One way that this becomes clearer is by putting that writing in touch with the creative work which, above all others, reveals the key tensions of the act of memorialising as Eliot saw them. Indeed, *The Elder Statesman*, as Eliot's final major work in verse, is the site on which his anxieties and our own projections about 'lastness' can be seen to come into most productive contact.

¹⁵⁹ See Day-Lewis, 'Proof of *Times* Obituary', Hayward Bequest King's College, Cambridge; 'Times Obituary of T. S. Eliot, (1946-1959)' (GBR/0272/HB/M/2).

¹⁶⁰ Cecil Day-Lewis, 'Mr T. S. Eliot, O.M.', *The Times*, Iss. 56211 (5 January 1965), 12.

¹⁶¹ Bridget Fowler, *The Obituary as Collective Memory* (New York; Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 43.

One of the main ideas to which Eliot draws our attention in his obituary writing is the timeliness of the moment of death and its effect on the shape of a life. In an unpublished telegram, ‘Homage to Paul Valéry’ (1945), he meditated on the relationship between literary periods and the lives of practitioners: ‘There are poets who die before their age has become conscious of them and who therefore die before their work has reached its social realisation. There are poets who survive their epoch who succeed or fail in adapting themselves to another age.’¹⁶² Perhaps implying himself in that final sentence, Eliot tells of how Valéry managed to find the chronological sweet-spot: ‘It is fitting that Valéry who more than any other poet in Europe was the poetic consciousness of his time should die at such a moment that future writers can speak of the age of Valéry’. In the enlarged, published version of this piece, ‘Leçon de Valéry’ (1946), Eliot’s thoughts turned from the ‘age of Valéry’ to his worries about the prolongation of his own life: ‘Valéry’s Europe is certainly finished, and I have to acknowledge that it is, in large part, my Europe too.’¹⁶³ This is Eliot admitting, perhaps, that everything he wrote after Valéry was merely an ‘Epilogue’. But though Eliot and Valéry’s time may have been over, the current of literary production goes on: ‘every language, to retain its vitality, must perpetually depart and return upon itself; but without the departure there is no return, and the returning is as important as the arrival.’¹⁶⁴ Ironically, that journey consists of words that are carried over from the past, specifically from *Four Quartets*: ‘We have to return to where we started from, but the journey has altered the starting place.’¹⁶⁵ The timing of death for Eliot, then, both is and is not important. It functions to give shape to the life that preceded it according to the rise and fall of the conventional narrative of life, but it also replays a departure and a return that has been enacted many times before, and is implicit in the everlasting life still to come.

¹⁶² ‘Homage to Paul Valéry’, *Complete Prose*, VI, 653-54 (653).

¹⁶³ ‘Leçon de Valéry’, *Complete Prose*, VI, 753-58 (754).

¹⁶⁴ ‘Leçon de Valéry’, 755.

¹⁶⁵ See ‘Leçon de Valéry’, 755; ‘Little Gidding’, 208.

In other obituary pieces, Eliot maintains this tension. In his memorial for ‘John Maynard Keynes’ (1946), he signals a broader perspective on the chronology of Keynes’s life: ‘His apparently scattered interests now appear as essential moments in a total development’.¹⁶⁶ ‘[E]ssential moments’ retains much of the flavour of the ‘still point’ in ‘Burnt Norton’, the seemingly timeless ‘moments’ that are preserved as they are, and yet also surviving into the present.¹⁶⁷ But behind this abstract survey of Keynes’s ‘development’, Eliot once again points to the practical timeliness of death: ‘Keynes’s death came suddenly – and unexpectedly – at a moment when his most recent public services were still fresh in the public memory.’¹⁶⁸ Keynes, like Valéry, died at just the right time, despite being at very different stages of their careers. In theories of ‘late style’, the timing of death has been one of the primary sticking points. In their recent compendium of essays that voices a great amount of suspicion for the critical idea of ‘lateness’, Gordon McMullan and Sam Smiles point to the example of Keats, whose last works have been seen to display characteristics of ‘lateness’: ‘insofar as they are – or are presumed to be – the final utterances of a major creative voice.’¹⁶⁹ Although Keats’s death was hardly sudden, what McMullan and Smiles’s collection demonstrates is that attempts to generalise about ‘lateness’ are almost always doomed to fail; death happens when it happens and (usually) cannot be predicted.

In *The Elder Statesman*, the narrative of a life is similarly shaped by its conclusion. Having recently retired from Parliament and moved into a convalescent home, Lord Claverton muses on the best time to die:

My obituary, if I had died in harness,
Would have occupied a column and a half
With an inset, a portrait taken twenty years ago.
In five years’ time, it will be half of that;

¹⁶⁶ ‘John Maynard Keynes’, *Complete Prose*, vi, 748–52 (749)

¹⁶⁷ See ‘Burnt Norton’, 181.

¹⁶⁸ ‘John Maynard Keynes’, 748.

¹⁶⁹ Gordon McMullan and Sam Smiles, ‘Introduction’, in *Late Style and its Discontents*, 1–12 (4).

In ten years' time, a paragraph.¹⁷⁰

That analogy of dying 'in harness' has an important relevance to what was said above regarding the stylistics of retirement in Eliot's poems, especially the obligation he felt to complete a Christmas poem to boost Faber & Faber's holiday sales. Claverton's worry about the effect on the narrative of his life is profound, as he pulls out the 'engagement books' which outline his daily life as an MP:

Every day, year after year, over my breakfast,
I have looked at this book – or one just like it –
You know I keep the old ones on a shelf together;
I could look in the right book, and find out what I was doing
Twenty years ago, to-day, at this hour of the afternoon.¹⁷¹

Claverton now checks his books 'Not over breakfast, but before tea', as Eliot reduces the progress of his life to the duration of a single day. His daughter, Monica, seeks to strangle his thirst for late-life activity: 'You know I'm to protect you / From your own restless energy – the inexhaustible / Sources of the power that wears out the machine.'¹⁷² But what troubles Claverton the most is not his 'restless energy', but the anxiety that he ought to have it: 'waiting, simply waiting, / With no desire to act, yet a loathing of inaction.' While this may sound like a mixture of 'Prufrock' and the *terza rima* passage in 'Little Gidding', it departs in important ways from the impulses of 'the rending pain of re-enactment / Of all that you have done, and been' (II, 85-86). Although Claverton has access to his 'engagement books', he is not 'fingering' the old pages – which he 'could' do – but instead is staring at the pages to come, those which lie 'empty'. The emphasis for Claverton, then, is not on the past but the future. For Monica, he seeks only to 'revel in gloom' of this static space: 'you're retired in a blaze of glory – You've read every word about you in the papers'.¹⁷³ The 'blaze of glory' sounds much like

¹⁷⁰ *The Elder Statesman*, 303.

¹⁷¹ *The Elder Statesman*, 301-02.

¹⁷² *The Elder Statesman*, 302.

¹⁷³ *The Elder Statesman*, 303.

a phrase that Eliot used elsewhere, in his memorial ‘Message on Charles Maurras’ (1953), when he used the French word for ‘firework’ in a discussion of posthumous reputation:

I can think of such in my own language: writers of such eminence that their every pronouncement, in their lifetime, seemed to their admirers – and perhaps to themselves – assured of enduring fame; yet whose reputation, after the journalistic *feux d’artifice* of the obituary moment, has begun to sink into oblivion.¹⁷⁴

Claverton, like Eliot, is cynical about any expression of ‘journalistic *feux d’artifice*’: ‘I don’t know which impressed me more, the insincerity / Of what was said about me, or of my reply’.¹⁷⁵ At this juncture, he is faced either with insincere celebration if he looks backwards, or a ‘fear of the vacuum’ if he looks forwards.

Like Geoffrey Faber, Claverton receives a commemorative gift upon this late-life milestone, but Eliot’s character is not so grateful for the ‘grudging contributions / That bought this piece of silver’.¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, it is Claverton’s complicity in the performance of a public persona that drives the plot of *The Elder Statesman*. He is visited by two figures from his past, Fred Culverwell – under the new name of Gomez – and Mrs Carghill, formerly known to Claverton as Maisie Montjoy. Each of them brings a secret that undermines Claverton’s authorised self-portrait. The former claims to be a witness to an incident in which Claverton ran over an ‘old man in the road’, a fact he seeks to exploit to blackmail his old friend to renew their acquaintance.¹⁷⁷ The latter, Maisie Montjoy, reveals herself to be his former lover, and interposes herself as the undoing of the ‘public man’ who retired in a ‘blaze of glory’: ‘You’ll still be playing a part / In your obituary, whoever writes it.’¹⁷⁸ Maisie is presented as a desperate hanger-on, an actress living in the past, and who wants nothing more than its ‘re-enactment’: ‘Please, Richard, just repeat my name – just once: / The name by which you knew me.’¹⁷⁹ The

¹⁷⁴ ‘Message on Charles Maurras’, *Complete Prose*, VII, 773-73 (773).

¹⁷⁵ *The Elder Statesman*, 302.

¹⁷⁶ *The Elder Statesman*, 312.

¹⁷⁷ *The Elder Statesman*, 312.

¹⁷⁸ *The Elder Statesman*, 324.

¹⁷⁹ *The Elder Statesman*, 321-22.

objectified text of history present in his ‘engagement books’ is a record of his public life, but there is not much room for the story of his love affair with Maisie; they are untrustworthy, like the ‘records’ of *The Confidential Clerk*. In recognition of that fact, Maisie produces a different set of documents, the love letters that Claverton had written to her in his youth:

I’m afraid I can’t show you the originals;
They’re in my lawyer’s safe. But I have photostats
Which are quite as good, I’m told. And I like to read them
In your own handwriting.¹⁸⁰

Her making of reproductions, ‘photostats’, displaces the original experience into another moment in time, a process which parallels that which takes place in her memory: ‘These memories are painful – but I cherish them.’¹⁸¹ These documents offer a portal into an alternative past that was not followed through, with obvious – and spiteful – reference to Eliot’s letters to Emily Hale.¹⁸² Nevertheless, no reproduction is a match for the aura of the ‘originals’, as she seeks the primal experience of his ‘handwriting’, much as he had remarked in his letters to Hale: ‘when I saw the handwriting that always thrills me I was thankful’.¹⁸³

Although Claverton sticks dogmatically to his version of the past for much of the play, he eventually reconciles himself to the truth in Maisie and Gomez’s accounts. While his daughter, Monica, counsels him ‘to escape’, Claverton objects: ‘What I want to escape from / Is myself, is the past. But what a coward I am, / To talk of escaping! And what a hypocrite!’¹⁸⁴ In his confession to Monica he acknowledges – though does not endorse – their versions of events; he confirms the incident described by Gomez that still ‘haunts’ him, as well as admitting that

¹⁸⁰ *The Elder Statesman*, 325.

¹⁸¹ *The Elder Statesman*, 323.

¹⁸² See ‘Directions to my Executors’, in ‘Statement on the Opening of the Emily Hale Letters at Princeton’, in *Eliot-Hale Letters*, <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/the-statements/>.

¹⁸³ ‘To Emily Hale, 3 November 1930’, *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/l4/>.

¹⁸⁴ *The Elder Statesman*, 337.

‘the ghost of the man I was / Still clings to the ghost of the woman who was Maisie.’¹⁸⁵ There is progress since the ‘rending pain of re-enactment’ in ‘Little Gidding’, as Claverton resists ‘brooding over faults I might well have forgotten’ and turns instead to expiation: ‘What has made the difference in the last five minutes / Is not the heinousness of my misdeeds / But the fact of my confession.’¹⁸⁶ In choosing to conclude the play with a confession, Eliot allies *The Elder Statesman* with the traditional associations of obituary writing. Bridget Fowler describes the original role of the obituary within the sacraments of preparation for burial: ‘It has its earliest roots in the religious framework in which people might assess the saved (“saint”, or a member of “the elect”), or the perpetrator of “venial sins” as opposed to mortal, irredeemable sins.’¹⁸⁷ Claverton’s movement towards the confession of his sins, then, is entirely consistent with the memorial impulses of the play’s structure, as he seeks to ensure that our last impression of him before his death is as one of the ‘saved’.

The status of an obituary as the last word on a life, a piece of writing which enshrines information into the permanent record, is a convention which underlies much of Eliot’s memorial writing. In his piece for Irving Babbitt (1941), for instance, he does not consider his former mentor capable of temporary influence: ‘he remains permanently an active influence; his ideas are permanently with one, as a measurement and test of one’s own.’¹⁸⁸ It is his memorial piece for Virginia Woolf (1941), however, which reveals a key tension in Eliot’s thinking, this time with relation to the notion of permanence. The obituary has puzzled critics for decades, particularly with relation to Eliot’s oddly judgmental remarks.¹⁸⁹ But Eliot himself

¹⁸⁵ *The Elder Statesman*, 344.

¹⁸⁶ *The Elder Statesman*, 345.

¹⁸⁷ Fowler, *Obituary as Collective Memory*, 41.

¹⁸⁸ ‘Memoir on Irving Babbitt’, *Complete Prose*, VI, 186-189 (188).

¹⁸⁹ See Megan Quigley, “‘What If?: New Insight into the Friendship of Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot’, *LA Review of Books* (27 December 2021), <lareviewofbooks.org/article/what-if-new-insight-into-the-friendship-of-virginia-woolf-and-t-s-eliot/> [accessed 15/10/23].

recognised this quality, and wrote to Woolf's widower, Leonard, to inform him that changes which he sought to make to the text had not been enacted by the editor of *Horizon*:

I only hope that the shades of difference indicated by my alterations will be too fine to matter for the general public. But they are important to me: because in my consciousness this was not the occasion either for a critique of Virginia's work or for the expression of personal feeling, and in endeavouring to imply both without stating them, I feared that I might produce a different effect from that intended. There is incidentally a kind of pomposity in the uncorrected text which is abhorrent. I had rather such a misfortune befell anything I wrote rather than this: and there is nothing to be done about it afterwards.¹⁹⁰

To Cyril Connolly at *Horizon*, Eliot was more candid, and struggled to contain his frustration:

'This is not the kind of article of which one can publish a variorum edition, and I think that silence had best be preserved; but I had rather this had happened to anything else than this.'¹⁹¹

Memorial pieces by design convey a sense of permanence, but in needing to give second thoughts – and for them not to be considered – creates uncertainty in the text 'abhorrent' not only to Woolf's memory, but to the very notion of memorialisation itself.

The incompatibility of last words and second thoughts in Eliot's memorial writing is an especially useful lens through which to consider the ending of *The Elder Statesman*. Although Claverton's confession to Monica, and his subsequent 'walk' over towards the beech tree imply a degree of finality, Eliot had a lot of trouble (as with his other plays) deciding how to end what he sensed might be his final major work.¹⁹² The play's producer, E. Martin Browne, informs us that the planning for the ending encompassed a number of different scenarios.¹⁹³ In early versions, Eliot included a 'thunderclap' and an ethereal 'Voice' – both derived from his Greek source, Sophocles' last work, *Oedipus at Colonus* – but discovered they did not quite fit with the shape of the play. Neither did the suggestion that Monica 'receive replies from Claverton

¹⁹⁰ 'To Leonard Woolf, 10 May 1941', *Letters*, ix, 825.

¹⁹¹ 'To Cyril Connolly, 10 May 1941', *Letters*, ix, supplementary online letters <tseliot.com/letters/volumes/letters_volume_9_unpublished/by-date/vol9letter_844>.

¹⁹² *The Elder Statesman*, 354-55.

¹⁹³ Martin Browne, *Making of Eliot's Plays*, 329ff.

through extra-sensory perception' seem very sensible.¹⁹⁴ In the published version, the relevance of Oedipus's death in the grove of the Eumenides is brought out through Claverton's last walk over to the 'great beech tree'; 'I felt drawn to that spot', he asserts, leaving Monica and Charles alone together for a moment before following.¹⁹⁵ Monica no longer feels anxious about her father's pursuers:

Age and decrepitude can have no terrors for me,
 Loss and vicissitude cannot appal me,
 Not even death can dismay or amaze me
 Fixed in the uncertainty of love unchanging.
 I feel utterly secure
 In you; I am part of you. Now take me to my father.¹⁹⁶

The use of the participle phrase, 'love unchanging', at the end of the line offers an important link to one of Eliot's final poems, 'Sleeping Together'. In doing so, Eliot imports those key tensions of obligation and self-indulgence, confidence and awkwardness, and retirement and vigour into this conclusive moment. It is a moment in which Monica herself loses all fear of 'lastness': 'Age and decrepitude can have no terrors for me'. We sense the peace that she has found in the idea of an afterlife, something that follows all of Eliot's post-1947 writing, as she calls both for her father and The Father.

The conclusion of *The Elder Statesman* and its connections to *Oedipus at Colonus* invoke the idea of the 'spiritual biography' or 'pilgrimage' that Bridget Fowler suggests was the original purpose of the formal obituary, and Eliot had discussed in his essay on 'George Herbert'. The 'journey' of development is something that Eliot sought to recreate when it was his responsibility to chart its course. In his *Selection of Joyce's Prose* (1942), Eliot's fundamental editorial principle was to 'make the reader aware of the continuity of development

¹⁹⁴ Martin Browne, *Making of Eliot's Plays*, 336.

¹⁹⁵ *The Elder Statesman*, 340.

¹⁹⁶ *The Elder Statesman*, 355.

between one book and the next'.¹⁹⁷ There was much at stake in such a selection; Eliot had written elsewhere of Joyce that 'One of the greatest capacities of genius is the power of development' and that 'what he leaves behind should be no more and no less than what is needed to realise each definite stage in his development.'¹⁹⁸ Always, when confronted with the question of a major writer's permanent value, Eliot referred to the importance of the whole over the synecdochic part, and the broader narrative of 'development': 'The question "which was Joyce's greatest work?"', he claimed, 'should appear as pointless as the question "which is Shakespeare's greatest play?"' Joyce's writings form a whole; we can neither reject the early work as stages, of no intrinsic interest, of his progress towards the latter, nor reject the later work as the outcome of decline.'¹⁹⁹

Conclusion: The End of the Line

By way of conclusion, then, I want to judge Eliot by his own criteria; does *The Elder Statesman*, as his last work, join up the rails in the narrative of his development? For Frank Kermode, Eliot's final play is at the end of a diversion that happened many years earlier. In 'What Became of Sweeney?' (1959) he argued:

With *The Elder Statesman*, Mr. Eliot has brought us to a place we could not have expected to reach when we started. We may see how the road runs from the fragmentary marvels of 'Sweeney Agonistes' to the finished, fluent *agones* and subtly compete recognitions of the latest plays, but it does not follow that this is the necessary, the only possible, or even the right road. Why was this one built, and not another?²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ 'Introductory Note to *Introducing James Joyce: A Selection of Joyce's Prose*', *Complete Prose*, VI, 329-31 (329).

¹⁹⁸ 'Prefatory Note to *James Joyce. Sa vie, son oeuvre, son rayonnement*', *Complete Prose*, VII, 369-71 (369-70).

¹⁹⁹ 'Prefatory Note to *James Joyce*', 370.

²⁰⁰ Frank Kermode, 'What Became of Sweeney?', in *T. S. Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, 2 vols (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), II, 709-711 (709).

As Jeffrey M. Brown, in a rare twenty-first-century study of *The Elder Statesman*, suggests, it is easy to link Kermode's judgment to assumptions of lost vigour after the *Quartets*: 'Common to all attempts to assess this play is a sense that Eliot's potential had already been foreclosed, that his moment was past, that he had taken, as Kermode states, a divergent, determinist path some thirty years previously.'²⁰¹ While Brown makes the opposite claim, it has been uncovered here that the 'foreclos[ure] of potential' is a notion that Eliot came to fixate upon after the twin crises of lastness in the late-1940s.

Although E. Martin Browne, Eliot's long-time director and producer, emphasised how 'Eliot was always determined to go on growing', he accepts that it may not accord with the usual models: 'Eliot, unlike Shakespeare, has not become more difficult in his late writings'.²⁰² Despite this, there has still been a tendency to think of Eliot's development in Shakespearean terms. Denis Donoghue argued that '*The Family Reunion* is Eliot's *Love's Labour's Lost*; *The Confidential Clerk* is his *Antony and Cleopatra*'.²⁰³ Similarly, Carol H. Smith, channelling *The Tempest*, reads *The Elder Statesman* as 'a kind of personal farewell to the theatre and as a final statement of resolution of the issue Eliot had struggled with in all his plays – how to integrate the obligations to one's human family with the more austere demands of service to God'.²⁰⁴ To read Eliot's career in quasi-Shakespearean terms is misleading on a number of counts. For one thing, as Browne indicates, his stylistic development is seemingly in the opposite direction, towards simplicity and looseness rather than complication. For another, Shakespeare's retirement to Stratford – aside from two late collaborations – also runs against Eliot's engagement with theatrical life right up until his final illness. More broadly, it encourages us

²⁰¹ Brown, 'Enacting the Obituary', 168.

²⁰² Martin Browne, *Making of Eliot's Plays*, 342; 305.

²⁰³ Denis Donoghue, *The Third Voice: Modern British and American Verse Drama* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 157.

²⁰⁴ Carol H. Smith, 'Eliot's "Divine" Comedies: *The Cocktail Party*, *The Confidential Clerk*, and *The Elder Statesman*', in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. David Chinitz (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 251-262 (257).

to superimpose another model onto Eliot's development which does not allow for the spontaneity which often drives it.

The Elder Statesman and Eliot's obituary writing show an acute awareness of the tendency for the act of memorialisation to force a sense of unity onto a subject. Eliot even wanted this to be the case, but less because it would qualify him for the status of 'major poet' for posterity, and more because he had a distinctly personal and religious desire for 'wholeness'. Eliot's development, however, resists most models of unity. Although *The Times* obituary asserted that 'From *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*, through *Journey of the Magi* and *Ash Wednesday*, to the *Four Quartets* there ran a steady line of development towards the positive treatment of religious experience', not all of the memorials of Eliot were so sure.²⁰⁵ Allen Tate's collection of essays, *T. S. Eliot, The Man and His Work* (1967) assembled reminiscences which one reviewer found 'so contradictory' that 'T. S. Eliot remains as much a mystery as he always was, appearing to his acquaintances in personae as various as the shadowy characters in his early poetry.'²⁰⁶ In his contribution to Tate's collection, Stephen Spender argued that 'although Eliot gives hints and indications of consistency, unity, wholeness, yet when one comes to examine the separate parts of the poetry, one has a Wyndham Lewis-like picture of a man for who the purposes of making each poem has separated part of himself from the whole.'²⁰⁷ But Eliot did not seem to think that mattered, there was 'wholeness' whether readers of his work could see it or not:

I cannot always say why, through knowing a person in a number of different situations, and observing his behaviour in a variety of circumstances, I feel that I understand better his behaviour or demeanour on a particular occasion: but we do believe that that person is a unity, however inconsistent his conduct, and that acquaintance with him over a span of time makes him more intelligible.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Day-Lewis, 'Mr T. S. Eliot, O.M.', *The Times*, Iss. 56211 (5 January 1965), 12.

²⁰⁶ C. B. Cox, 'Eliot's Entire Corpus', *Spectator* 218.7245 (5 May 1967), 12-14 (12).

²⁰⁷ Stephen Spender, 'Remembering Eliot', *Sewanee Review* 74.1 (1966), 58-84, reprinted in *T. S. Eliot: The Man and His Work*, ed. Allen Tate (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), 38-64 (61).

²⁰⁸ 'What Is Minor Poetry?', 576.

Epilogue: The T. S. Eliot Estate

Eliot's exploitation of the law in the management of his writing has proved a point of reference at various points of this thesis. Although he tried to expand his own understanding, and even confessed to thinking he would make a 'brilliant corporation-lawyer', he relied largely on the advice of associates, including John Quinn (a lawyer and cultural patron in New York City), Bird & Bird (the London firm used to enact his separation from Vivien) and his brother, Henry (who had spent a year at law school after graduating college).¹ He consulted them and others on a number of issues, with particular reference to alleged defamation and copyright infringement. Eliot claimed to have been a victim of libel numerous times, including Ben Hecht's 1922 charge that *The Waste Land* was an 'elaborate hoax', and John Peter's 1952 essay on potential homosexual inspiration in Eliot's poems, which led to all copies of the issue of *Essays in Criticism* being destroyed.² Problems of copyright proved more insistent but no less frustrating. There was the matter of the *Harvard Advocate* piracy which provoked the production of *Poems Written in Early Youth*, and there were weeks of haggling over American copyright for *Four Quartets*, the *Ariel* poems, and the *Landscapes* (a process which he called 'protecting' them).³ But there was often a financial incentive to accompany the mania about reputation. Eliot was furious to discover an unauthorised anthology reprinting of *The Waste Land*, then 'my longest and most profitable poem', and spent a good deal of time perfecting a

¹ See his consultation of 'Copinger's *Law of Copyright*', in 'To Michael Sadleir, 19 January 1932', *Letters*, vi, 37; 'To Paul Elmer More, 12 July 1931', *Letters*, v, 618.

² John Peter, 'A New Interpretation of *The Waste Land* (1952) with Postscript (1969)', *Essays in Criticism* 19.2 (1969), 140-75.

³ See 'To James Laughlin IV, 22 November 1935', *Letters*, vii, 836; 'To Donald Brace, 17 December 1935', *Letters*, vii, 863; 'To Frank Morley, 13 February 1941', *Letters*, ix, 737.

statement of copyright for the American edition of *Murder in the Cathedral* to put an end to unauthorised (and unremunerated) performances.⁴

In life, Eliot made use of the law to bring situations under his control, and in death things were no different. The T. S. Eliot Estate has been cited as an antagonist in scholarly studies of his work. In 2000, Ian Hamilton called it ‘perhaps the most impregnable estate today’, and Robert Spoo argued that it has ‘severely hampered a full understanding of Eliot’s life and career.’⁵ Beneath this, though, the actual workings of the Estate are often mischaracterised or misunderstood. For the first time, I offer below an outline of the legal frameworks put in place by Eliot before his death in order to maintain a degree of control over his life, work, and money, followed by an account of the actions of Valerie Eliot and her successors in maintaining and revising those frameworks. The operations of the Estate over the last sixty years have been instrumental to the fluctuations in Eliot’s literary reputation, and, following the much-publicised release of Eliot’s letters to Emily Hale in 2020 and the centenary of *The Waste Land* in 2022, it is a trend that seems likely to continue.

The first, and perhaps the most obvious, document with which to begin is Eliot’s Will, signed on 29 July 1964, six months before his death. The two-page document, witnessed by two of Eliot’s colleagues at Faber & Faber, is surprisingly concise given the considerable anxieties about posthumous reputation unearthed in ‘Lastness’. Following instructions for his burial, Eliot names Valerie as the inheritor of ‘all my estate of whatsoever kind’ and the ‘sole **EXECUTRIX** of this my Will’.⁶ However, when it comes to ownership of intellectual

⁴ On unauthorised anthology printings of *The Waste Land*, see ‘To Mark Van Doren, 13 May 1930’, *Letters*, v, 170; ‘To Henry Eliot, 13 May 1930’, *Letters*, v, 174; ‘To Henry Eliot, 25 May 1930’, *Letters*, v, 202; ‘To Henry Eliot, 28 July 1931’, *Letters*, v, 627; ‘To Henry Eliot, 3 September 1931’, *Letters*, v, 651; on *Murder*, see ‘To Donald Brace, 30 December 1938’, *Letters*, viii, 1023.

⁵ Ian Hamilton, ‘Keepers of the Flame’, *New Statesman* 13.607 (29 May 2000), 45–46 (46); Robert Spoo, ‘Ezra Pound’s Copyright Statute: Perpetual Rights and the Problem of Heirs’, *UCLA Law Review* 56.6 (2009), 1775–1834 (1823).

⁶ T. S. Eliot, ‘Last Will and Testament’, UK Government Probate Records <gov.uk/search-will-probate> [Will received 15/12/2021] 1–2 (1).

property, Eliot announces a surprising beneficiary: ‘I have assigned all the copyrights in my literary and dramatic works to Set Copyrights Limited.’⁷ On 28th March 1960, Eliot incorporated a limited company that bore an anagram of his own initials, SET Copyrights, of which Valerie was made a Director.⁸ By vesting his copyrights in the company rather than a person, Eliot gave his widow professional status; anyone who wished to quote from his work had to go through an ostensibly corporate structure. The primary purpose of the company, outlined in the ‘Memorandum of Association’, looks to the question of copyright:

To purchase or otherwise acquire and obtain exclusive and other rights or interests in copyrights and rights of representation, and any other rights of or in books, novels, stories, plays, scripts, music, songs, cinematograph and other films, pictures, paintings, photographs, words, operas, comedies, burlesques, and compositions of all kinds and descriptions and to sell, improve, manage, develop, turn to account, exchange, let on rent, royalty, share of profits or otherwise, grant licences and other rights in or over and in any other manner deal with or dispose of such rights, interests, properties and assets or any of them.⁹

According to this description, it seems that Eliot envisioned the possibility of acquiring the rights of other authors, as well as adaptation rights for the intellectual property which the company already owned. However, this was not all that Eliot had allowed for. In its incorporation documents, SET Copyrights defines its purpose as performing a number of activities pertaining to cultural administration besides copyright permissions, including purchasing and leasing property, engaging with printers, engravers, and manufacturers, and even to ‘present, produce, manage, conduct, and represent at any theatre, cinema, music hall [...] such plays, films, dramas, comedies [...] as the Company may from time to time think

⁷ Eliot, ‘Last Will and Testament’, 1.

⁸ Documents related to SET Copyright requested through Companies House, Company Number 00654302 <find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/00654302/filing-history?page=6> [accessed 01/02/2024].

⁹ ‘SET Copyrights ‘Memorandum of Association’ (28 March 1960), in Certificates of Incorporation, Companies House, Company Number 00654302 <find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/00654302/filing-history?page=6>, 1-18 (5).

fit.’¹⁰ Eliot left room for the company to become much more than just a shell for dealing with copyright; here was the description of a multi-purpose artistic agency, with Valerie at the helm.

While Eliot’s planning was meticulous, we might observe that the Will was silent on directions for how SET Copyrights was to manage permissions for quoting from his published work, and access to his unpublished work. However, we know thanks to Valerie and to the co-editor of Eliot’s *Letters*, John Haffenden, that there was an additional memorandum left to Eliot’s executors containing such directions. Signed in December 1960 (‘earlier than one might imagine’, Haffenden notes), Eliot set down at least two recommendations for Valerie, the first being that ‘I do not wish my Executors to facilitate or countenance the writing of any biography of me.’¹¹ This was not just a ‘testamentary act’, the instruction had been consistent throughout his lifetime; he told Alfred Kreymborg as early as 1925 that ‘my own aim is to suppress my own biography.’¹² Naturally, a key source for the writing of biography is the subject’s correspondence, and the memorandum’s second known instruction is reported to read: ‘I wish my wife Esmé Valerie Eliot to have sole control over my correspondence, to preserve or destroy letters written to me, and copies of letters written by me, at her discretion.’¹³ By leaving the copyright vested in a limited company managed by Valerie, and giving her directions in a ‘memorandum’ and not formally in his Will, Eliot placed a great deal of trust in his wife’s ‘discretion’. Indeed, the lawyer who helped Eliot draw up the Will, Anthony Raymond Jabez-Smith, testified that ‘This memorandum was not the subject of probate with the Will, as the court does not give probate to any document which is not directly concerned with the disposal of the deceased’s estate. It is, however, a memorandum which is morally binding on Eliot’s

¹⁰ ‘Memorandum of Association’, 6.

¹¹ John Haffenden, ‘Valerie Eliot: Editing the Letters’, *Letters*, v, xix-xxxvii, (xx). Though this contradicts the dating of Peter du Sautoy, who suggests ‘September 30th 1962’ in ‘Eliot’s Request’, *New York Review of Books* (15 April 1976) <nybooks.com/articles/1976/04/15/eliot-s-request/> [accessed 20/02/2024].

¹² ‘To Alfred Kreymborg, 30 May 1925’, *Letters*, II, 665.

¹³ Haffenden, ‘Editing the Letters’, xx.

executors.’¹⁴ Trusting in Valerie’s ‘discretion’ also allowed Eliot to avoid the kinds of difficulties which mar the ‘poorly drawn testamentary documents’ of other writers surveyed by Michael Millgate, including the troublesome contradictory clauses in Philip Larkin’s Will, or the warring executors of Thomas Hardy’s estate.¹⁵

Without this ‘memorandum’ being available, it is difficult to know whether Eliot had more specific wishes regarding published and unpublished work, or if he gave any reasons for such restrictions. What can be done, however, is to trace the kinds of directions that he gave to previous executors, before he and Valerie got married. When he asked John Hayward to act as his executor in February 1938, he elaborated on what he thought the main duties would be:

The functions would be chiefly negative. I have had to write at one time or another a lot of junk in periodicals the greater portion of which ought never to be reprinted. If any of this came to light, you would have to decide; but I wouldn’t expect you to collect it yourself: you could take it in general that what I have not published in books by the time of my death I don’t consider worth publishing. F. & F. might be tempted, and your job would be to say no. And I don’t want any biography written, or any letters printed that I wrote prior to 1933, or any letters at all of any intimacy to anybody. In fact, I have a mania for posthumous privacy. So again, your job would be to discourage any attempt to make books of me or about me, and to suppress everything suppressable [sic]. And I would leave instructions in the will, to this effect.¹⁶

Eliot’s choice of Hayward in 1938 – long before they lived together – is made clearer in a letter to one of his alternatives, Frank Morley: ‘he is to obstruct everything, and to prevent you and Geoffrey from trying to print posthumous books of papers that ought to be suppressed.’¹⁷ While Geoffrey Faber had been Eliot’s first executor in 1930, he was clearly worried that his publisher may seek to take advantage of a spur of interest in the poet’s life when he was no longer around

¹⁴ A. R. Jabez-Smith, quoted in T. S. Matthews, *Writing Great Tom: T. S. Eliot & The Keepers of the Flame*, ed. Sara Fitzgerald (Great Barrington, MA: Berkshire, 2023), eText.

¹⁵ Michael Millgate, *Testamentary Acts: Browning, Tennyson, James, Hardy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 189-90.

¹⁶ ‘To John Hayward, 15 February 1938’, *Letters*, VIII, 799-800.

¹⁷ ‘To Frank Morley, 17 February 1938’, *Letters*, VIII, 803.

to prevent it.¹⁸ But there is also something paradoxical about choosing Hayward, a renowned bibliophile and collector, to suppress work. Hayward's edition of *T. S. Eliot: Selected Prose* (1953), for instance, brought passages from *After Strange Gods* back from extinction, despite confessing in the introduction that 'The author was dissatisfied with [the lectures] and has chosen to allow them to go out of print.'¹⁹ If anyone were likely to preserve Eliot's documents, even those the poet had rejected, it was Hayward.

Above all other kinds of material, Eliot's letters proved the most contentious objects for executors, and he forbade any written 'prior to 1933' – the year of his separation from Vivien – or indeed 'any letters at all of any intimacy to anybody' to be printed. In his as-yet-unpublished letters to the staff at the Houghton Library, Eliot was incredibly anxious about access to his correspondence. In 1954, he was alarmed to hear that a researcher had reportedly been allowed to copy from his letters in the archive: 'I think that letters, whether original or photostat that have fallen into your hands, ought not to be shown to such researchers.'²⁰ He was troubled by the story of Peter Kavanagh, who had managed to memorise excerpts from John Quinn's letters after visits to the New York Public Library in 1960, and produced a pamphlet on a hand press at his home.²¹ Eliot concluded that 'no precautions can be too strict', and that 'no-one, even a qualified research student' should be given access to letters, and 'formal tests' ought to be devised for access to other kinds of unpublished writing.²² The librarians at Houghton were used to such tests; researchers wishing to visit the archive of Henry James, for instance, had been subject to extensive vetting long before Eliot tightened his grip

¹⁸ See 'To Emily Hale, 8 December 1930', *Eliot-Hale Letters*, ed. John Haffenden (Online: T. S. Eliot Estate, 2023) <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/17>.

¹⁹ John Hayward, 'Introduction', *T. S. Eliot: Selected Prose*, ed. John Hayward (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953), 7-13 (12).

²⁰ 'To William A. Jackson, 7 April 1954', T. S. Eliot Correspondence with Houghton Library, Houghton Library, Harvard University, (MS Am 1691.5 (2)), folder 1.

²¹ See 'To William A. Jackson, 11 May 1961', T. S. Eliot Correspondence with Houghton Library, Houghton Library, Harvard University, (MS Am 1691.5 (2)), folder 2; Peter Kavanagh, ed., *The John Quinn Letters; A Pandect* (New York: Kavanagh Hand-Press, 1960).

²² 'To William A. Jackson, 16 August 1961', T. S. Eliot Correspondence with Houghton Library, Houghton Library, Harvard University, (MS Am 1691.5 (2)), folder 2.

on the collection of his own work after his brother's death in 1947.²³ Nevertheless, there are hints that Valerie was beginning to change her husband's mind in the last years of his life:

My wife has been pestering me to get a copy of the typescript of the Clark Lectures I gave at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1926. She both wants to read them, and is anxious to possess a copy. As a matter of fact, I am rather ashamed of them and would rather suppress them altogether. Nevertheless, I want to obey her behest!²⁴

By the time of Eliot's death in 1965, she had succeeded in persuading him to let her edit his correspondence, a prospect he had long feared: 'the uxorious Eliot came to agree that she might in due time make a selection – posthumously.'²⁵

The most infamous restrictions concerning Eliot's correspondence were those pertaining to the letters he wrote to Emily Hale, now residing at the Firestone Library at Princeton University and released to the public in 2020. Eliot's instructions to his executor (who could conceivably have still been Valerie), were to release a 'Statement' written by him 'as soon as the letters to Miss Hale are made public', including if 'any excerpts or quotations from any of them, or Miss Hale's "commentary", are disclosed before that time'.²⁶ From early on in their correspondence, he had told Hale that both sides should be preserved: 'You are, of course, to do exactly what pleases you best with your own property: either course, to entrust them to Margaret or to send them to Geoffrey (not Gerald!) Faber to add to my collection of papers for the Bodleian'.²⁷ But he was insistent about a delay in their being made available to researchers:

Many of them contain comments on living people; I should not like the letters to be made public until everyone whose feelings could be hurt, or whose interests

²³ See Michael Anesko, *Monopolizing the Master: Henry James and the Politics of Modern Literary Scholarship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 139ff.

²⁴ 'To William A. Jackson, 19 April 1962', T. S. Eliot Correspondence with Houghton Library, Houghton Library, Harvard University, (MS Am 1691.5 (2)), folder 3.

²⁵ See Haffenden, 'Editing the Letters', xx.

²⁶ T. S. Eliot, 'Directions to my Executors', in 'Statement on the Opening of the Emily Hale Letters at Princeton', *Eliot-Hale Letters*, <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/the-statements>.

²⁷ 'To Emily Hale, 29 July 1932', *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/1158>.

damaged in any way, are dead. Fifty years is the usual time; and they shouldn't be published before then without the consent of my literary executors.²⁸

He was, then, infuriated to learn in 1956 that she had given the letters to Princeton before her death, and that librarians appeared to have been reading them: 'it seemed to me that her disposing of the letters in that way at the time threw some light upon the kind of interest which she took, or had come to take, in these letters', adding a Jamesian tag, '*The Aspern Papers* in reverse.'²⁹ Such was his outrage that it seems likely to have accelerated – if not entirely motivated – his proposal of marriage to Valerie. Indeed, the 'Statement' for release by his executors was certainly written with Valerie in mind, if not with her actually next to him: 'I cannot believe that there has ever been a woman with whom I could have felt so completely at one as with Valerie.'³⁰ Eventually, Eliot changed his mind about preserving Hale's side of the correspondence. At some point in 1963, he asked Peter du Sautoy (his second-choice executor should he and Valerie both die in an accident together), to burn all of her letters to him, which had been preserved in a 'tin box' in his office at Faber & Faber since 1930.³¹

Whether or not she would live to see Eliot's letters to Hale (and she made failed requests to consult them), when her husband died in 1965 Valerie inherited a great deal of responsibility, not only as director of SET Copyrights, but as the owner of all of Eliot's physical property.³² Her executorship of the T. S. Eliot Estate made her an important figure in cultural life, but also – to many – scholarly enemy number one. To a certain extent, the scholarly community had been complicit in forcing her to inhabit that role. In the early years of widowhood, Valerie had indulged the curiosity of researchers by welcoming them into the rooms where the last part of

²⁸ 'To Emily Hale, 6 October 1956', *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/11199>

²⁹ Eliot, 'Directions to my Executors', <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/the-statements>.

³⁰ Eliot, 'Directions to my Executors', <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/the-statements>.

³¹ 'To Emily Hale, 8 December 1930', *Eliot-Hale Letters*, <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/17>.

³² See Paul Keegan, 'Emily of Fire & Violence', *London Review of Books* 42.20 (2020), eText.

her husband's writing took place.³³ Soon, though, the reception turned sour, when she discovered that some scholars who availed themselves of her hospitality had stolen documents while her back was turned.³⁴ Valerie became increasingly paranoid, insisting that visitors turn out their pockets as they left the flat. Eventually, that paranoia resolved itself into prohibition, as she sought to defend her husband's archive – which had sentimental as well as historical significance – from intruders.

Officially, her role as executor was tested early, not only by the trade publication of *Poems Written in Early Youth* (1967) – which she may have discussed with Eliot – but also by the discovery of the drafts of *The Waste Land* and the *Inventions of the March Hare* notebook at the New York Public Library in 1968. Although they had actually been uncovered ten years earlier, the announcement of their discovery was delayed to coincide with the publication of B. L. Reid's *The Man from New York: John Quinn and his Friends* (1968).³⁵ Immediately, Valerie set about editing the manuscript herself, eschewing the help of a team of assistants largely because, as John Haffenden writes, 'Eliot himself had entrusted her with the task of publishing the manuscript, should it ever be found, and she lived in terror of "failing Tom."' ³⁶ That fierce sense of responsibility defined her approach to the *Letters*, too. Perhaps the major takeaway from Haffenden's account of Valerie's editorial labours from 1965 onwards is how meticulous but also how sensitive she had been, using the task to acquaint herself with her late husband's life:

She saw little reason why other scholars thought they had a right to carve out for their own purposes parts of the research she was frantically engaged upon, and she was anxious to retain copyright control. From the outsider's point of view, she

³³ See Haffenden, 'Editing the Letters', xix-xxxvii.

³⁴ Reported to me by Ronald Schuchard.

³⁵ See Valerie Eliot, 'Introduction', in *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), ix-xxx (xxix); Donald Gallup, 'The "Lost" Manuscripts of T. S. Eliot' *Times Literary Supplement*, Iss. 3480 (7 November 1968), 1237-9.

³⁶ John Haffenden, 'Literary Dowsing: Valerie Eliot Edits *The Waste Land*', in *T. S. Eliot Studies Annual Vol. 2* (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), 133-150 (137).

seemed overprotective and obstructive. In truth, she was simply adhering as best she could to her brief as literary executor.³⁷

In the midst of her work on the first volume of *Letters*, Valerie had to contend with numerous attempts to violate Eliot's other key point in the memorandum: 'I do not wish my Executors to facilitate or countenance the writing of any biography of me.' When T. S. Matthews sought to persuade her to release material for his biography, *Great Tom* (1974), Valerie lost her patience: 'I am afraid there really is no point in a meeting. You knew the position at the outset and yet chose to go ahead against my husband's wishes.'³⁸ Matthews even suspected in his diary that Valerie had scared other members of the Eliot family away from talking to him.³⁹ A decade later, Valerie denied quotation permission to Peter Ackroyd for *T. S. Eliot* (1984). In an interview about the biography, she proved remorseless: 'Ackroyd knew when he set out that Tom had said: No biography. So to start bleating at the end about not being able to quote from the poetry, when everyone else has to obey the same rules, is pretty feeble.'⁴⁰ The published biography had no option but to resort to contextual paraphrase: 'I am forbidden by the Estate to quote from Eliot's published work, except for purposes of fair comment in a critical context, or to quote from Eliot's unpublished work or correspondence.'⁴¹ Despite Ackroyd's stark choice of 'forbidden', Valerie did not actually go through with litigation, she relied on his publisher backing away from including too much material before the book went to print. But Valerie was nevertheless referred to in a court of law, when Ian Hamilton was sued by the subject of his biography, J. D. Salinger, for copyright infringement. When the case was heard in New York in 1987, Mark Fowler writes how the 'Ackroyd-Eliot contretemps' was cited by Hamilton's publisher, Random House, 'as evidence of the perils of a per se rule

³⁷ Haffenden, 'Editing the Letters', xxxiii-xxxiv.

³⁸ 'Valerie Eliot to T. S. Matthews, 29 January 1970', quoted in Matthews, *Writing Great Tom*, eText.

³⁹ See Matthews, *Writing Great Tom*.

⁴⁰ Valerie Eliot, quoted in Blake Morrison, 'The Two Mrs Eliots', *Independent on Sunday* (24 April 1994), 4-9 (9).

⁴¹ Peter Ackroyd, *T. S. Eliot* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984), 10.

against the quotation of unpublished source materials.’⁴² Fowler suggests that Hamilton’s fear of litigation from the territorial Valerie may have prompted his decision not to write an essay about Eliot for his collection, *Keepers of the Flame: Literary Estates and the Rise of Biography* (1992). But Hamilton did, eight years later, go as far as to imply that Valerie was using her ownership of Eliot’s copyright to censor debate about his writing: ‘With Eliot, it is well known that there are no-go areas – or at any rate, areas where writers have to watch their step. These famously include Eliot’s alleged anti-Semitism, his relations with his unstable first wife, Vivienne, and the details of his so-called “secret loves”’.⁴³

Throughout these legal scuffles, Valerie’s editorial labours continued, though not without controversy. John Sutherland complained about the twenty-year delay between the first and second volumes of the *Letters*, writing how ‘scholars seeking access to the Faber-Eliot archive have customarily seen their requests unanswered or turned down. This has generated a vacuum around Britain’s greatest modern poet.’⁴⁴ Meanwhile, Karen Christensen, one of the editorial assistants on the first volume, asked in the *Guardian* whether Valerie had ‘done the poet’s reputation a disservice by delaying publication of his letters?’⁴⁵ Nevertheless, it was not Valerie’s delay but others’ speculative filling of the ‘vacuum’ which threatened Eliot’s reputation. When Michael Hastings’s play about Eliot’s first marriage, *Tom and Viv* (1984) was produced as a film in 1994, it compounded Valerie’s sense that Eliot’s memory and his archive – which still functioned as her home – were under attack: ‘A lot of people come by, taking photographs of my flat, because they know it’s where Tom once lived. I keep wondering,

⁴² See Mark A. Fowler, “‘The Quick in Pursuit of the Dead’: Ian Hamilton and the Clash between Literary Biographers and Copyright Owners”, in *Modernism and Copyright*, ed. Paul K. Saint-Amour, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 217-42 (231).

⁴³ Hamilton, ‘Keepers of the Flame’, *New Statesman*, 46.

⁴⁴ John Sutherland, “‘The Letters of T. S. Eliot’”; review of *The Letters of TS Eliot: Volume Two: 1923-1925*, in *Financial Times* (16 November 2009), <ft.com/content/c1a42524-cfe1-11de-a36d-00144feabdc0> [accessed 31/03/23].

⁴⁵ Karen Christensen, ‘Dear Mrs Eliot’, in *Guardian* (29 January 2005) <theguardian.com/books/2005/jan/29/classics.thomasstearnseliot> [accessed 01/04/24].

now the film's out: Am I going to get a brick through the window?'⁴⁶ The film's inaccuracies forced her to agree to an interview in the *Sunday Times*, where she presented the interviewer with letters that contradicted allegations made by the film, including one that Eliot had organised Vivien's committal to a mental hospital. 'Read that', Valerie had said, 'It seems to blow *Tom & Viv* out of the water.'⁴⁷ Similarly, when Anthony Julius's *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form* (1995) attributed an anti-Semitic review of *The Yellow Spot* (1936) in the *Criterion* to Eliot, Valerie corrected him in the *TLS* by citing 'the financial files of the magazine.'⁴⁸ Julius, himself a renowned barrister, asked whether it was 'satisfactory that thirty years after Eliot's death, the resolution of such issues should still await the whim of his executrix?'⁴⁹ Valerie's patience with the *Letters* infuriated scholars, but it also revealed the importance of getting them right.

As remarked in the Introduction to this thesis, Valerie did commission a number of significant projects by scholars which brought her husband's work out of the archive, including Christopher Ricks's *Inventions of the March Hare* (1996) and Ronald Schuchard's *Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry* (1993). One project not referenced in the foregoing chapters, however, was also the most lucrative. In 1978, Valerie gave permission for a seemingly innocent use of Eliot's words, for a budding young musician, Andrew Lloyd Webber, to set 'one of Eliot's poems from *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* to music.'⁵⁰ By 1980, she was giving Lloyd Webber access to Eliot's unpublished writing, 'everything she had' concerning the *Cats*, including 'Grizabella, the Glamour Cat', who would feature prominently in the musical then being written.⁵¹ As Ian Hamilton put it: 'Scholars who have had trouble with the Eliot estate on

⁴⁶ Valerie Eliot, quoted in Morrison, 'The Two Mrs Eliots', 9.

⁴⁷ Valerie Eliot, quoted in Morrison, 'The Two Mrs Eliots', 5.

⁴⁸ Valerie Eliot, 'T. S. Eliot', *Times Literary Supplement*, Iss. 4861 (31 May 1996), 17.

⁴⁹ Anthony Julius, 'T. S. Eliot and anti-Semitism', *Times Literary Supplement*, Iss. 4863 (June 14, 1996), 17.

⁵⁰ 'Matthew Evans to Andrew Lloyd Webber, 30 June 1978', quoted in Toby Faber, *Faber & Faber: The Untold Story* (London: Faber & Faber, 2019), 348.

⁵¹ See 'Matthew Evans to Andrew Lloyd Webber, 26 June 1980', and 'Valerie Eliot to Tom Faber, 29 June 1980', quoted in Faber, *Faber & Faber*, 355-56.

the matter of permissions might well go a bit sulky when they hear Grizabella mew about those “burnt out ends of smoky days, the stale cold smell of morning”.”⁵² While the financial arrangements of Eliot’s Will were befitting of the former banker, Valerie’s decision to collaborate with Lloyd Webber proved the savviest decision of all. She used SET Copyrights’ clause of incorporation, ‘To purchase or otherwise acquire and obtain exclusive and other rights or interests in copyrights and rights of representation’, to acquire joint rights to the lyrics for the incredibly successful musical. One media outlet puts the profits the Estate has received from *Cats* since its opening night at £120 million.⁵³

With a substantial injection of funds, Valerie introduced a new use for the money that had been left to her in Trust in Eliot’s Will. In January 1990, she founded a charitable entity, ‘Old Possum’s Practical Trust’, with the aim of increasing the ‘knowledge and appreciation of any matters of historic, artistic, architectural, literary, musical or theatrical interest’.⁵⁴ Alluding to the *Practical Cats* – the collection from which most of this new money had been drawn – she set about making sizeable donations to a number of cultural institutions. Among the donations included a £2.5 million grant to the London Library for the ‘T. S. Eliot Wing’, and other less significant sums to HighTide, Shakespeare for Schools, the Victoria & Albert Museum, the London Children’s Ballet, British Youth Opera, The National Theatre, and the National Portrait Gallery.⁵⁵ She also sponsored an exchange programme at the Old Vic, with the hope ‘that the link with Eliot would not only remind the public of T. S. Eliot’s significant work as a playwright, but perhaps inspire and inform generations to come.’⁵⁶ The T. S. Eliot

⁵² Ian Hamilton, *Keepers of the Flame: Literary Estates and the Rise of Biography* (London: Hutchinson, 1992), 293.

⁵³ Mike Ridley, ‘Meow it all began’, *The Sun* (17 December 2019) <thesun.co.uk/tvandshowbiz/10574889/paul-nicholas-invest-original-cats-musical/> [accessed 03/03/2024].

⁵⁴ ‘Old Possum’s Practical Trust’, <tseliot.com/foundation/old-possums-trust/> [accessed 03/03/2024]; see also Old Possum’s Practical Trust, Charity Number 328558, Charity Commission <register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/328558/charity-overview> (Online: UK Government, 2021) [accessed 03/03/2024].

⁵⁵ See ‘Old Possum’s Practical Trust’, <tseliot.com/foundation/old-possums-trust/>.

⁵⁶ ‘Old Possum’s Practical Trust’, <tseliot.com/foundation/old-possums-trust/>.

Prize, the most valuable prize in British poetry, was founded in 1993. Clearly, she felt that donations were one way of ensuring Eliot's name remained synonymous in the collective memory with cultural conservation and development, as well as high standards.

Like her husband's, Valerie's Will made effective use of Trusts to manage her financial portfolio.⁵⁷ The Will names three separate Trusts, 'Old Possum's Practical Trust', 'Morgan Trust', and 'Old Deuteronomy Discretionary Trust' which allowed her to separate substantial sums of money and different kinds of property. Directly to her trustees she left specific items to be given to Magdalene College, Cambridge, where Eliot was an honorary fellow: 'my collection of T S Eliot first editions', 'T S Eliot's gold Nobel Prize medal', and 'books which in the opinion of my Executors were of importance to him in his work.'⁵⁸ Any other 'items related to T S Eliot should be retained by the trustees of the Old Possum's Trust to be lent out as necessary.' Meanwhile, the second Trust, 'Morgan Trust' was left 'my collection of T S Eliot's manuscript material' and 'T S Eliot's letters to me, both before and after our marriage, with the request that none of these are published until at least ten years after my death.'⁵⁹ This was evidently the Trust dedicated to Eliot's unpublished writing, kept separate from all other kinds of property. Any remaining 'real and personal property' was left to the 'Old Deuteronomy Discretionary Trust' and to the 'Old Possum's Trust' for 'its general charitable purposes'.⁶⁰ Like Eliot's faith in Valerie's 'discretion', the Trusts she established allowed the trustees to use the contents for whatever benefit they saw fit. When the responsibility of managing Eliot's reputation is passed on, the use of Trusts seems to be one way of ensuring that individuals remain separate from the copyright and the money it generated.

⁵⁷ Esmé Valerie Eliot, 'Last Will and Testament', UK Government Probate Records <gov.uk/search-will-probate> [Will received 15/12/2021], 1-4.

⁵⁸ Valerie Eliot, 'Last Will and Testament', 1.

⁵⁹ Valerie Eliot, 'Last Will and Testament', 2.

⁶⁰ Valerie Eliot, 'Last Will and Testament', 2.

Finally, then, we arrive at the period between Valerie's death in 2012 and the present day. Towards the end of her life, she appointed new trustees of SET Copyrights, Judith Hooper and Clare Reihill, who remain to this day the figures in charge of Eliot's Estate.⁶¹ With regard to the management of Eliot's writing, their first task was to supervise the projects which Valerie had initiated, Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue's *Poems* (2015), Ron Schuchard's *Complete Prose* (2015-19) and John Haffenden's *Letters* (1988-). But they also endorsed new projects, perhaps mindful that Eliot's works go out of copyright in 2035. A facsimile edition of Eliot's *Gloucester Notebook* (the contents of *Inventions of the March Hare*) was published in 2022, and an edition of Eliot's *Collected Prose* under the editorship of Archie Burnett is scheduled for publication at the end of 2024.⁶²

One major new development since Valerie's death is the expansion of the digital presence of Eliot's work. The creation of the website, tseliot.com, in 2016 gave a home to authorised biographical and bibliographical information, an online hub for the T. S. Eliot Prize, but is also an editorial space in its own right.⁶³ The website has become a crucial resource to deposit material that is too large for physical volumes, but still requires publication to offset allegations of censorship. Indeed, it is important to point out that the *Letters of T. S. Eliot* and the *Life and Writings of Vivien Eliot* (2020) are both hybrid editions, having significant portions only accessible on the website. The edition of the *Eliot-Hale Letters* is only accessible on tseliot.com, and there are no plans to make it available in print.⁶⁴

Since 2012, however, the task that has occupied a great deal of the Estate's attention is the continuation of Valerie's charitable endeavours. The 'T. S. Eliot Foundation' was established in 2014 with its 'mission purpose' being:

⁶¹ See SET Copyrights, Companies House, Company Number 00654302, <find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/00654302/officers>.

⁶² T. S. Eliot, *The Gloucester Notebook* (Cambridge: Galileo, 2022).

⁶³ See Oliver Rowse, 'The T. S. Eliot Foundation Debuts its Website: tseliot.com', *Time Present* 91 (Spring 2017), 4; 9-10.

⁶⁴ See *Eliot-Hale Letters*, <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters>.

To further the education of the general public, principally in relation to the works of TS Eliot and to promote art, cultural and heritage, in particular poetry, in his name. To preserve and conserve for the public benefit an archive of poetry, manuscripts, and memorabilia relating to the life and work of TS Eliot.⁶⁵

Taking on many of the responsibilities of the ‘Old Possum’s Practical Trust’, which still exists and administers its own grants, the Foundation has become an important benefactor of the arts in Britain and North America.⁶⁶ Its work on the ‘T. S. Eliot Prize’ continues alongside a new venture, the ‘*Four Quartets* Prize’, which was established in collaboration with the Poetry Society of America in 2018. Both prizes have, in recent years especially, given a noticeable boost to traditionally underrepresented voices, a significant contrast to the main charges often levelled against Eliot’s social views. Another of the Foundation’s newest ventures, ‘Dead Poets Live’, was conceived of in 2016, and produces staged readings of poetry in London, Ireland, and the United States.⁶⁷ Supported entirely by the Foundation, all of the proceeds from the performances go to the refugee charity, Safe Passage UK. Eliot’s remarks about refugees have caused their own critical tussles in recent years. While Ronald Schuchard detailed Eliot’s attempts to help Jewish refugees during the Second World War, recent material in letters to Emily Hale reveal some qualifications: ‘I am concerned about the refugees – if they are allowed to collect indefinitely in Britain there is great risk of eventual anti-semitism here: but where are they to go? And there is no denying that Jews in the mass are antipathetic!’⁶⁸ When his friends,

⁶⁵ ‘The T. S. Eliot Foundation’, Charity Number 1159129, Charity Commission for England and Wales, <register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-details/?regid=1159129&subid=0> [accessed 08/04/2024].

⁶⁶ For the continuing activities of Old Possum’s Practical Trust, see Charity Number 328558, Charity Commission <register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/328558/charity-overview> (Online: UK Government, 2021).

⁶⁷ See Dead Poets Live <deadpoets.live/>.

⁶⁸ Ronald Schuchard, ‘Burbank with a Baedeker, Eliot with a Cigar: American Intellectuals, Anti-Semitism, and the Idea of Culture’, *Modernism/modernity* 10.1 (2003), 1-26; see also the essays in response by David Bromwich, Ronald Bush, Denis Donoghue, Anthony Julius; James Logenbach, Marjorie Perloff. ‘To Emily Hale, 27 January 1939’, *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/1658>.

the Tandy family, housed a German Jewish child refugee at the start of the Second World War, Eliot declared 'it': 'a rather nice child, not at all objectionably Jewish to look at'.⁶⁹

Along similar philanthropic lines, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Foundation made a substantial number of 'emergency grants' to a variety of organisations and individuals in danger of closing down. Between 2020 and 2022, nearly a million pounds was awarded from the Eliot Foundation to theatres, literary societies and festivals, charities, schools, galleries, museums, and archives.⁷⁰ Donations in excess of £20,000 were awarded to English PEN, the Children's Poetry Archive website, the National Portrait Gallery, Hampstead Theatre, and the 92Y poet-in-residence.⁷¹ The trustees were also reported as having donated £50,000 to an appeal by the Friends of the National Libraries to save a group of manuscripts by such writers as Jane Austen, Robert Burns, and Walter Scott from being sold to private collectors and American research libraries.⁷² Some of these donations, though not all, came with a certain amount of publicity, as, for instance, 'TS Eliot comes to rescue of Brontë Museum'.⁷³ Reading through the lists of beneficiaries, one gains a sense of Eliot's money as being fundamental to the survival of cultural life during the crisis of Covid-19.

Yet the Foundation does not consider itself merely a PR agency operating on Eliot's behalf; its secondary purpose is ostensibly to 'preserve and conserve for the public benefit an

⁶⁹ 'To Emily Hale, 26 October 1939', *Eliot-Hale Letters* <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/letters/1701>.

⁷⁰ 'The T. S. Eliot Foundation Trustees' Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2021' (2021) <register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search?p_p_id=uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=2&p_p_state=maximized&p_p_mode=view&p_p_resource_id=%2Faccounts-resource&p_p_cacheability=cacheLevelPage&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_objectiveId=A11482325&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_priv_r_p_mvcRenderCommandName=%2Ffull-print&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_priv_r_p_organisationNumber=5046817> [accessed 23/02/24].

⁷¹ See 'Eliot Foundation Trustees' Report and Financial Statements', 25-26.

⁷² See Richard Eden and Juliet Conway, 'Poetic justice! T.S. Eliot's *Cats* cash to help save literary trove', *Daily Mail Online* (13 August 2021) <dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-9889277/EDEN-CONFIDENTIAL-Poetic-justice-T-S-Eliots-Cats-cash-help-save-literary-trove.html> [accessed 03/03/24].

⁷³ Grant Tucker, 'TS Eliot comes to rescue of Brontë Museum', *Sunday Times* (6 September 2020) <thetimes.co.uk/article/ts-eliot-comes-to-rescue-of-bronte-museum-77tzb3wxf>. See also Sarah Bahr, 'T. S. Eliot's Estate Donates "Cats" Royalties to Brontë Museum', *New York Times* (8 September 2020), <nytimes.com/2020/09/08/arts/design/ts-eliot-cats-royalties-bronte-museum.html> [accessed 03/03/2024].

archive of poetry, manuscripts, and memorabilia relating to the life and work of TS Eliot.’ Despite this aim, it is notable that the archive of the Eliot Estate held at the poet’s flat in Kensington remains closed to the public, with enquiries by scholars often refused except for projects – like the *Poems*, *Letters*, and *Prose* – already endorsed by the Estate. While it is true that some material is shared on an infrequent blog, ‘From the Archive’, exactly what is intended by ‘for the public benefit’ seems largely up for debate.⁷⁴ While the archive of Faber & Faber also remains closed, many details about Eliot’s life – personal and professional – will stay hidden from view, an outcome that still seems indebted to Eliot’s own testamentary acts.

⁷⁴ Nancy Fulford, ‘From the Archive’, <tseliot.com/foundation/category/from-the-archive/> [accessed 12/04/24].

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Published Writing by T. S. Eliot

- Eliot, T. S., *Eliot-Hale Letters*, ed. John Haffenden (Online: T. S. Eliot Estate, 2023) <tseliot.com/the-eliot-hale-letters/>
- , *The Gloucester Notebook* (Cambridge: Galileo, 2022)
- , *The Letters of T. S. Eliot Volume 9: 1939-1941*, ed. Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden (London: Faber & Faber, 2021) supplementary letters for this volume can be found online at <tseliot.com/letters>
- , *The Letters of T. S. Eliot Volume 8: 1936-1938*, ed. Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden (London: Faber & Faber, 2019) supplementary letters for this volume can be found online at <tseliot.com/letters>
- , *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 8: Still and Still Moving, 1954-1965*, edited by Jewel Spears Brooker and Ronald Schuchard (Online: The Johns Hopkins University Press and Faber & Faber, 2019) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/primary/eliot/>>
- , *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 7: A European Society, 1947-1953*, ed. Iman Javadi and Ronald Schuchard (Online: The Johns Hopkins University Press and Faber & Faber, 2018) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/primary/eliot/>>
- , *The Letters of T. S. Eliot Volume 7: 1934-1935*, ed. Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden (London: Faber & Faber, 2017) supplementary letters for this volume can be found online at <tseliot.com/letters>
- , *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 6: The War Years, 1940-1946*, ed. David Chinitz and Ronald Schuchard (Online: The Johns Hopkins University Press and Faber & Faber, 2017) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/primary/eliot/>>
- , *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 5: Tradition and Orthodoxy, 1934-1939*, ed. Iman Javadi and Ronald Schuchard and Jayme Stayer (Online: The Johns Hopkins University Press and Faber & Faber, 2017) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/primary/eliot/>>
- , *The Letters of T. S. Eliot Volume 6: 1932-1933*, ed. Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden (London: Faber & Faber, 2016) supplementary letters for this volume can be found online at <tseliot.com/letters>
- , *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 4: English Lion, 1930-1933*, ed. Jason Harding and Ronald Schuchard (Online: The Johns Hopkins University Press and Faber & Faber, 2015) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/primary/eliot/>>
- , *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 3: Literature, Politics, Belief, 1927-1929*, ed. Frances Dickey and Jennifer Formichelli and Ronald Schuchard (Online: The Johns Hopkins University Press and Faber & Faber, 2015) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/primary/eliot/>>
- , *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue, 2 vols (London: Faber & Faber, 2015)
- , *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 2: The Perfect Critic, 1919-1926*, ed. Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (Online: The Johns Hopkins University Press and Faber & Faber, 2014) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/primary/eliot/>>
- , *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 1: Apprentice Years, 1905-1918*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker and Ronald Schuchard (Online: The Johns Hopkins University Press and Faber & Faber, 2014) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/primary/eliot/>>
- , *The Letters of T. S. Eliot Volume 5: 1930-1931*, ed. Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden (London: Faber & Faber, 2014) supplementary letters for this volume can be found online at <tseliot.com/letters>
- , *The Letters of T. S. Eliot Volume 4: 1928-1929*, ed. Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden (London: Faber & Faber, 2013) supplementary letters for this volume can be found online at <tseliot.com/letters>
- , *The Letters of T. S. Eliot Volume 3: 1926-1927*, ed. Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden (London: Faber & Faber, 2012) supplementary letters for this volume can be found online at <tseliot.com/letters>
- , *The Letters of T. S. Eliot Volume 2: 1923-1925*, ed. Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton (London: Faber & Faber, 2009)
- , *The Letters of T. S. Eliot Volume 1: 1888-1922*, ed. Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton, rev. ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 2009)
- , *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Faber & Faber, 1996)
- , *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, ed. Ronald Schuchard (London: Faber & Faber, 1993)
- , *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber & Faber, 1975)
- , *Poems Written in Early Youth* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967)

- , *Collected Plays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1962)
- , *T. S. Eliot: Selected Prose*, ed. John Hayward (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953), 7-13
- Eliot, T. S., and Donald Hall, 'T. S. Eliot', in *The Paris Review Interviews*, ed. Philip Gourevitch, 4 vols (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007-09), I, 62-85
- Eliot, T. S., Ezra Pound, and Vivien Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts*, ed. Valerie Eliot and Matthew Hollis, new ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 2022)
- , *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts*, ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber & Faber, 1971)
- Eliot, T. S., and Tom Greenwell, 'Talking Freely', in *The Bed Post: A Miscellany of the Yorkshire Post*, ed. Kenneth Young (London: MacDonald, 1962), 41-53
- Eliot, T. S., and G. M. Hoellering, *The Film of Murder in the Cathedral* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952)

Unpublished Sources

Harvard University Archives

- 'English 12 Student Papers, 1897-1925', in *Papers of Charles Townsend Copeland*, Harvard University Archives (HUG 4298.65)

Houghton Library, Harvard University

- Cummings, E. E., 'E. E. Cummings papers', Houghton Library, Harvard University (MS Am 1823-1823.10)
- Eliot, Henry, 'To Oscar C. Orman, 4 March 1946' and 'To Oscar C. Orman, 5 March 1946', in 'Correspondence concerning the donation of family materials to various libraries', Henry Ware Eliot T. S. Eliot Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University (MS Am 2560 (39))
- Eliot, Henry, 'To Harry Scott, 17 April 1932', in 'Henry Ware Eliot Correspondence concerning the Eliot Collection', Henry Ware Eliot T. S. Eliot Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University (bMS Am 2560 (27))
- Eliot, T. S., 'To William A. Jackson, 7 April 1954', 'To William A. Jackson, 11 May 1961', 'To William A. Jackson, 16 August 1961', 'To William A. Jackson, 19 April 1962', in 'T. S. Eliot Correspondence with Houghton Library', Houghton Library, Harvard University (MS Am 1691.5 (2)), folders 1-3
- Eliot, T. S., 'T. S. Eliot press cuttings, 1919-1923: scrapbook of clippings', Henry Ware Eliot T. S. Eliot Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University (bMS Am 2560 (418))

King's College, Cambridge

- Bonnier, Georg, 'to John Hayward, 14 December 1950', in '*Poems Written in Early Youth*, 1950', Hayward Bequest, King's College, Cambridge (GBR/0272/HB/V/1), f. 7
- Day-Lewis, Cecil, , 'To John Hayward, 21 June 1943' and 'Draft of *Times* Obituary of T. S. Eliot', in 'Times Obituary of T. S. Eliot, (1946-1959)', Hayward Bequest, King's College, Cambridge (GBR/0272/HB/M/2)
- Eliot, T. S., 'To John Hayward, 17 August 1942', in 'Correspondence from T. S. Eliot to J. D. Hayward, 1925-10-02-1962-06-13' Hayward Bequest, King's College, Cambridge (GBR/0272/HB/L/12/1/19: January – December 1942), f. 305
- Eliot, T. S., 'Drafts of "The Cultivation of Christmas Trees"', in 'Essays, Addresses, and Verses, 1930-1955', Hayward Bequest, King's College, Cambridge (GBR/0272/HB/H/1 E)
- Eliot, T. S., '"If Time and Space as Sages Say", 1905-1943', Hayward Bequest, King's College, Cambridge (GBR/0272/HB/V/2A)
- Runnquist, Åke, 'To John Hayward', 5 April 1950', in '*Poems Written in Early Youth*, 1950', Hayward Bequest, King's College, Cambridge (GBR/0272/HB/V/1), f. 1.
- Wilson Knight, G., *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearian Tragedy*, 4th ed. (London: Methuen, 1949), with pencil annotations by T. S. Eliot, Hayward Bequest, King's College, Cambridge (H/8/54)

Princeton University

Eliot, T. S., and Emily Hale, 'Emily Hale Letters from T. S. Eliot, 1895-1965', Firestone Library, Princeton University (C0686)

UK Government Probate Records

Eliot, Esmé Valerie, 'Last Will and Testament', UK Government Probate Records <gov.uk/search-will-probate> [Will received 15/12/2021]

Eliot, T. S., 'Last Will and Testament', UK Government Probate Records <gov.uk/search-will-probate> [Will received 15/12/2021]

Yale University

'Donald Clifford Gallup Papers', Beinecke Library, Yale University (YCAL MSS 838)

'T. S. Eliot Collection', Beinecke Library, Yale University (YCAL MSS 523)

Secondary Sources

[Unsigned], 'Not Here, O Apollo.', in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 21

[Unsigned], 'T. S. Eliot, the American-Born Poet, Dies in London at 76', *New York Times* (5 January 1965), 1

[Unsigned], 'Tom to T.S.', *Time* 33.1 (2 January 1939), 35.

[Unsigned], 'The Literary Scene', *Chicago Daily News* (21 February 1923), 14

'T. S. Eliot Foundation Trustees' Report and Financial Statements' (2021), Charity Commission <register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/5046817 > (Online: UK Government, 2021) [accessed 23/02/24]

Ackroyd, Peter, *T. S. Eliot* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984)

Adams, J. Donald, *Copey of Harvard: A Biography of Charles Townsend Copeland* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960)

Adorno, Theodor, 'Late Style in Beethoven', in *Essays on Music*, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2002), 564-68

—, 'On the Score of Parsifal', trans. Anthony Barone, *Music & Letters* 76.3 (1995), 384-97

Aiken, Conrad, 'After Ash-Wednesday', in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 312-314

—, *Ushant: An Essay* (London: W. H. Allen, 1963)

Aldington, Richard, 'Stepping Heavenward: A Record', in *Soft Answers* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press; London: Feffer & Simons, 1967), 167-210

—, *Life for Life's Sake* (New York: Viking Press, 1941)

Altieri, Charles, 'Objective Image and Act of Mind in Modern Poetry', *PMLA* 91.1 (1976), 101-14

Anesko, Michael, *Generous Mistakes: Incidents of Error in Henry James* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)

—, *Monopolizing the Master: Henry James and the Politics of Modern Literary Scholarship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012)

Arnold, Matthew, 'Introduction from *The English Poets. Selections with Critical Introductions by Various Hands*, ed. Thomas Humphry Ward (1880) ['The Study of Poetry']', in *Matthew Arnold*, ed. Seamus Perry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 595-615

—, 'On Translating Homer: Last Words', in *Matthew Arnold*, ed. Seamus Perry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 279-90

Auden, W. H., 'T. S. Eliot, O.M.: A Tribute', in *W. H. Auden: Prose: Volume v: 1963-1968*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 122-124

—, 'Port and Nuts with the Eliots', in *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden, Prose, Volume III: 1949-1955*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 97-101

—, 'A Literary Transference', in *Hardy: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Albert J. Guerard (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 135-142

- Babbitt, Irving, 'The College and the Democratic Spirit', in *Literature and the American College; Essays in Defense of the Humanities* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1908), 72-87
- Bahr, Sarah, 'T. S. Eliot's Estate Donates "Cats" Royalties to Brontë Museum', *New York Times* (8 September 2020), <nytimes.com/2020/09/08/arts/design/ts-eliot-cats-royalties-bronte-museum.html>
- Barolini, Teodolinda, 'Inferno 27: Disconversion,' *Commento Baroliniano, Digital Dante* (Online: Columbia University Libraries, 2018) <digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/inferno/inferno-27/> [accessed 21/03/24].
- Barwick, Sandra, 'That's no dragon, that's his wife', *Independent* (22 January 1994) <independent.co.uk/voices/that-s-no-dragon-that-s-his-wife-1408513.html>
- Bateson, F. W., 'T. S. Eliot: The Poetry of Pseudo-learning', *The Journal of General Education* 20.1 (1968), 13-27.
- Bay-Cheng, Sarah, "'Away we go": Poetry and Play in Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats and Andrew Lloyd Webber's Cats,' in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. David Chinitz (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 228-38
- Beasley, Rebecca, 'A "Dangerous Model": Resisting *The Waste Land*', in *'The Waste Land' After One Hundred Years* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2022), 25-46
- Bell, Clive, 'How Pleasant to Know Mr Eliot', in *T. S. Eliot: A Symposium*, ed. Richard March and Tambimuttu (London: PL Editions Poetry, 1948), 15-19
- Bell, Robert H., *Jocoserious Joyce: The Fate of Folly in 'Ulysses'* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1991)
- Bellin, Roger, 'The Seduction of Argument and the Danger of Parody in the *Four Quartets*', *Twentieth Century Literature* 53.4 (2007), 421-441
- Bennett, Andrew, *Wordsworth Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)
- Bennett, Arnold, *The Journals of Arnold Bennett: Vol. III – 1921-28*, ed. Newman Flower (London: Cassell, 1933)
- Bergonzi, Bernard, 'Ghostly Voices: Review of *The Composition of 'Four Quartets'*', *Encounter* 51.1 (1978), 69-73
- , 'Introduction', in *T. S. Eliot, 'Four Quartets': A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1969), 11-20
- Bergson, Henri, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Dover Publications, 2012)
- Beijerman, John, 'Mortality', in *Collected Poems* (London: John Murray, 2006), 288
- Bevis, Matthew, *Wordsworth's Fun* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019)
- , 'Eliot Among the Comedians', *Literary Imagination* 16.2 (2014), 135-56
- Boden, Margaret A., *The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms*, 2nd ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2004)
- Booth, James, *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014)
- Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996)
- , *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993)
- , 'The Scholastic Point of View', *Cultural Anthropology* 5.4 (1990), 380-91
- Bradshaw, David, 'Review of *Institutions of Modernism*', *RES* 51.203 (2000), 514-15.
- Braudy, Leo, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and its History* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986)
- Brockman, William S., "'Clio's Clippings": From Newspaper to Press Cutting', in *Publishing in Joyce's 'Ulysses': Newspapers, Advertising and Printing* (Leiden; Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2018), 175-91
- Brooker, Jewel Spears, ed., *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)
- Brooker, Jewel Spears, *T. S. Eliot and the Dialectical Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018)
- , "'Slip-slidin' away": Metamorphosis and Loss in Eliot's Philosophical Papers', in *The T. S. Eliot Studies Annual, Vol. 2*, ed. John D. Morgenstern (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), 109-14
- , 'Dialectical Collaboration: Editing *The Waste Land*', in *The Cambridge Companion to 'The Waste Land'*, ed. Gabrielle McIntire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 102-115
- , 'From *The Waste Land* to *Four Quartets*', in *Words in Time: New Essays on Eliot's 'Four Quartets'*, ed. Edward Lobb (London: Athlone Press, 1993), 84-106
- Brooker, Peter, Andrew Thacker, Sascha Bru, and Christian Weikop, eds, *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009-13)
- Brown, Jeffrey M., 'Enacting the Obituary: The "Successful Failure" of T. S. Eliot's *The Elder Statesman*, *Modern Drama* 56.2 (2013), 165-85
- Brown, Rollo Walter, *Dean Briggs* (New York; London: Harper & Brothers, 1926)

- Browne, E. Martin, *The Making of T. S. Eliot's Plays* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969)
- Bryant, Marsha, and Douglas Mao, 'Camp Modernism: Introduction', *Modernism/modernity* 23.1 (2016), 1-4
- Bush, Ronald, "'An Easy Commerce of the Old and New'?: Recent Eliot Scholarship', *Modernism/modernity* 17.3 (2010), 677-81
- , 'T. S. Eliot and Modernism at the Present Time: A Provocation', in *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History*, ed. Ronald Bush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 191-204
- , *T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983)
- Butler, Marilyn, 'Culture's Medium: The Role of the Review', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism* ed. Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 127-52
- Butscher, Edward, *Conrad Aiken: Poet of the White Horse Vale* (Athens; London: University of Georgia Press, 1988)
- Callison, Jamie, 'Transmuting F. H. Bradley: T. S. Eliot's Notes Towards a Theory of Poetry', in *The T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, Vol. 1, ed. John D. Morgenstern (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 99-113
- Cameron, Kenneth Neill, *The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical* (London: Gollancz, 1951)
- Carroll, Noël, *Humour: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)
- Chernaik, Judith, 'T. S. Eliot as "Tom Possum": The "good grey Poet" and the Tandy family', *Times Literary Supplement* Iss. 4622 (1991), 13-14
- Chinitz, David, ed., *A Companion to T. S. Eliot* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014)
- Chinitz, David, 'A Major Minor Document', *T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, Vol. 2 (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), 129-32
- , *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2003)
- , 'Review of *Inventions of the March Hare*', *ANQ* 11.3 (1998), 56-64 (62-63).
- Christensen, Karen, 'Dear Mrs Eliot', in *Guardian* (29 January 2005)
<theguardian.com/books/2005/jan/29/classics.thomasstearnseliot>
- Churchill, Suzanne, and Adam McKible, eds, *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007)
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Adam Roberts (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2014)
- , *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Vol. 16: *Poetical Works: Part 1*, ed. J. C. C. Mays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001)
- , 'Lecture 2: *Romeo and Juliet*', in *Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987)
- Cooper, John Xiros, ed., *T. S. Eliot's Orchestra: Critical Essays on Poetry and Music* (New York; London: Garland, 2000)
- Cooper, John Xiros, *The Cambridge Introduction to T. S. Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)
- , *T. S. Eliot and the Ideology of 'Four Quartets'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)
- Copeland, Charles Townsend, and Henry Milner Rideout, *Freshman English and Theme-Correcting in Harvard College* (New York; Boston: Silver, Burdett and Co., 1901)
- Cox, C. B., 'Eliot's Entire Corpus', *Spectator* 218 (7245) (5 May 1967), 12-14
- Crawford, Robert, *Eliot After 'The Waste Land'* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2022)
- , *Young Eliot: from St Louis to 'The Waste Land'* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2015)
- Creasy, Matthew, 'A Handful of Eliot', *PN Review* 43.2 (2016), 63-64
- Cuda, Anthony, 'Back, Late, from the Hyacinth Garden', in *T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, Vol. 4 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022), 57-71
- , 'What Happened to "Modern Tendencies in Poetry"', in *The T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, Vol. 2, ed. John D. Morgenstern (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), 115-120 (120)
- , "'A Precise Way of Thinking and Feeling": Eliot and Verse Drama', in *The New Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. Jason Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 116-30.
- Cummings, E. E., *Etcetera: The Unpublished Poems of E. E. Cummings*, ed. Richard S. Kennedy and George James Firmage (New York: Liveright, 1983)
- , *Selected Letters of E. E. Cummings*, ed. F. W. Bupee and George Stade (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969)
- , *Tulips and Chimneys* (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1923)
- Cummings, E. E., S. Foster Damon, J. R. Dos Passos, Robert Hillyer, R. S. Mitchell, William A. Norris, Dudley Poore, Cuthbert Wright, *Eight Harvard Poets* (New York: L. J. Gomme, 1917).
- Cushman, Stephen, 'Poetry in the Public Square', in *A Companion to American Poetry*, ed. Mary McAleer Balkun, Jeffrey Gray, Paul Jaussen (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2022), 320-331

- Dante, *Convivio: A Dual Language Critical Edition*, ed., trans. Andrew Frisardi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018)
- , *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri*, ed. Herman Oelsner, trans. John Aitken Carlyle (London: J. M. Dent, 1900)
- Dardis, Tom, *Firebrand: The Life of Horace Liveright* (New York: Random House, 1995)
- Davie, Donald, “‘The Dry Salvages’: A Reconsideration”, in *Modernist Essays: Yeats, Pound, Eliot* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2004), 216-227
- , ‘Mr Eliot’, in *The Poet in the Imaginary Museum: Essays of Two Decades* (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1977), 117-121
- , *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965)
- , ‘T. S. Eliot: The End of an Era’, in *T. S. Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Hugh Kenner (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 192-205
- Davison, Sarah, *Modernist Parody: Imitation, Origination, and Experimentation in Early Twentieth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023)
- Dawson, N. P., ‘Books in Particular’, *New York Globe (and Commercial Advertiser)* (17 April 1923), 16
- Day-Lewis, Cecil, ‘Mr T. S. Eliot, O.M.’, *The Times*, Iss. 56211 (5 January 1965), 12
- de Villiers, Rick, *Eliot and Beckett’s Low Modernism: Humility and Humiliation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022)
- Dickens, Charles, *Great Expectations*, ed. Margaret Cardwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)
- Dickey, Frances, “‘Hydraulic’: The Company and its Archive”, in *The T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, Vol. 3, ed. John D. Morgenstern, Julia E. Daniel, Frances Dickey (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021), 235-40
- , ‘Eliot’s Letters to Emily Hale and His Personal Theory of Poetry’, *T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, vol. 3 (2021), 123-27
- , ‘May the Record Speak: The Correspondence of T. S. Eliot and Emily Hale’, *Twentieth-Century Literature* 66.4 (2020), 431-62
- , *Reports from the Emily Hale Archive*, The International T. S. Eliot Society, <tselotsociety.wildapricot.org/news/8377909#comments>
- Diepeveen, Leonard, ‘Eliot, Fraud’, *T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, vol. 3 (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021), 23-46
- , *Modernist Fraud: Hoax, Parody, Deception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019)
- , ‘Modern Proliferation, Modernist Trust’, in *Incredible Modernism: Literature, Trust and Deception*, ed. John Attridge and Rod Rosenquist (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 21-36
- , ‘Learning from Philistines: Suspicion, Refusing to Read, and the Rise of Dubious Modernism,’ in *New Directions in American Reception Study*, ed. Philip Goldstein, James L. Machor (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
- , ‘Taking Literature Seriously: Essays to 1927’, in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. David Chinitz (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 263-74.
- Donoghue, Denis, ‘On “Burnt Norton”’, in *Words in Time: New Essays on Eliot’s ‘Four Quartets’*, ed. Edward Lobb (London: Athlone Press, 1993), 1-19
- , *The Third Voice: Modern British and American Verse Drama* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959)
- Douglass, Paul, ‘Eliot’s Cats: Serious Play Behind the Playful Seriousness’ *Children’s Literature* 11.1 (1983), 105-24
- Druckerman, Pamela, ‘How the Midlife Crisis Came to Be’ <theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/05/the-invention-of-the-midlife-crisis/561203/> [accessed 30/05/2022]
- du Sautoy, Marcus, *The Creativity Code: How AI is Learning to Write, Paint, and Think* (London: 4th Estate, 2019)
- du Sautoy, Peter, ‘Eliot’s Request’, *New York Review of Books* (15 April 1976)
- Duff, David, *Romance and Revolution: Shelley and the Politics of a Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)
- Eagleton, Terry, *Humour* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019)
- Eden, Richard and Juliet Conway, ‘Poetic justice! T.S. Eliot’s *Cats* cash to help save literary trove’, *Daily Mail Online* (13 August 2021) <[dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-9889277/EDEN-CONFIDENTIAL-Poetic-justice-T-S-Eliots-Cats-cash-help-save-literary-trove.html](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-9889277/EDEN-CONFIDENTIAL-Poetic-justice-T-S-Eliots-Cats-cash-help-save-literary-trove.html)>
- Edgar, Randolph, ‘The Grind’, *Harvard Advocate* 83.7 (3 June 1907), 102-06
- Editors, ‘Comment’, *The Dial* 73.6 (December 1922), 685-87
- Eliot, Charlotte C., *William Greenleaf Eliot: Minister, Educator, Philanthropist* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1904)
- Eliot, Valerie, ‘T. S. Eliot’, *Times Literary Supplement*, Iss. 4861 (31 May 1996), 17

- Ellis, Steve, 'The Poems of T. S. Eliot', *Modernist Cultures* 12.3 (2017), 463-68 (465).
- , *T. S. Eliot: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2009)
- Ellmann, Maud, *The Poetics of Impersonality: T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987)
- Empson, William, 'Selected Poems of Thomas Hardy', in *Argufying: Essays on Literature and Culture*, ed. John Haffenden (London: Chatto and Windus, 1987), 421-23
- , 'The Style of the Master', in *T. S. Eliot: A Symposium*, ed. Richard March and Tambimuttu (London: PL Editions Poetry, 1948), 35-37
- English, James F., 'Everywhere and Nowhere: The Sociology of Literature After "The Sociology of Literature"', *New Literary History* 41.2 (2010), v-xxiii
- Faber, Toby, *Faber & Faber: The Untold Story* (London: Faber & Faber, 2019)
- Felski, Rita, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015)
- , 'Modernist Studies and Cultural Studies: Reflections on Method', *Modernism/Modernity* 10.3 (2003), 501-17
- Ferguson, John Whittier, and Frances Dickey, eds, 'Special Forum: First Readings of the Eliot-Hale Archive', in *The T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, Vol. 3, ed. John D. Morgenstern, Julia E. Daniel, Frances Dickey (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021), 117-170
- Flood, Alison, 'TS Eliot estate steps in to help Brontë Parsonage Museum rescue appeal', *Guardian* (7 September 2020), <theguardian.com/books/2020/sep/07/ts-eliot-estate-steps-in-to-help-bronte-parsonage-museum-rescue-appeal>
- Forbes, Deborah, *Sincerity's Shadow: Self-Consciousness in British Romantic and Mid-Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2004)
- Foster, John Burt, 'Not T. S. Eliot, but Proust: Revisionary Modernism in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*', *Comparative Literature Studies* 28.1 (1991), 51-67
- Fowler, Bridget, *The Obituary as Collective Memory* (New York; Abingdon: Routledge, 2007)
- , *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory: Critical Investigations* (London: Sage, 1997)
- Fowler, Mark A., "'The Quick in Pursuit of the Dead" Ian Hamilton and the Clash between Literary Biographers and Copyright Owners', in *Modernism and Copyright*, ed. Paul K. Saint-Amour, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 217-42
- Gallup, Donald, *T. S. Eliot: A Bibliography*, 2nd ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 1969)
- , 'The "Lost" Manuscripts of T. S. Eliot' *Times Literary Supplement*, Iss. 3480 (7 November 1968), 1237-9
- Gardner, Helen, *The Composition of 'Four Quartets'* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978)
- , *The Art of T. S. Eliot* (London: Cresset Press, 1949)
- Gilmer, Walker, *Horace Liveright, Publisher of the Twenties* (New York: D. Lewis, 1970)
- Gopal, Priyamvada, 'The Limits of Hybridity: Language and Innovation in Anglophone Postcolonial Poetry', in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature* (London: Routledge, 2012), 182-198
- Gordon, Lyndall, *The Hyacinth Girl: T. S. Eliot's Hidden Muse* (London: Virago, 2022)
- , *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* (London: Virago, 1998)
- , *Eliot's New Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1988)
- , *Eliot's Early Years* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1977)
- Grant, Michael, 'Introduction', in *T. S. Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Michael Grant, 2 vols (Abingdon: Routledge, 1982), I, 1-65
- Green Kaiser, Jo Ellen, 'Disciplining *The Waste Land*, or How to Lead Critics Into Temptation', *Twentieth Century Literature* 44.1 (1998), 82-99
- Greenberg, Clement, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', in *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1957), 98-111 (102).
- Greenblatt, Stephen, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare*, repr. (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2005)
- Greene, David, *Reality and the Heroic Pattern: Last Plays of Ibsen, Shakespeare, and Sophocles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967)
- Grimble, Simon, 'Englishness', in *T. S. Eliot in Context*, ed. Jason Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 43-51
- Guillory, John, 'Bourdieu's Refusal', *Modern Language Quarterly* 58.4 (1997), 367-98
- Haffenden, John 'Literary Dowsing: Valerie Eliot Edits *The Waste Land*', in *T. S. Eliot Studies Annual Vol. 2* (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), 133-150
- , 'Valerie Eliot: Editing the Letters,' in *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, Vol. 5, 1930-1931, ed. Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden (London: Faber & Faber, 2014), xix-xxxvii
- Hall, Donald, *The Ancient Glittering Eyes: Remembering Poets and More Poets* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1992)
- Hamilton, Ian, 'Keepers of the Flame', *New Statesman* 13.607 (29 May 2000), 45-46
- , *Keepers of the Flame: Literary Estates and the Rise of Biography* (London: Hutchinson, 1992)

- Harding, D. W., 'We Have Not Reached Conclusion', in *T. S. Eliot, 'Four Quartets': A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1969), 64-68
- Harding, Jason, 'Unravelling Eliot', in *The New Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. Jason Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1-25
- , *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)
- Hardy, Florence, and Thomas Hardy, *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1891* (London: Macmillan, 1928)
- Hardy, Thomas, *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Samuel Hynes, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982-95)
- , *Thomas Hardy's 'Studies, specimens &c.' Notebook*, ed. Pamela Dalziel and Michael Millgate (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994)
- , *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* (London: Harper & Brothers, 1898)
- Harvard Advocate* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1866-)
- Harvard University Faculty of Arts and Sciences, 'Announcement of the Courses of Instruction Offered by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, 1909-1910' (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1909)
- Helmling, Steven, 'The Grin of Tiresias: Humour in *The Waste Land*', *Twentieth-Century Literature* 36.2 (1990), 137-154.
- Hemley, Cecil, 'The Problem of the Paper-backs', in *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1957), 141-146 (141).
- Herrnstein Smith, Barbara, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968)
- Hewes, Henry, 'T. S. Eliot at Seventy, and an Interview with Eliot', *Saturday Review* 41 (12 September 1958), 30-32
- Hewett, R. P., *A Choice of Poets: An Anthology of Poets from Wordsworth to the Present Day* (London: Harrap, 1968)
- Higgins, David, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity, Politics* (London: New York: Routledge, 2005)
- Higinbotham, R. N., 'Objections to a Review of "Little Gidding"', in *T. S. Eliot, 'Four Quartets': A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1969), 68-71
- Hill, Geoffrey, 'Dividing Legacies', in *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 366-79
- Hodge, Marion C., 'The Sane, the Mad, the Good, the Bad: T. S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*', *Children's Literature* 7.1 (1978), 129-46
- Hoellering, Andrew, 'Murder in the Cathedral: Film, Play, Book' (London: British Film Institute, 2015) [booklet to the DVD]
- Hoellering, G. M., 'Preface', in T. S. Eliot and G. M. Hoellering, *The Film of Murder in the Cathedral* (London: Faber & Faber, 1952), 11-14
- Hoffman, Frederick J., Charles Allen, and Carolyn Ulrich, *The Little Magazine: A History and Bibliography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946)
- Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. A. T. Murray, rev. George Dimock, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1995)
- Hosmer, James K., 'Introduction', in Charlotte C. Eliot, *William Greenleaf Eliot: Minister, Educator, Philanthropist* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1904), xv-xix
- Housman, A. E., *The Poems of A. E. Housman*, ed. Archie Burnett (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997)
- Howarth, Herbert, *Notes on Some Figures Behind T. S. Eliot* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965)
- Humble, Nicola, 'Sitting Forward or Sitting Back: Highbrow v. Middlebrow Reading', *Modernist Cultures* 6.1 (2011), 41-59
- Humphries, Rolfe, 'Eliot's Poetry', *New Masses* 20 (18 August 1936), 25-26
- Hutcheon, Linda, and Michael Hutcheon, 'Historicizing Late Style as a Discourse of Reception', in *Late Style and its Discontents: Essays in Art, Literature, and Music*, ed. Gordon McMullan and Sam Smiles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 51-68
- Hutchinson, Ben, *The Midlife Mind: Literature and the Art of Aging* (London: Reaktion Books, 2020)
- , *Lateness and Modern European Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)
- Jaffe, Aaron, "'T. S. Eliot rates socko!': Modernism, Obituary, and Celebrity", in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. David Chinitz (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 423-35
- , *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)
- Jakobson, Roman, 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances', in *On Language*, ed. Linda R. Waugh and Monique Monville-Burston (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1990), 115-133

- James, Henry, 'Preface to "The Aspern Papers"', in *The Art of the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 159-179
- , 'Preface to *The Author of Beltraffo*', in *The Art of the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 232-240
- , *The Middle Years* (London: W. Collins Sons & Co., 1917)
- , 'The Middle Years', in *The Author of Beltraffo, The Middle Years, Greville Fane and Other Tales* (New York: Scribner's, 1909), 77-105
- Johnson, Loretta, 'Feeling the Elephant: T. S. Eliot's Bolovian Epic', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 37.4 (2014), 109-129
- , 'T. S. Eliot's Bawdy Verse: Lulu, Bolo and More Ties', *Journal of Modern Literature* 27.1-2 (2003), 14-25
- Jones, Gavin, *Failure and the American Writer: A Literary History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014)
- Joyce, James, 'Extracts from Press Notices and Reviews of *Dubliners*' (London: Grant Richards, 1914)
- , 'Extracts from Some Press Notices of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*' (London: Egoist Press, 1916)
- , 'Extracts from Press Notices of *Ulysses* by James Joyce' (Harlesden: Leveridge, 1922)
- Judge, Elizabeth F., 'Make it Pound: Translation, Professionalism and the Right to Propertian Discourse in 'Homage to Sextus Propertius'', *Paideuma* 33.1 (2004), 127-63.
- Julius, Anthony, 'T. S. Eliot and anti-Semitism,' *Times Literary Supplement*, Iss. 4863 (June 14, 1996), 17
- , *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)
- Keegan, Paul, 'Emily of Fire & Violence', *London Review of Books* 42.20 (2020), 7-16
- Kennedy, Richard S., 'Introduction', in *Etcetera: The Unpublished Poems of E. E. Cummings*, ed. Richard S. Kennedy and George James Firmage (New York: Liveright, 1983), xi-xii
- , *Dreams in the Mirror: A Biography of E. E. Cummings*, 2nd ed. (New York: Liveright, 1994)
- , *E. E. Cummings Revisited* (New York: Twayne; Oxford: Maxwell Macmillan, 1994)
- Kennedy, Sarah, *T. S. Eliot and the Dynamic Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018)
- Kenner, Hugh, 'Introduction', in *T. S. Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 1-14
- , *The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot* (London: Methuen, 1959)
- Kermode, Frank, 'What Became of Sweeney?', in *T. S. Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, 2 vols (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), II, 709-711
- Kirk, Russell, *Eliot and His Age: T. S. Eliot's Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Random House, 1971)
- Kirsch, Adam, 'Review of *Early Poems and Juvenilia*', *Times Literary Supplement*, Iss. 5328 (May 13 2005), 9-10
- , 'St Louis to London', *Times Literary Supplement*, Iss. 5893 (11 March 2016), 3-4
- Knox-Shaw, Peter, 'The Dry Salvages: Eliot in Wordsworthian Waters', *Philological Quarterly* 94.1-2 (2015), 149-172
- Krystal, Arthur, ed., *A Company of Readers: Uncollected Writings of W. H. Auden, Jacques Barzun, and Lionel Trilling* (New York: The Free Press, 2001)
- Lahrsow, Miriam, *The Author as Annotator: Ambiguities of Self-Annotation in Pope and Byron* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, Brill Deutschland, 2022)
- Lamos, Colleen, *Deviant Modernism: Sexual and Textual Errancy in T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
- Langbaum, Robert, *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition*, new ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1972)
- Lanham, Richard A., *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991)
- Larkin, Philip, 'An Unofficial Life', in *Further Requirements: Interviews, Broadcasts, Statements and Book Reviews 1952-85*, ed. Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber & Faber, 2001), 358-61
- , *Early Poems and Juvenilia*, ed. A. T. Tolley (London: Faber & Faber, 2005)
- , *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin, 1940-1985*, ed. Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber & Faber, 1992)
- , 'Wanted: Good Hardy Critic', *Critical Quarterly* 8.2 (1966), 174-79
- , 'What's Become of Wystan?', *The Spectator* 205.6890 (15 July 1960), 104-05.
- Leavell, Linda, *Holding On Upside Down: The Life and Work of Marianne Moore* (London: Faber & Faber, 2013)
- Leavis, F. R., 'Eliot's Later Poetry', in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 446-452
- , 'T. S. Eliot's Stature as Critic', *Commentary* 26.5 (1958), 399-410

- , *New Bearings in English Poetry: A Study of the Contemporary Situation* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932)
- Leavis, Q. D., *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932)
- Lehman, Robert S., 'Eliot's Last Laugh: The Dissolution of Satire in "The Waste Land"', *Journal of Modern Literature* 32.2 (2009), 65-79s
- Lentricchia, Frank, *Modernist Quartet* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994)
- Lipking, Lawrence, *The Life of the Poet: Beginning and Ending Poetic Careers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981)
- Lobb, Edward, 'Introduction', in *Words in Time: New Essays on Eliot's 'Four Quartets'*, ed. Edward Lobb (London: Athlone Press, 1993), xi-xiv
- , 'Limitation and Transcendence in "East Coker"', in *Words in Time: New Essays on Eliot's 'Four Quartets'*, ed. Edward Lobb (London: Athlone Press, 1993), 20-37
- Lodge, David, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977)
- Lowell, Robert, *The Letters of Robert Lowell*, ed. Saskia Hamilton (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005)
- Lucas, F. L., 'The Waste Land', in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 115-17
- Macdonald, Dwight, 'Masscult and Midcult,' in *Masscult and Midcult: Essays Against the American Grain*, ed. John Summers (New York: New York Review of Books, 2011), 3-71
- , 'A Theory of Mass Culture', in *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1957), 59-73
- , 'A Theory of Popular Culture, *Politics* 1.1 (1944), 20-23
- Mackinnon, Lachlan, 'Aesthetic Certainty: A full exploration of Eliot's critical opinions', *Times Literary Supplement* Iss. 6096 (31 January 2020) [accessed online]
- Maddrey, Joseph, *The Making of T. S. Eliot: A Study of the Literary Influences* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2009)
- Mallett, Phillip, 'Thomas Hardy and Sincerity', *The Thomas Hardy Journal* 8.1 (1992), 45-54
- Mao, Douglas, 'Introduction', in *The New Modernist Studies*, ed. Douglas Mao (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 1-22
- Mao, Douglas, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, 'The New Modernist Studies', *PMLA* 123.3 (2008), 737-748
- Marchesi, Maria Serena, *Eliot's Perpetual Struggle: The Language of Evil in 'Murder in the Cathedral'* (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 2009)
- Matthews, Steven, 'Introduction', in *'The Waste Land' After One Hundred Years*, ed. Steven Matthews (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2022), 1-24
- Matthews, T. S., *Writing Great Tom: T. S. Eliot & The Keepers of the Flame*, ed. Sara Fitzgerald (Great Barrington, MA: Berkshire, 2023)
- , *Great Tom: Notes Towards the Definition of T. S. Eliot* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974)
- Matthiessen, F. O., *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot: An Essay on the Nature of Poetry* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1935)
- McGann, Jerome J., *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
- McGurl, Mark, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009)
- McIntire, Gabrielle, *Modernism, Memory, and Desire: T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)
- , 'An Unexpected Beginning: Sex, Race, and History in T. S. Eliot's Columbo and Bolo Poems', *Modernism/Modernity* 9.2 (2002), 283-301
- McLaughlin, Don James, 'Eliot, All in Prose', *Journal of Modern Literature* 39.3 (2016), 117-122
- McMullan, Gordon, and Sam Smiles, 'Introduction', in *Late Style and its Discontents: Essays in Art, Literature, and Music*, ed. McMullan and Smiles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1-12
- McMullan, Gordon, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing: Authorship in the Proximity of Death* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)
- Menand, Louis, 'Practical Cat: How T. S. Eliot became T. S. Eliot' *The New Yorker* (19/09/2011) <newyorker.com/magazine/2011/09/19/practical-cat> [accessed 01/06/2022]
- , *Discovering Modernism: T. S. Eliot and his Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987)
- Mendelson, Edward, *Early Auden, Later Auden: A Critical Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017)
- Meyers, Jeffrey, *Edmund Wilson: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995)
- Miller, James E., *T. S. Eliot: The Making of an American Poet, 1888-1922* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2005)

- Millgate, Michael, *Testamentary Acts: Browning, Tennyson, James, Hardy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)
- Milton, John, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Routledge, 2013)
- Monteith, Charles, 'Publishing Larkin', in *Larkin at Sixty*, ed. Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber & Faber, 1982), 38-47
- Moody, A. D., *Thomas Stearns Eliot: Poet*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)
- Moore, Marianne, *Collected Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1952)
- More, Paul Elmer, 'The Cleft Eliot', *Saturday Review* 9 (12 November 1932), 233; 235.
- Morgenstern, John D., 'General Editor's Note', in *The T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, Vol. 2, ed. John D. Morgenstern (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), 1-2
- Morrell, Roy, *Thomas Hardy: The Will and the Way* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1965)
- Morris, Mowbray, 'Culture and Anarchy', in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R. G. Cox (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 214-21
- Morrison, Blake, 'The Two Mrs Eliots', *Independent on Sunday* (24 April 1994), 4-9
- Morrisson, Mark, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001)
- Morton, Timothy, 'The Notes to *Queen Mab* and Shelley's Spinozism', *The Neglected Shelley*, ed. Alan Weinberg and Timothy Webb (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 77-94
- Muir, Kenneth, *Last Periods of Shakespeare, Racine, Ibsen* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1961)
- Nabokov, Vladimir, *Pale Fire* (London; New York: Penguin, 2016)
- Nobel Prize in Literature 1948, <nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1948/summary/> [accessed 20/10/23]
- North, Michael, 'History's Prehistory: Modernist Studies before the New', in *The New Modernist Studies*, ed. Douglas Mao (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 25-40
- , *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)
- Old Possum's Practical Trust, Charity Number 328558, Charity Commission <register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/328558/charity-overview> (Online: UK Government, 2021)
- Orwell, George, 'Points of View. T. S. Eliot', in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 452-455
- Owens, Thomas, '"Sweetness and Light" from Swift to Arnold', *Review of English Studies* 68.283 (2017), 99-122
- Oxford English Dictionary* (Online: Oxford: Oxford University Press) <oed.com>
- Ozick, Cynthia, 'T. S. Eliot at 101: "The man who suffers and the mind which creates"', in *Fame and Folly: Essays* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1996), 3-49
- Palgrave, Francis Turner, ed. *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1861)
- Pasternak Slater, Ann, *The Fall of a Sparrow: Vivien Eliot's Life and Writing* (London: Faber & Faber, 2020) [An edition of Vivien's diaries and ledgers can be found online at <tseliot.com/vivien>]
- Patrides, C. A., 'T. S. Eliot: Alliances of Levity and Seriousness', *The Sewanee Review* 96.1 (1988), 77-94
- Peacock, Francesca, 'Fragments: *Waste Land* 2022 review', *Telegraph* (10 April 2022) <[telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/fragments-waste-land-2022-review-slightly-wasted-opportunity/](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/fragments-waste-land-2022-review-slightly-wasted-opportunity/)>.
- Perkins, David, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Sincerity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1964)
- Perrin, Tom, *The Aesthetics of Middlebrow Fiction: Popular US Novels, Modernism, and Form, 1945-75* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)
- Perry, Seamus, 'Eliot, Blake, Unpleasantness', in *The T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, Vol. 2, ed. John D. Morgenstern (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), 47-66
- Perry, Seamus, and Mark Ford, 'Modern-ish Poets (Live): *The Waste Land*', *London Review of Books Podcast* (2022) <lrb.co.uk/podcasts-and-videos/podcasts/close-readings/modern-ish-poets-live-the-waste-land>.
- Peter, John, 'A New Interpretation of *The Waste Land* (1952) with Postscript (1969)', *Essays in Criticism* 19.2 (1965), 140-75
- , 'A New Interpretation of *The Waste Land*', *Essays in Criticism* 2.3 (1952), 242-66
- Pierce, April, 'T. S. Eliot, Phenomenologist', in *The T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, Vol. 1, ed. John D. Morgenstern (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 114-130
- Popp, Richard K., 'Information, Industrialization, and the Business of Press Clippings, 1880-1925', *The Journal of American History* 101.2 (2014), 427-453, 440.
- Pound, Ezra, 'How to Read', in *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), 15-40
- , *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (London: Faber & Faber, 1951)

- , *The ABC of Economics* (London: Faber & Faber, 1933)
- , *Selected Poems of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1928)
- , *Personae* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1926)
- , 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste', *Poetry* 1.6 (March 1913), 200-06
- Prichett, V. S., "'Our Mr. Eliot' Grows Younger', *New York Times Magazine* (21 September 1958), 15; 72-73
- Quigley, Megan, "'What If?': New Insight into the Friendship of Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot', *LA Review of Books* (27 December 2021), <lareviewofbooks.org/article/what-if-new-insight-into-the-friendship-of-virginia-woolf-and-t-s-eliot/>
- Quigley, Megan, and David Chinitz, ed., *Eliot Now* (London: Bloomsbury, 2024) <bloomsbury.com/uk/eliot-now-9781350173941/>
- Raine, Craig, 'In Defence of T. S. Eliot', in *In Defence of T. S. Eliot* (London: Picador, 2000), 320-32
- Raine, Kathleen, 'Points of View: Another Reading', in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 455-58
- Rainey, Lawrence, *Revisiting 'The Waste Land'* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2005)
- , *Institutions of Modernism* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1998)
- Rascoe, Burton, 'In Defense of T. S. Eliot', in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 91-93
- Reagan, Stephen, 'Contemporary and postwar poetry' in *T. S. Eliot in Context*, ed. Jason Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 359-69
- Ricks, Christopher, *Decisions and Revisions in T. S. Eliot* (London: British Library, 2003)
- , *T. S. Eliot and Prejudice* (London: Faber & Faber, 1988)
- , 'Donald Davie and the English', *London Review of Books* 2.10 (22 May 1980) <lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v02/n10/christopher-ricks/donald-davie-and-the-english>
- Rickword, Edgell, 'A Fragmentary Poem', in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 110-12
- Ridley, Mike, 'Meow it all began', *The Sun* (17 December 2019) <thesun.co.uk/tvandshowbiz/10574889/paul-nicholas-invest-original-cats-musical/>
- Robinson, W. A., 'The National Insurance Act, 1946', *The Modern Law Review* 10.2 (1947), 171-79.
- Rodway, Allan, 'Review of *Poems Written in Early Youth*', *Notes and Queries* 15.2 (1968), 80
- Romeike, Georges D., 'Who Is Mentioned Oftenest in the Newspapers?', *American Magazine* 93 (1922), 15; 98
- Rosenbaum, Susan B., *Professing Sincerity: Modern Lyric Poetry, Commercial Culture, and the Crisis in Reading* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007)
- Rosengard Subotnik, Rose, *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991)
- Rosenquist, Rod, *Modernism, the Market and the Institution of the New* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)
- Rowse, A. L., *A Cornishman at Oxford* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1965)
- Rowse, Oliver, 'The T. S. Eliot Foundation Debuts its Website: tseliot.com', *Time Present* 91 (Spring 2017), 4; 9-10
- Rusk, Ralph L. ed., *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Volume 4: 1848-1855* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939)
- Said, Edward, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006)
- Schuchard, Ronald, 'Burbank with a Baedeker, Eliot with a Cigar: American Intellectuals, Anti-Semitism, and the Idea of Culture', *Modernism/modernity* 10.1 (2003), 1-26
- , 'Preface', in *The Edinburgh Companion to T. S. Eliot and the Arts*, ed. Frances Dickey and John D. Morgenstern (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), xi-xvii
- , 'T. S. Eliot as an Extension Lecturer, 1916-1919', *Review of English Studies* 25.98 (1974), 163-73
- , 'T. S. Eliot as an Extension Lecturer, 1916-1919. (Concluded)', *Review of English Studies* 25.99 (1974), 292-304
- , 'Valerie Eliot and the State of Eliot Studies', opening address, T. S. Eliot International Summer School, London (6 July 2013)
- , *The Last Minstrels: Yeats and the Revival of the Bardic Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
- , *Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)
- Scofield, Martin, *T. S. Eliot: The Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)
- Scott, Edmund, 'There is Humor in T. S. Eliot', *Christian Science Monitor* 36.38 (11 January 1944), 10
- SET Copyrights Certificates of Incorporation, Companies House, Company Number 00654302 <find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/00654302/filing-history?page=6>
- Sewell, Elizabeth, 'Lewis Carroll and T. S. Eliot as Nonsense Poets,' in *T. S. Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Hugh Kenner (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 65-72
- Seymour-Jones, Carole, *Painted Shadow: A Life of Vivienne Eliot* (London: Constable, 2001).

- Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, rev. ed. (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2016)
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe, *The Poems of Shelley, Volume 3, 1819-1820*, ed. Jack Donovan, Cian Duffy, Kelvin Everest, Michael Rossington (London: Longman, 2011)
- , *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Volume 2*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004)
- , *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964)
- Shusterman, Richard, *T. S. Eliot and the Philosophy of Criticism* (London: Duckworth, 1988)
- Siegel, Lee, *Groucho Marx: The Comedy of Existence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015)
- Simpson, Eileen, *Poets in their Youth: A Memoir* (London: Faber & Faber, 1982)
- Sinclair, May, 'Prufrock and Other Observations: A Criticism', in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 10-13
- Smart, John, *Tarantula's Web: John Hayward, T. S. Eliot and their Circle* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 2013)
- Smart, Nicholas, 'T. S. Eliot and the Problem of the Archive', *ELH* 90.3 (2023), 851-81
- Smith, Carol H., 'Eliot's "Divine" Comedies: *The Cocktail Party*, *The Confidential Clerk*, and *The Elder Statesman*', in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. David Chinitz (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 251-262
- Smith, Grover, *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1956)
- Sontag, Susan, 'Notes on Camp', in *Susan Sontag: Essays of the 1960s & 70s*, ed. David Rieff (New York: Library of America, 2013), 259-74
- Speaight, Robert, 'T. S. Eliot, O.M.: A Birthday Tribute', *The Listener*, (25 September 1958), 60, 455-57
- Spender, Stephen, *Journals, 1939-1983* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985)
- , *Eliot* (London: Fontana, 1975)
- , 'Remembering Eliot', *Sewanee Review* 74.1 (1966), 58-84, reprinted in *T. S. Eliot: The Man and His Work*, ed. Allen Tate (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), 38-64
- Spender, Stephen, and David Hockney, and others, *Hockney's Alphabet* (London: Faber & Faber, 1991)
- Spindler, Elizabeth Carroll, *John Peale Bishop: A Biography* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Library Press, 1980)
- Spoo, Robert, 'Ezra Pound's Copyright Statute: Perpetual Rights and the Problem of Heirs', *UCLA Law Review* 56.6 (2009), 1775-1834
- Stafford, Fiona, *The Last of the Race: The Growth of a Myth from Milton to Darwin* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994)
- Stayer, Jayme, *Becoming T. S. Eliot: The Rhetoric of Voice and Audience in 'Inventions of the March Hare'* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021)
- , 'The Short and Surprisingly Private Life of King Bolo: Eliot's Bawdy Poems and Their Audiences', in *T. S. Eliot Studies Annual: Vol. 1* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 3-30
- , 'T. S. Eliot as a Schoolboy: The Lockwood School, Smith Academy, and Milton Academy', *Twentieth Century Literature* 59.4 (2013), 619-656
- , 'Searching for the Early Eliot: *Inventions of the March Hare*', in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. David Chinitz (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 107-19
- Steane, J. B., *Marlowe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 172.
- Strachey, Lytton, 'Mr. Hardy's New Poems', in *Characters and Commentaries* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1933), 195-201
- Sullivan, Hannah, 'The Moment of Embalming: T. S. Eliot's Love Letters – A Report from the Archive,' *Times Literary Supplement*, Iss. 6096 (31 January 2020)
- , *The Work of Revision* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013)
- , '"But we must learn to take literature seriously": T. S. Eliot and the Little Magazines of Modernism, 1917-1920', *Critical Quarterly* 46.2 (2004), 63-90
- Sultan, Stanley, *Eliot, Joyce and Company* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987)
- Sunne, Richard, 'Men and Books [A review of *The Rock*]', in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 304-06
- Sutherland, John, '"The Letters of T. S. Eliot"; review of *The Letters of TS Eliot: Volume Two: 1923-1925*,' in *Financial Times* (16 November 2009), <[ft.com/content/c1a42524-cfe1-11de-a36d-00144feabdc0](https://www.ft.com/content/c1a42524-cfe1-11de-a36d-00144feabdc0)>
- Sutherland, Keston, 'Wrong Poetry', *Textual Practice* 24.4 (2010), 765-782
- Sutton, Walter, ed., *Pound, Thayer, Watson, and 'The Dial': A Story in Letters* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994)
- Svarny, Erik, *'The Men of 1914': T. S. Eliot and Early Modernism* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988)

- Swift, Daniel, 'Casual, funny, flirtatious, severe: *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*', *Spectator* (12 September 2015) <[spectator.co.uk/article/casual-funny-flirtatious-severe/](https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/casual-funny-flirtatious-severe/)> [accessed 30/03/2024].
- Tate, Allen, 'Whose Ox', in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 90-91
- Tate, Allen, ed., *T. S. Eliot: The Man and His Work* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), 38-64
- Taylor, Dennis, *Hardy's Language and Victorian Philology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993)
- Taylor, Michelle A., '(In)discreet Modernism: T. S. Eliot's Coterie Poetics', *College Literature* 47.1 (2020), 34-64
- Tennyson, Alfred Lord, *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, ed. Christopher Ricks, rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 2014)
- Thaventhiran, Helen, *Radical Empiricists: Five Modernist Close Readers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)
- Tolley, A. T., 'Introduction', in *Early Poems and Juvenilia*, ed. A. T. Tolley (London: Faber & Faber, 2005), xv-xxv.
- Toynbee, Philip, 'T. S. Eliot: An appreciation of his work and influence', *The Observer* (19 January 1965), 26
- Trevelyan, Mary, and Erica Wagner, *Mary & Mr Eliot: A Sort of Love Story* (London: Faber & Faber, 2022)
- Trilling, Lionel, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972)
- , 'The Function of the Little Magazine', in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), 93-103
- Trousdale, Rachel, *Humor, Empathy, and Community in Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021)
- Tucker, Grant, 'TS Eliot comes to rescue of Brontë Museum', *Sunday Times* (6 September 2020) <[thetimes.co.uk/article/ts-eliot-comes-to-rescue-of-bronte-museum-77tzb3wxf](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ts-eliot-comes-to-rescue-of-bronte-museum-77tzb3wxf)>
- Untermeyer, Louis, 'Disillusion vs. Dogma', in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 93-95
- Virgil, *Virgil, Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid, Books 1-6*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1999-2000)
- Wacquant, Loïc J. D., 'For a Socio-Analysis of Intellectuals: On "Homo Academicus"', *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 34 (1989), 1-29
- Wagner, Charles A., ed., *Prize Poems: 1913-1929*, (New York: C. Boni, 1930), 70-85
- Wallace, Anthony, and Christopher Ricks, 'Book Interview: Christopher Ricks on *The Poems of T. S. Eliot, The Annotated Text*', *The Arts Fuse* (18 May 2016) <artsfuse.org/145296/fuse-book-interview-christopher-ricks-on-the-poems-of-t-s-eliot-the-annotated-text/> [accessed 30/03/2024]
- Watson, Alex, 'The Faith of the Faithless: Percy Bysshe Shelley's Notes for *Queen Mab*', in *Romantic Futures: Legacy, Prophecy, Temporality* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 129-47
- Watt, R. J. C., ed., *Philip Larkin: A Concordance to the Poetry* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1995)
- Wheatley, David, 'The Poems of T. S. Eliot, A review', *Guardian* (13 November 2015) <[theguardian.com/books/2015/nov/13/the-poems-of-ts-eliot-annotated-text-christopher-ricks-jim-mccue-review](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/nov/13/the-poems-of-ts-eliot-annotated-text-christopher-ricks-jim-mccue-review)> [accessed 30/03/2024].
- White, Susanna, dir., 'T. S. Eliot: Into *The Waste Land*' (Oxford: BBC, 2022) <[bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001d1yy](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001d1yy)>.
- Wilner, Joshua, 'Autobiography', in *William Wordsworth in Context*, ed. Andrew Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 145-51.
- Wilson Knight, G., *The Wheel of Fire: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare's Sombre Tragedies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930)
- Wilson, Edmund, *Letters on Literature and Politics, 1912-1972* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977)
- Winters, Yvor, *Primitivism and Decadence: A Study of American Experimental Poetry* (New York: Arrow Editions, 1937)
- Winterson, Jeanette, 'Secular Sermon', Southwark Cathedral (7 April 1922) <thewasteland2022.com/fragment/opening-talk-jeanette-winterson/>
- Winton, J. R., *Lloyds Bank, 1918-1969* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1982)
- Wittman, Reinhard, 'Was there a Reading Revolution at the End of the Eighteenth Century?', in *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier (Oxford: Polity Press, 1999), 284-313.
- Woolf, Virginia, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, 5 vols (London: Granta, 2023)
- , 'The Novels of Thomas Hardy', in *Collected Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf, 4 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1966-67), 1, 256-266
- , 'Middlebrow', in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1942), 113-19
- Wordsworth, William, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed R. L. Brett and Alun R. Jones (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2005)

- , *The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850: Authoritative Texts, Contexts and Reception, Recent Critical Essays*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979)
- , *The Prelude, Or Growth of a Poet's Mind* (London: Edward Moxon, 1850)
- Wylie, Elinor, 'Mr. Eliot's Slug Horn', in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 95-96
- Yeats, W. B., ed., *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1936)
- Zakaria, Rafia, 'May T.S. Eliot letters send an overdue #MeToo message', *CNN Online* (7 January 2020) [<edition.cnn.com/2020/01/07/opinions/t-s-eliot-letters-and-bad-male-poets-zakaria/index.html>](https://edition.cnn.com/2020/01/07/opinions/t-s-eliot-letters-and-bad-male-poets-zakaria/index.html)