

Poetics and *The Waste Land*

Subjects, Objects and the “Poem Including History”

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to trace key elements of the poetics that produced *The Waste Land*, T. S. Eliot's landmark work of modernist poetry. Part I of the thesis examines the development of the Hulme-Pound-Eliot strand of modernist poetry through a focus on the question of subjectivity and the relationship between philosophical-epistemological ideas and modernist poetics. It traces a movement from a poetic approach centred on the individual consciousness towards one that aims to incorporate multiple subjectivities. Part II offers a complementary account of Eliot's shift towards a more expansive scope of subject matter and of the fragmented poetic structure of *The Waste Land*. The argument is based on Jacques Rancière's analysis of the modern regime of poetics dominant in the West since the Romantics, which identifies "literature" with the "life of a people" and is characterized by an inclusive logic that poeticizes ordinary subjects, objects and fragments.

To my parents

Contents

Introduction.....	1
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Part I

1 Early Modernism and Turn-of-the-century Philosophy: Subjectivity and Objectivity...	9
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1.1 Subjectivity and Narrative Technique.....	10
1.2 Consciousness and Reality in Turn-of-the-Century Philosophy.....	12
1.3 Hulme, Pound, Ford: Subjectivity and Objectivity.....	19

2 Eliot, Subjectivity and The Waste Land.....	29
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2.1 Eliot Among the Moderns: Objectivity in Subjectivity.....	30
2.2 “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”: Beyond the Individual Consciousness.....	39
2.3 Eliot’s “Theory of Points of View”: Towards The Waste Land.....	45

Part II

3 The “Poem Including History”: A Rancièrian Perspective.....	57
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3.1 The Long Poem, Epic, and History as Subject Matter.....	58
3.2 Literature and the “Life of a People”.....	66
3.3 The Inclusive Logic of Literature: Historical Subjects, Objects, Fragments.....	82
3.4 Conclusion.....	97

Works Cited.....	101
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Introduction

In late November 1922, just a few weeks after the *The Waste Land* first appeared in the United States, the *New York Evening Post Literary Review* published an essay by Edmund Wilson titled “The Rag-Bag of the Soul”, in which he comments on the state of modern literature. Wilson cites “T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and Ezra Pound’s *Eight Cantos*; James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and the short stories of such writers as Virginia Woolf and Sherwood Anderson” as exemplars of a modern literary tendency that takes as its subject the

cross-section of the human consciousness of a single specific human being, usually carried through a very limited period—only a day or an hour—of his career. It is the whole world sunk in the subjective life of a single human soul—beyond whose vague and impassable walls there is nothing solid and clear, there is nothing which exists in itself as part of an objective order. (Brooker 78)

He then goes on to reflect on modern fragmentation in literature as well as in the individual and the social psyche—familiar themes for any student of literary and artistic modernism. In the absence of ideal figures and shared conceptual frameworks religious, philosophical, social, even economic, literature is reduced to “only harsh self-mockery and self-knowledge—the human soul as a mess”. “And no one”, Wilson states, “makes any attempt to pick up the scattered pieces” (Brooker 79). The title of Wilson’s essay, “The Rag-Bag of the Soul”, therefore points to two interconnected issues: the subjective or solipsistic enclosure within the solitary soul, and the fragmented state of the individual soul itself—social fragmentation being then a reflection of the isolation of the individual and the absence of a unified or shared worldview.

Later on in his essay, Wilson makes sure to clarify that he does not accuse all works of literature belonging to this modern tendency of failing to “pick up the scattered pieces”. He thus hails Joyce’s *Ulysses* as among the masterpieces of the form, for Joyce manages to shape the “brokenness and triviality” of the stream of conscious into an organized whole, and to bring it “into relation with the rest of the world” (Brooker 80). We may assume that the works by Eliot, Pound, Woolf and Anderson, which Wilson

mentions earlier along with Joyce's, similarly rank for him among the "masterpieces of the form" and succeed, in his view, in ordering the "brokenness and triviality". He also quotes the "heap of broken images" passage of *The Waste Land* as a direct comment by Eliot on this state of isolated fragmentation. In light of these qualifications, it becomes ambiguous which works of literature Wilson's main line of argument is actually supposed to describe. Yet the two tendencies which he singles out remain telling.

It is somewhat ironic that Wilson should cite Eliot's and Pound's works as his examples of the "newer poetry" sunk in subjectivity (Brooker 78). Both Eliot and Pound would seem to have been preoccupied by this issue in much of their work up to and beyond 1922. They were both harshly critical of their nineteenth-century predecessors precisely on the charge of literary solipsism, of an excessive subjectivity that distorts reality and fails to render experience faithfully. Pound's Imagist project of the 1910s, which famously prescribed the "direct treatment of the 'thing' whether objective or subjective" (*Literary Essays* 3), emphasized precision and concreteness, and in effect aimed at objectivity in the treatment even of the private processes of the mind, so as to make them communicable. Eliot, for his part, as evidenced for instance by his philosophical dissertation on F. H. Bradley (completed in 1916), was deeply concerned with the problem of the epistemological limits of individual subjectivity and philosophical attempts to overcome them. And Eliot's project in *The Waste Land* particularly, as the first part of this thesis will argue, is shaped in significant ways by the effort to overcome the limitation to the "single human consciousness".

If Wilson's comments on *Ulysses* are in fact meant to apply to *The Waste Land* as well, then what he is suggesting here is that Eliot's poem achieves or at least strives towards some kind of unity or ordering of the disparate fragments into an organized whole; but it remains, in his view, part of the subjectivist tendency in modern literature, confining itself to "merely explor[ing] a single human consciousness and mak[ing] a record of what we find there" (Brooker 80). Subsequent criticism of *The Waste Land* through the twentieth century would debate whether the poem is content to critique or lament the fragmentation of the modern world, or if it manages to transcend the disorder through an organized structure and a unified vision (See Gish 439-42). From the perspective of this thesis—which I think agrees with the general critical consensus today—*The Waste Land* is more interesting as a fragmented, disorderly text than as a

controlled and unified whole. Our interest also lies in the way that the poetic structure of *The Waste Land* is shaped by the attempt to move beyond the “single human consciousness”. From our perspective, therefore, Wilson would be wrong on both counts. Nevertheless, Wilson in effect puts us on the scent of some of the pivotal terms of this study: subjectivity, subjects and fragmentation.

This is a study in poetics. Its purpose can be expressed simply as: accounting for a set of defining features of Eliot’s *The Waste Land* through an examination of ideas that informed and influenced its ultimate shape. The focus is not on the social context of the poem’s production, but is rather confined to poetics, in interaction with related intellectual contexts. The first half of the thesis, consisting of two chapters, is concerned with the poetics of a certain strand of modernist poetry, represented in the main by T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, considered in relation to philosophical thinking of the time concerning subjectivity and epistemology. Part II of the thesis turns to a broader poetical context and inscribes *The Waste Land* and its poetics within a larger poetical regime going back to the eighteenth century, and involving the domain of history.

The thesis will involve little close reading of *The Waste Land* itself. Instead, it will seek to shed light on the poem by reading around the text, in critical, philosophical and literary writings by Eliot and others. We may, however, offer a preliminary, short description of the poem, identifying its most recognizable, defining features, which the thesis seeks to illuminate at length: *The Waste Land* is a long poem of 430-odd lines; it is conceived and constructed as a large collection or collage of highly heterogeneous fragments (including imagistic fragments, lyrical fragments, short scenes, dialogue, quotations and allusions, snippets from songs... and, we may add, annotations) with rapidly shifting perspectives and voices, and a remarkably diverse cast of characters and objects; it is identified as a poem dealing with history, or the history of a civilization, as its subject matter; finally—since the reception is part of the artefact that is the poem—it has been consistently seen by many, since its publication, as a landmark work of modernist poetry.

Ronald Bush begins his influential book *T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style* with a question: “how did the author of *The Waste Land*, one of the most highly charged, dramatic poems of the twentieth century, come twenty years later to write ...

Four Quartets?” (ix). He then adds that questions about Eliot point beyond him to modernism itself. The present thesis, in a sense, focuses on the first step and attempts to answer the question of how *The Waste Land* came to be and to take the shape and significance that it did. Bush’s approach to his topic is in part biographical. Others have approached *The Waste Land* from the perspective of social context. Lawrence Rainey, for instance, has a socio-economic take on the publication history of the poem in his excellent chapter “The Price of Modernism: Publishing *The Waste Land*”, from *Institutions of Modernism*. This thesis will approach the poem from the point of view of poetics. Rainey writes in the closing paragraph of his chapter: “Generations of students have been exhorted to look closely at the poem, to examine only the text, to indulge in a scholastic scrutiny of linguistic minutiae” (106). He suggests an alternative which he states in deliberately exaggerated terms: “The best reading of a work may, on some occasions, be one that does not read it at all”. This thesis does, of course, depend on a thoughtful reading of *The Waste Land* itself, but it does not presume to walk the reader through the minutiae of the text. Instead, it takes as its starting point the above sketch outlining some of the poem’s most salient structural features and attempts to shed light on them by reading around the text itself and uncovering elements of the poetics that informed its creation.

The French philosopher Jacques Rancière insists, as Gabriel Rockhill explains, on “the necessity of examining practices in conjunction with the theoretical discourses that establish the conditions by which these are perceived *qua* artistic and literary practices” (Rancière, *Mute Speech* 6). This attitude is most directly pertinent in the second half of this study, which takes Rancière’s work as its primary basis, but it also generally informs the poetics-centred approach of this study.

Part I of this thesis seeks to account for the poetic approach and the fragmented structure of *The Waste Land* by examining the development of a certain strand of modernist poetics in conjunction with philosophical ideas about consciousness and subjectivity. Chapter 1 will establish a context of turn-of-the-century philosophical thinking about consciousness and epistemology, exemplified by the ideas of Henri Bergson, among others. This will be connected to an early modernist poetics, represented mainly by T. E. Hulme and Ezra Pound, which assigns to poetry the task of

rendering faithfully and objectively the subjective impressions of the individual consciousness. In Chapter 2, we turn to T. S. Eliot himself and proceed to situate his work within the poetic tendency identified in the first chapter. While he manifestly shared the outlook of this brand of poetics, Eliot, we will argue, showed early signs of scepticism about the limitations of individual subjectivity. This scepticism was developed in his philosophical papers of the 1910s, where he sought to formulate a philosophical basis for the possibility of external, shared truths. His answer was to move beyond the individual subject and to ground external truth in a multiplicity of fragmentary perspectives, or a multiplicity of subjectivities. This abstract philosophical idea, it will be argued, found its literary counterpart in the fragmented poetic structure of *The Waste Land*, which gathers together a heterogeneous collection of fragments with shifting perspectives and voices, doubled through allusion and quotation.

Eliot's desire to establish a basis for external, shared truths and his answer to the problem point towards a poetics of knowledge that grounds truth in some kind of communal or collective entity. The second half of this thesis ventures a complementary account of Eliot's move beyond the individual subject and the fragmented structure of the poem, from the perspective of a broader conception of poetics. It is broader, firstly, because it seeks to inscribe the poetics of *The Waste Land* within a larger poetical regime going back to the eighteenth century. Roughly since Frank Kermode's pioneering 1957 study *Romantic Image*, critics increasingly recognized the continuities between modernism and Romantic/nineteenth-century poetics, as opposed to the sense of radical rupture usually associated with modernism. The novel and ambitious work undertaken by Jacques Rancière since the 1990s—and continuing to this day—offers a compelling theoretical framework which describes these continuities in terms of a modern regime of poetics that took root in the West around the end of the eighteenth century. In Rancière's analysis of this poetics, "literature" itself is identified as a historically constituted regime of the art of writing, inscribed within a larger regime of thought. The argument in Part II of this thesis is essentially based on this broad perspective, and examines the way in which Eliot's *The Waste Land* can be understood as belonging to the modern regime for literature as described by Rancière.

In his study of the *Modernist Poetics of History*, James Longenbach "locate[s] Pound and Eliot in the central tradition of Romantic and post-Romantic poetry" by

examining their conception of history and culminates with a reading of *The Waste Land* as a “poem including history” (x). Part II of this thesis is part of a similar effort, but it starts out by asking why Eliot’s landmark poem of modernist poetry should have been conceived in the first place as a “poem including history”. The first stage of the argument will discuss the identification of Eliot’s *The Waste Land* as a “long poem”, partaking of the genre of “epic” and treating “history” as its subject matter, and suggest that Eliot was impelled to conceive of his most ambitious poetic project in those terms owing to a set of conventional expectations within the poetics available to him. This, we will argue, informs his turn towards a more expansive scope of subject matter beyond the confines of individual subjectivity.

Secondly, we will delve deeper into Rancière’s analysis of the aesthetic regime of literature and discuss the logic by which this regime identifies “literature” with the “expression of the life of a people”. “History”, “society”, “culture” or “civilization”, all belong to the same matrix of intertwined terms that can be subsumed under the “life of a people”. Based on this perspective, it is no surprise that the landmark poem of modernist poetry should have been one purporting to analyse the “history of a civilization”, or a “poem including history”.

Finally, the last stage of the argument turns to the question of the treatment of history itself within the modern poetics of literature described by Rancière. While Longenbach in the above study examines Eliot’s conception of history from a time perspective, focusing on the relationship between past and present and the idea of the “presence” of the past, our perspective here will be different. Having discussed “history” first as an identifier of subject matter, conferring a certain status upon the work of literature, we will at last discuss the literary treatment of “history” from the perspective of the subjects and objects that populate it. The discussion seeks to shed light on the fragmented poetic structure of the “poem including history” through the lens of Rancière’s analysis of the inclusive logic of literature within the modern regime, whereby fragmentary subjects and objects take on historical significance.

Part I

1 Early Modernism and Turn-of-the-century Philosophy: Subjectivity and Objectivity

The first part of this thesis seeks to contextualize Eliot's project in *The Waste Land* by tracing a progression in a strand of literary modernism up to 1922 which is characterized in telling ways by a concern with the question of subjectivity. This first chapter aims to establish a certain context of literary and philosophical thinking in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries centred on the preoccupation with consciousness and subjectivity. Developments in novelists' approach to narrative in that period were marked by the highly influential work of Henry James and Joseph Conrad, who sought to achieve greater realism by limiting the narrative perspective to that of a single narrator or focalizing consciousness. At the same time, turn-of-the-century philosophers like Henri Bergson were deeply preoccupied with the question of consciousness. Bergson saw the raw subjective flux of sensations and impressions as a fundamental level of reality which is ordinarily concealed from us, and he assigned to the philosopher and the artist the task of recovering this deeper reality. Bergson was a highly influential figure because his ideas spread widely and, indeed, exerted a direct influence on T. E. Hulme as well as T. S. Eliot himself, who for a time identified as a Bergsonian. Inspired by Bergson, T. E. Hulme articulated an imagist poetics which sought to represent and communicate sense impressions faithfully. Ezra Pound propounded similar ideas in his critical writings—and in his capacity as literary impresario—and became the great champion of Imagism.

This chapter hopes to demonstrate the centrality of the question of subjectivity in the strand of modernist poetry represented in its early stages by Hulme and Pound, and to which Eliot was a latecomer. But it simultaneously aims to show that this poetics was motivated by the desire for *objectivity* in the representation of reality as it is experienced by the individual. Eliot's early work from the 1910s belongs to this modernist poetics seeking to represent subjective experience faithfully, indeed objectively, but his pursuit of objectivity would lead him to look beyond the individual subject. As we shall see, the matrix of modernism—to borrow Sanford Schwartz's phrase—that sets the context for *The Waste Land* is constituted out of the confluence of literary and philosophical-

epistemological concerns. The question of Eliot's place within this matrix and the development of his poetics towards *The Waste Land* will be taken up in Chapter 2.

1.1 Subjectivity and Narrative Technique

Michael H. Levenson's influential book *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine 1908-1922* is an account of the literary and conceptual attitudes and developments that motivated one "recognizable lineage" of writers and works of English literary modernism up to *The Waste Land* (x). Levenson centres his study on a group of writers who lived and worked and interacted in London during the period in question: T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, Ford Madox Ford and, finally, Eliot, whom Levenson considers to be "the heir to English modernism". But the book begins tellingly with a chapter on "Consciousness" focusing among other things on the narrative approach of Joseph Conrad and Henry James, both of whom were widely admired in the early twentieth century, and held in high esteem by Eliot himself. Eliot, as is well known, intended to use a line from Conrad as the epigraph to *The Waste Land* (until dissuaded by Pound). In 1918, he had praised James as "the most intelligent man of his generation", commending his novels in particular for "maintaining a point of view, a viewpoint untouched by the parasite idea" (*Selected Prose* 152). And the matter of point of view, of subjectivity, is the focus of Levenson's opening discussion of Conrad and the late Victorian literary context and one of the driving motifs in his study, as it is in this chapter.

Levenson takes as his starting point Conrad's preface to one of his novels, recognized by critics as Conrad's most direct statement of his artistic stance, and argues that it points to concerns that have general relevance and are central to the situation of late Victorian and early modernist literature (2). Levenson highlights a tension, evident in Conrad's preface, between the goal of "fidelity to the visible universe"—with an emphasis on sensory impressions—and references to interiority and subjectivity. As Levenson explains, the fiction of the late nineteenth century sees the breakdown of the conventions of the omniscient narrator, and this leads to two tendencies: on the one hand, toward "a physical description confined to sensory detail"—what Ford Madox

Ford would later sum up in the dictum “Never state: present”—and, on the other, toward the creation of character-narrators who can, from their limited perspective, realistically comment on, interpret and evaluate what they see, thus taking over some of the traditional functions of the omniscient narrator (5, 8-9).

Conrad’s novel in question, while some critics have questioned the consistency of its narration, provides for Levenson a revealing instance where both tendencies can be seen at work. Thus, third-person passages, characterized by the meticulous use of evocative physical detail in order to present a given situation vividly, go on to introduce the first-person at moments of “straining after emotion” and when the need arises to “plausibly give utterance to ... beliefs, perceptions, inferences”. Only then do “direct statements of attitude” and “psychological verbs” become more manifest in the narration (Levenson 6). What both of these strategies indicate is a concern with an increased realism or plausibility that has become linked to an awareness of the limitation of the subjective point of view. The narrative situation presupposes a point from which objects and events are observed, and a personal witness that registers and reacts to what they see. There are limits to what this witness can realistically be said to observe. The narrator cannot, as in George Eliot’s novels, pass casually and indifferently from “externality” to the “internality” of various characters (Levenson 7), but is subject to the limits dictated by point of view, by the senses and by the confines of the single human consciousness. The characterizations, descriptions and evaluations offered by a personal narrator are, by extension, understood to belong to their own consciousness, and, indeed, may be assigned a varying degree of reliability.

This conception of the narrative situation has become a commonplace of narrative theory, but it was established and consolidated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, partly through the example of Conrad and, perhaps even more, that of Henry James. Levenson finds the same duality of emphasis on surfaces or the sensory together with the subjective in some of Henry James’s prefaces. James asserts that “art deals with what we see”, and he locates “the *leading* interest” of any plot “in a consciousness” (20-1). For Levenson, the examples of Conrad and James point to the “establishment of a ‘psychologistic’ theory of literary meaning which insists on the primacy of consciousness and the muteness of the mere event” (21). Levenson is careful to distinguish this tendency from the “idealist’s doubt of external reality”, since it is the

“*meaning* of the physical reality, not its independent existence”, that is tied to subjectivity (21). But this remains a subjectivist stance. An implication of this, which will come to play a role in our account, is the suspicion that meanings, values or even perceptions may be different for each individual, and also difficult—if not impossible—to communicate accurately. In any case, the main idea we want to retain here is that subjectivity and the awareness of the epistemological limits of the individual consciousness become an animating concern and a constitutive element of Conrad’s and James’s poetics of fiction. The conceptual questions connected to this poetics form an meaningful background for the developments that would characterize Eliot’s strand of modernist poetry. Another significant element of this background, to which we will turn next, derives from turn-of-the-century philosophy.

1.2 Consciousness and Reality in Turn-of-the-Century Philosophy

Philosophical works, ideas and concerns from the turn of the twentieth century had a direct influence on T. E. Hulme, Pound and Eliot, the poet-theorists of our strand English modernism. Yet, even without the discernible lines of direct influence, the philosophical ideas in question would retain their relevance because there are clear affinities that help elucidate modernist poetics. *The Matrix of Modernism* is Sanford Schwartz’s pioneering study of the philosophical context of Pound and Eliot’s modernism. Schwartz focuses on the work of four philosophers: Henri Bergson, William James, F. H. Bradley and Friedrich Nietzsche. He is particularly interested in their views on abstraction and experience, and sets out to demonstrate the bearing of their work in that area on the thinking of Hulme, Pound and Eliot. Differences notwithstanding, the work of these four philosophers shows a preoccupation with consciousness and subjectivity, and can be said to point towards an emphasis on the sensory and on the perceptions of the individual consciousness similar to that we saw in Joseph Conrad’s and Henry James’s poetics of fiction. Henri Bergson and William James, in fact, appear to equate the effort towards a true—we might say objective—description of reality with the attempt to give a more faithful account of subjective experience. This philosophical

attitude would seem to parallel the premises of Conrad's and Henry James's approach to narrative. Bergson's ideas, moreover, informed the imagist poetics of T. E. Hulme.

Sanford Schwartz claims that "the opposition between abstraction and sensation" was "one of the most prominent features of turn-of-the-century thought" (20). The four philosophers, as he points out, each coined a term of his own in order to refer to "the original presentation of reality beneath the instrumental conventions we use to order it". Bergson spoke of "real duration", James of the "stream of consciousness", Bradley referred to "immediate experience" and Nietzsche to the "chaos of sensations". Although each of them had a somewhat different attitude towards this fundamental sensory flux, the key idea was to distinguish the given data that presented itself in its raw form in the human consciousness from the systems of supposedly conventional, acquired or conditioned abstractions that are habitually imposed upon the raw flux of sensations by various instrumental functions that serve practical purposes, such as the intellect or language. These abstract systems or instrumental mechanisms, for instance for Bergson, "isolate those elements from the sensory flux that serve our practical interests", and "screen us from the rest" (Schwartz 20). Driven by our practical interests, they simplify the data of the sensory flux and censor certain elements of experience, so that we may "inhabit a world that is suited to our everyday needs", but at the price of becoming "detached from the original stream of sensations". This implies that the original, raw stream of sensations, rich in elements or aspects of experience which we habitually ignore, constitutes the deeper, more fundamental level of our experience. This amounts to an "inversion of Platonism", because it places reality "in the immediate flux of sensory appearances" rather than "in a rational order" underlying a world of mere appearances (Schwartz 12). We can already detect an affinity between this position and the assumptions hinted by the narrative approach of Conrad and Henry James, where the desire to achieve greater realism and objectivity corresponded to the breakdown of the conventions of the omniscient narrator along with emphasis placed on appearances and sensory impressions recorded from the point of view of an individual narrator or focalizing consciousness.

Bergson, Schwartz reminds us, does not deny the independent existence of external objects (22). Yet his interest is directed not to objects themselves but to our own experience of them. His doctoral thesis, known in English as *Time and Free Will*, retains

its original french name in the affixed subtitle: *An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. This is, of course, the work where he introduces his idea of real duration. In doing so, he insists on distinguishing between external objects and our experience of them, and argues memorably that, though an object may well remain identical to itself, one can never experience it twice in the same way:

Deep-seated psychic states are radically heterogeneous to each other, and it is impossible that any two of them should be quite alike, since they are two different moments of a life-story. While the external object does not bear the mark of the time that has elapsed ... we cannot here speak of identical conditions, because the same moment does not occur twice. (*Time and Free Will* 199-200).

This evidences Bergson's interest in the concrete particulars of subjective experience, in its totality, at any given moment. To these he opposes the generalizations we impose in order to organize our experiences, and which necessarily falsify our experience because they are selective and cause us to suppress elements of the flux of sensation—based on the practical directives of our everyday lives. The reason why differences in our experiences of the same objects usually escape our attention, he argues in another passage, is that “our outer and, so to speak, social life is more practically important to us than our inner and individual existence” (*Time and Free Will* 130). Yet Bergson maintains that “duration is something real for the consciousness which preserves the trace of it” (*Time and Free Will* 200). Bergson is trying to correct the habitual prioritization of “our outer and social life” by putting the spotlight on our “inner and individual existence”, and asserting the *reality* of this inner life.

Schwartz remarks that Bergson is reacting against what is called the “associationist” tendency, proponents of which take “the recurrent element in every presentation of an object—the object itself—and treat that recurrent element as if it made a simple, direct impression each time it appears”. For Bergson, on the other hand, as Schwartz explains, “there is no reason to treat the personal element” in the overall impression as “an accidental addition to the original impression; the personal element is an integral part of the total experience” (25). This again indicates Bergson's

preoccupation with the inner, subjective aspects of consciousness, which form an essential part of reality as we experience it. Thus, while Bergson does distinguish between a “world of everyday appearance” and a “more fundamental reality” (as Plato does), he “identifies this reality ... with the immanent flux of real duration”, that is with the raw flux of perceptions, sensations and feelings which, for him, makes up the deepest level of the subjective, inner life of consciousness (Schwartz 29-30).

William James (who, of course, happens to be the older brother of Henry James) often appeared “less concerned with the sensory flux itself than with the constructs we use to order it”, but he was, like Bergson, concerned with the integral character of subjective experience (Schwartz 45). Both philosophers make a case against the “atomistic” view of consciousness—aligned, again, with the “associationist” tendency—which divides experience into discrete elements which are then combined into more complex ideas (Schwartz 25). Bergson claimed that this atomism “misrepresents the nature of psychic experience”, and he described real duration as characterized by the “interpenetration” of successive moments in a seamless whole. William James, for his part, maintained that “consciousness ... does not appear to itself chopped up in bits”, and proposed the “stream of consciousness” as an appropriate metaphor for referring to the real character of consciousness or subjective life (239). In addition to a particular view of consciousness, two telling—and potentially contradictory—dispositions come through in the descriptions above. First is the weight given by James to the way that “consciousness appears to itself”. Not only is William James concerned with describing the true character of consciousness, but his argument for establishing one of its essential qualities invokes the way consciousness experiences itself. This speaks again to James’s emphasis, shared by Bergson, on the “personal and subjective nature” of reality at its most fundamental level (Schwartz 46). On the other hand, it is evident from the context of the argument that consciousness cannot invariably appear to itself in its genuine character, for if it did there would be no occasion for inaccurate descriptions of consciousness to crop up, such as the atomist view which is being criticized. Both Bergson and William James are therefore concerned with the recovery of the deeper level of reality constituted by “real duration” or the “stream of consciousness”. “The greater part of the time”, Bergson contends, “we live outside ourselves” (*Time and Free Will* 231). We are prevented by certain habitual and conventional mechanisms from

being in contact with the full texture of reality and our essential selves. As Schwartz explains, however, for Bergson “there are moments in our lives when we suspend our practical orientation and place in abeyance the mechanisms that ordinarily condition our existence. It is in these moments that we are made aware of the deeper psychic states that usually escape our attention” (29).

We have mentioned Friedrich Nietzsche as another philosopher who posits a more fundamental level of reality. Unlike Bergson, however, Nietzsche “attaches no value whatever to the ‘chaos of sensations’” (Schwartz 45). He claims further that “everything of which we become conscious is arranged, simplified, schematized, interpreted through and through”, which means that we never have access to any pre-conceptual level of reality (Nietzsche 263-4). This level of reality “is not ‘the true world’”, Nietzsche maintains, but a “formless unformulable world ... ‘unknowable’ to us” (307). The comparison with Nietzsche underlines an important aspect of Bergson’s outlook. For Bergson, for his part, maintains that “real duration” is in fact “the true world” or the fundamental level of reality. To “get back into pure duration”, he claims in *Time and Free Will*, is “to recover possession of oneself”—that, moreover, is what allows one in effect to “act freely” (231-2). Bergson therefore attaches great importance to the recovery of real duration, and he goes so far as to assign to the philosopher the task of helping us to transcend the conventional mechanisms which usually stand in our way, to guide us “from conceptual abstractions back to immediate experience” (Schwartz 29-30). Notably, he assigns this task also to the artist.

Turn-of-the-century philosophy thus evidences a central preoccupation with consciousness and the nature of subjective life. Interestingly, the work of Bergson and William James equates the effort towards a true—we might say objective—description of reality with the attempt to give a more faithful account of subjective experience. This attitude parallels the tendency we have identified in the late Victorian approach to narrative, which pursued greater realism by resolving to portray faithfully the impressions and feelings registered from the position of an individual narrator or focalizing consciousness (this tendency, we may note, becomes more and more radicalized in later modernist novels). That which, on the other hand, distorts or falsifies reality is, in this sense, not an excess of subjectivity or a deficiency in detached, impersonal rationality. It is instead the set of conventional constructs which we

habitually impose on reality, and which come between us and our experience, rendering us detached from our true inner selves. These constructs are instrumental, causing us to alienate elements of our own experience at all times so that we may fulfil certain superficial practical functions. One of these mechanisms is the rational intellect. Another, interestingly, is language. “We instinctively tend to solidify our impressions in order to express them in language”, says Bergson (*Time and Free Will* 130). This raises the problem of whether we are indeed capable of recovering in language an undistorted sensory flux and of communicating it to others, a concern that informs some of the developments in modernist poetry which the present chapter attempts to recount.

As we shall see, T. E. Hulme, who played a significant role in the early developments of English modernist poetry, took an active interest in Bergson’s work in particular and drew on his ideas, such as the recovery of a pristine world of immediate experience and, in modified form, his attitude towards language, in justifying his imagist poetics. Bergson’s ideas and concerns similarly shed light on Pound’s Imagism and some of his critical attitudes in the 1910s. But before we move on to Imagism, we shall turn very briefly to late nineteenth-century aestheticism, and consider this current as a pre-modernist literary reaction against instrumentalism which parallels Bergson’s anti-instrumentalist stance. The point is simply to suggest in the aestheticist current of late nineteenth-century poetry, another precursor of early modernist poetry sharing affinities with aspects of Bergson’s ideas—just as we had pointed to developments in the novel at the time as a parallel to the Bergsonian impulse to identify reality with the flux of sensations.

Bergson, who wanted to expose the instrumentality and interestedness of knowledge, claimed that “we do not, in general, aim at knowing for the sake of knowing” (*Creative Mind* 149). Aesthetes in the latter part of the nineteenth century proposed, for their part, to pursue “art for art’s sake”, in reaction to critical discourses that called for art to serve social and moral functions. While this is not exactly what Bergson was concerned with, aestheticism effects a comparable turn away from the demands placed on consciousness by practical life, towards activities, whether artistic or philosophical, which are defined in terms of the “disinterested” attention to subjective life or the recovery of authentic selfhood. As Oscar Wilde writes: “whenever a community ... attempts to dictate to the

artist what he is to do, Art either entirely vanishes, or becomes stereotyped, or degenerates into a low and ignoble form of craft. *A work of art is the unique result of a unique temperament*" (270). Rebecca Beasley, in her book on the poetics of the Hulme-Pound-Eliot strand of modernist poetry, proposes that the latter owes a largely unacknowledged debt to the poetry of the aestheticist current (21). As Beasley suggests, Hulme, Pound and Eliot all disparaged what they saw in aestheticism (as in most of nineteenth-century poetry in English) as a sentimentalist over-emphasis on the—often idiosyncratic—self. But she characterizes them—in the period before the First World War—as having themselves been “poet-aesthetes cultivating the objective correlative and the image” (95). The relation of these modernists to aestheticism may perhaps best be examined through the lens of what we have seen of Bergson and turn-of-the-century philosophy. This will be more apparent in the next part of this chapter which deals with Imagism. For now, we might simply point out the kinship between the aestheticist attitude and the modernists’ early emphasis on capturing the impressions of the individual consciousness, away from overt description of emotions and discursive clichés and, above all, perhaps, away from any moralizing strain.

Another aspect of early modernist poetry where Beasley maintains that the aestheticist influence is felt is the poetic experimentation in rhythm and sound (22-3). She singles out the poet Algernon Charles Swinburne as the prominent figure in that regard. While Eliot and Pound both appreciated Swinburne’s artistry, their objections to him are telling and point to an important aspect of the poetics of early modernism which concerns us in this chapter. The problem with Swinburne, according to Pound, was that his preoccupation with words’ “value as sound” led him to suffer from “inaccurate writing” (*Literary Essays* 292-3). Eliot, who similarly appreciated elements of Swinburne’s achievement, claims that in his poetry “language, uprooted, has adapted itself to an independent life of atmospheric nourishment” (*Sacred Wood* 149). Pound’s and Eliot’s objection is therefore that Swinburne’s attraction to the musicality of words causes him to neglect their sense (23-4). Pound and Eliot are interested in a poetry that can actual experience faithfully and communicate it, and this cannot happen if language loses its referentiality. Another aesthete—one who would become recognized as a modernist—begins, Beasley suggests, to adumbrate a way forward. W. B. Yeats, in “The Symbolism of Poetry”, writes that: “all sounds, all colours, all forms ... evoke

indefinable and yet precise emotions ... and when sound, and colour, and form are in a musical relation, a beautiful relation to one another, they become, as it were, one sound, one colour, one form, and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and yet is one emotion” (115-6). This statement on the evocative use of language and sensory detail can be said to point forward to Imagism.

1.3 Hulme, Pound, Ford: Subjectivity and Objectivity

So far, we have been busy sketching a turn-of-the-century backdrop of philosophical and literary concern with consciousness and subjectivity. This context is useful for shedding light on certain aspects of the development of early modernist poetry leading up to Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. If we skip forward for a moment, however, to Pound’s demand for scientific precision on the part of the artist, and, later, to Eliot’s theory of the “impersonality of poetry”, this might suggest that the above can help us only negatively and through contrast. Michael Levenson, indeed, speaks of the “development of an ‘objective’ tendency explicitly opposed to subjectivism” which forms a key element in modernist poetics (24). As this story progresses, we will in fact find that the “objective tendency” comes more notably to take the form of the attempt to escape or overcome subjectivity, and this will be a key element in our understanding of the project of *The Waste Land*. Eliot’s early work belongs to the early modernist poetics centred on the experience of the individual subject, but it begins to show signs of scepticism as to the limits of subjectivity and the possibility of capturing and communicating private subjective experience. His later philosophical work and *The Waste Land* display a desire to break beyond the individual consciousness in order to arrive at external, shared truths, while retaining important elements of the earlier approach and techniques. At this stage of our analysis, however, turn-of-the-century philosophy helps us to see that the “objective tendency” need not necessarily be opposed to subjectivism in some form. Indeed, the Imagist poetics developed by Hulme as well as that of Pound can be understood in one sense as attempting to achieve objectivity through a focus on subjectivity coupled with a novel and rigorous use of language.

T. E. Hulme's 1908 "A Lecture on Modern Poetry", the main drive of which is to argue that modern poetry should free itself from the regularity of metre, begins also to sketch an Imagist poetics, and already shows the influence of Bergson. As Levenson points out, Hulme had by 1907 "read, listened to, and become acquainted with" Bergson, and returned to London "as a Bergsonian" (39). In this early lecture, two elements are pertinent for the topic at hand: Hulme's focus on subjectivity, and a first version of an interesting argument about the use of language in poetry. In the first place, Hulme makes the aim of poetry the registering of subjective perception. In contrast to "old poetry", which was interested in "big things" and "epic subjects", Hulme claims, modern poetry "has become definitely and finally introspective and deals with the expression and communication of momentary phases in the poet's mind" (52-3). He states that he became interested in poetry in the first place because "there were certain impressions which I wanted to fix", for example the "peculiar quality of feeling which is induced by the flat spaces and wide horizons of the virgin prairie of western Canada" (50, 53). Hulme understands the task of the poet firstly in terms of attending carefully and precisely to sense impressions and internal states, and then endeavouring to communicate these. For Hulme the poet deals in "delicate pattern[s] of images and colour", choosing "certain images which put into juxtaposition in separate lines serve to suggest and to evoke the state he feels" (54). This passage is strikingly similar to Yeats's comments quoted above on the evocative use of symbolism in poetry, especially when Hulme claims that "two visual images form what one may call a visual chord. They unite to suggest an image which is different to both".

In addition to Hulme's focus on subjective experience, his argument about the kind of language that this poetry calls for shows the influence of Bergson. The language of poetry, Hulme maintains, is a "direct language ... because it deals in images" (55). This he understands in contrast to a "conventional language" which he equates to "prose". He tellingly compares the language of "prose" to "reflex action in the body", for instance when lacing one's boots. He says, in an echo of Bergson's arguments about the instrumental mechanisms that simplify our experience, that conventional language develops in order to serve our practical, everyday ends with an "economy of effort". The imagist language of poetry, on the other hand, "arrests your mind all the time with a picture". It causes us therefore, in a sense, to escape for a moment the mechanisms by

which we distractedly pursue our everyday ends, and manages to really hold our attention to a particular impression. We can already see how this recalls Bergson's desire to recover real duration from the conventional mechanisms that habitually organize and simplify our experience. This becomes even more apparent in other texts by Hulme. "The ordinary man does not see things as they are", he writes, "but only sees certain fixed types ... we never ever perceive the real shape and individuality of objects. We only see stock types. We tend to see not *the* table but *a* table" (199). This shows Hulme's concern with recovering the particulars of experience which are habitually glossed over.

In "Romanticism and Classicism" (1911/2), Hulme states that "the great aim is accurate, precise and definite description. ... each man sees a little differently, and to get out clearly and exactly what he does see, he must have a terrific struggle with language" (68). Setting aside for a moment the comment on language, this passage points us back to the tension between objectivity and subjectivity which we have alluded to. While Hulme seems from this passage to be interested in the particulars of individual experience even in its idiosyncrasy, he still asks for accuracy and precision in their description. He even hopes, while admitting the difficulty of it, that these can be communicable. For Levenson, Hulme's position places the poetics of the image in the earliest stages of English modernist poetics in opposition to the later, "developed modernist perspective", as well as to Hulme's own later attitude, because the image is not justified in terms of tradition, objectivity or authority but as anti-traditional, individualist, expressive (47). While Levenson is certainly right and shows convincingly in his book that Hulme as well as this strand of modernism evolved and went through significant transformations from 1908 and through the 1910s, the foregoing presentation of Bergson and elements of turn-of-the-century philosophy suggests a way that Hulme could have seen his subjective focus not necessarily in opposition to objectivity per se. Even in the early "Lecture on Modern Poetry", as Hulme sought a "maximum of individual and personal expression", he still spoke of and desired to reproduce through verse a "peculiar quality of feeling which is induced by" a certain aspect of Canadian landscapes: as though the feeling were an objective thing which could similarly be experienced by others and summoned through poetry (53). Later on, Hulme would explain more explicitly that

An individual way of looking at things ... does not mean something which is peculiar to an individual, for in that case it would be quite valueless. It means that a certain individual artist was able to break through the conventional ways of looking at things which veil reality from us at a certain point, was able to pick out one element which is really in all of us, but which before he had disentangled it, we were unable to perceive (194-5).

The idea of breaking through convention in order to recover a reality which is habitually veiled from us is obviously still Bergsonian, as well as the fact that this task is assigned to the artist. For Sanford Schwartz, Hulme departs somewhat from Bergson in turning his attention towards a precise rendering of the objects of perception rather than the inner, transient stream of real duration (53). Schwartz suggests further that Hulme in effect is turning towards a Husserlian concern with the objective side of experience (54). This is supported by the passage quoted above, and Levenson also confirms that Hulme did read and take an interest in Edmund Husserl's work (91-2). In any case, the foregoing indicates that, even as Hulme pursues the particulars of impressions and the expression of momentary phases of the mind, this, from early on, is accompanied by, even connected to, a concern with arriving at more precise, communicable, objective descriptions of reality. This concern would grow and become more explicit. Eventually, it would change its emphasis and character significantly, towards a preoccupation with authority and objective standards of value—but we will not go into this stage of Hulme's career here.

According to Schwartz, Hulme diverges from Bergson also in his view of language. In a first instance, Schwartz points to Hulme's emphasis on the visual power of language, which stands in contrast to Bergson's interest in verbal sequences experienced in time (55). On the other hand, Hulme introduces a historical dimension to his understanding of language and metaphor, which leans towards Nietzsche and the French critic Remy de Gourmont (57). Already in his 1908 "Lecture", Hulme suggests that an expression such as "the hill was clad with trees" originates in a metaphor which distinctly evoked the image of a person clad in clothes, only to gradually turn with use into a dead expression that no longer summons a vivid image (55). Hulme repeats similar examples in later texts (70, 95). Poetry's job is ever to create fresh metaphors

“not so much because they are new ... but because the old cease to convey a physical thing and become abstract counters” (70). Thus, a fresh metaphorical language constitutes for Hulme the poet’s tool for communicating impressions and overcoming the conventions that veil reality from us.

In Ezra Pound’s critical writings of the 1910s, we find echoes and developments both of Hulme’s quest for objective representation of impressions and perceptions and of the importance he attaches to metaphor. Pound seemed to hold that the source of poetry lay in emotion and that art should express emotion (Schwartz 66). Levenson also brings to attention Pound’s connection to an individualist and egoist tradition, illustrated through his affiliation with the journal the *New Freewoman*, later renamed *The Egoist*—inspired by the work of egoist philosopher Max Stirner which was witnessing a revival of interest at the time—as well as through his enthusiasm for the work of the poet Allen Upward, who held a similar attitude (70, 73-4). For Levenson, then, Pound was a major actor in an early modernist poetics that was characterized by aggressive individualism and also depended on an epistemological stance stressing the primacy of immediate individual perception (78).

As with Hulme, on the other hand, our concern here is with the fact that Pound’s effort to capture and communicate the individual’s subjective impressions and emotions is attended by a desire for objectivity and accuracy. And Pound reveals this tendency in more explicit terms than Hulme. In his 1913 essay “The Serious Artist”, he claims that “the arts, literature, poesy, are a science, just as chemistry is a science. Their subject is man, mankind and the individual” (*Literary Essays* 42). Even as he confirms his individualist stance, maintaining that a key fact the arts reveal about us is “that men ... do not resemble each other as do buttons cut by machine” (note the similarity with Bergson’s attention to unique particulars), Pound argues that a basic function of art is to “give us a great percentage of the lasting and unassailable data regarding the nature of man”. “Good art”, he concludes, is “art that bears true witness”, or “the art that is most precise” (*Literary Essays* 44). True witness of what? At a later point in the same essay, Pound says: “You wish to communicate an idea and its concomitant emotions, or an emotion and its concomitant ideas, or a sensation and its derivative emotions, or an impression is that emotive, etc., etc., etc.” (51). And in a more famous formula, he

defines the “Image” as “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (4). Pound’s apologetic recourse in his essay to the language of science risks, for Schwartz, can be misleading “until we realize that Pound’s artist is more akin to the phenomenologist”, that Pound is actually trying to “bridge the distinction between subjective and objective domains” (67). “Insofar as his art is a science”, Schwartz concludes, “it is the science of subjective life”. Pound, in *The Spirit of Romance*, in a statement that recalls Hulme and even Yeats’s comment on the power of poetic images to evoke precise emotions, had in fact written that poetry gives us “equations for the human emotions” (qtd. in Schwartz 68).

Poetry then, for Pound, “expresses subjective emotions, but these emotions are objectified in the very things we perceive”, and the tension between subjectivity and objectivity is indicative of a “project aimed at the verbal transmission of immediate experience” (Schwartz 67, 68). This Pound hopes to achieve through a certain use of image and of metaphor. In Pound’s own account of the genesis of his most anthologized imagist poem, “In a Station of the Metro”, he states that he was attempting to capture “the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective” (qtd. in Schwartz 67). And he did so through the juxtaposition of two distinct images. Metaphor for Pound, according to Schwartz, refers to “any technique that displays a new relation” (74). Schwartz relates the importance accorded to metaphor by Pound (as well as by Hulme or Eliot) to the influence of Nietzsche and Remy de Gourmont, as well as Ernest Fenollosa’s theories of Chinese ideograms. The common thread between these thinkers is that they were critical of a Western metaphysical tendency to hypostatize conceptual abstractions. Concepts are metaphors in that they bring together various concrete particulars, but the problem, for Nietzsche, is when the concept that isolates the common element of these particulars is mistaken for a reality underlying nature. The metaphorical nature of the concept is thereby forgotten or, indeed, suppressed (Schwartz 75-7). As should be clear at this point, this parallels the Bergsonian distrust of any mechanisms that elide particularities and simplify experience as part of ordinary, practical pursuits. In contrast to this type of conceptual abstraction, Nietzsche encourages therefore the production of new metaphors, in fulfilment of a fundamental human creativity. Literary or poetic metaphors that “openly display their fictional status” are able to “identify resemblances between

distinct particulars” without hypostatizing “the resemblance into an autonomous entity” (Schwartz 78, 85). This is the kind of metaphor that Pound favours. In contrast to what he terms “ornamental” or “decorative” metaphors, which serve mere embellishment, as well as “explanatory” metaphors that lay claim to revealing underlying realities, Pound values “interpretive” metaphors (*Literary Essays* 162; Schwartz 92-4). These, in Schwartz’s terms, overlie rather than underlie reality, and project “experiential possibility” rather than “conceptual certainty” (94). For Pound, they express “realities perceptible to the sense” triggered by intense emotional states (*Literary Essays* 154; Schwartz 92). These ideas confirm that Pound’s interest at this stage, as we have said about Hulme, lies in the attempt to capture and convey accurately and objectively certain internal states of the individual’s conscious experience.

The last figure which we will address in this chapter is that of Ford Madox Ford (né Ford Hermann Hueffer), the English novelist who was closely associated with and admired by Ezra Pound, and whom Levenson sees as a highly significant personage and “an exemplar of the early development of modernism” (48). Some of Ford’s ideas articulated in the 1910s, together with Pound’s own appreciation of them, shed valuable light on the early modernist poetics which we are discussing here. Ford identified himself as a novelist in a line going back, through Joseph Conrad and Henry James, to Gustave Flaubert (Levenson 48). In the 1900s and 1910s, he came to be “the acknowledged representative of Impressionism” in literature, and wrote a good deal of literary journalism and critical articles where he advanced elements of his artistic doctrine (49). As the name suggests, Ford’s “Impressionism” is a subjectivist stance that emphasizes the individual’s impressions. Like Conrad and James, Ford is interested in a narrative approach that seeks to record events from the perspective of the individual observer, and thus amounts to the rejection of the omniscient narrator and the reliance on a single focalizing consciousness. In effect, Ford confines “artistic vision to the immediacy of personal observation” (60). As Michael Levenson explains, “Impressionist fiction” is “committed ... to the sequence of perceptions and memories”, and “artistic fidelity is not owed to the event as such, but to the apprehension of the event” (117).

Ford’s subjectivist attitude, according to Levenson, was motivated by a number of concerns which included a distrust of moralizing discourses (an attitude shared by

other modernists including Eliot, as we shall see in the next chapter) as well as a reaction to what he perceived as a bewilderingly complex modernity that precludes certainties about large questions (51, 55). In a sense, it also reflected a political retreat from public matters. But such a retreat on the part of Ford only makes sense as one to a domain that offers a measure of certainty. Indeed, Ford justifies his attitude in various instances in epistemological terms, emphasizing the objectivity of the Impressionist approach. This is also reinforced in Pound's appreciation of Ford as a novelist and a critic. In a 1913 article on Henry James, Ford praises, in Levenson's paraphrase, "James' refusal of profound morality, and any purpose but the strictly artistic" (56). This would appear to be the position of an aesthete, but it is also justified in terms that stress the objectivity of the artist. James, Ford writes, "couldn't by any possibility be the great writer he is if he had any public aims": "Mr. James alone, it seems to me, in this entire weltering universe, has kept his head, has bestowed his sympathies upon no human being and upon no cause, has remained an observer, passionless and pitiless" (qtd. in Levenson 56). Ford finds such "sympathies" objectionable because they amount to partialities that would distract from the truth (we shall see a comparable attitude echoed by Pound and Eliot in the next chapter). On the other hand, while Ford invites the artist to focus on "strictly artistic" matters, the latter are not understood in terms of beauty or pleasure but in terms of rigorous observation.

Like Pound, Ford characterized the approach he favours as "scientific", because, in Levenson's words, "it represented, faithfully and rigorously, the artist's impressions" (110). For Ford, "Impressionism" is ultimately "a realism", and, by the same token, he praised Pound's Imagism because it belonged to the "category of realists" and recognized that "the supreme literary goal is 'the rendering of the material facts of life, without comment and in exact language'" (108). Pound returned the favour: "Mr. Hueffer", he wrote, "believes in an exact rendering of things ... He is objective" (qtd. in Levenson 106). Pound supported what he termed a "prose tradition" of poetry, by which he meant a tendency "common to good prose and to good verse alike" and defined in terms of objectivity and precision (qtd. in Levenson 112). And he saw in Ford a champion of the "prose tradition" whether in poetry or in fiction (Levenson 111). Pound, in fact, would later on credit Ford with instilling in him "the praise of objectivity", reminiscing in the thirties: "it should be realized that Ford Madox Ford had been

hammering this point of view [the praise of objectivity] into me from the time I first met him (1908 or 1909)” (qtd. in Levenson 105). The case of Ford confirms that modernists like him and Pound, and indeed Hulme, did not necessarily see any inherent contradiction between the focus on the subjective, the impression or the individual life of consciousness and the drive towards an artistic practice that captures reality faithfully. In fact, they pursued greater realism, precision and objectivity precisely by limiting themselves to these domains of experience.

This chapter has been concerned with establishing a specific aspect of the literary and intellectual context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which formed the backdrop for T. S. Eliot’s strand of modernist poetry. The foregoing presentation has aimed to demonstrate the important place occupied by the question of subjectivity in this context. Influential philosophers of the turn-of-the-century had a central concern with consciousness and subjective life and elaborated the metaphysical and epistemological implications of their views of consciousness. The literature of the period similarly exhibited an interest in subjectivity and sometimes sought to limit itself to the portrayal of the inner life of the individual. And yet, as we have seen, in both philosophy and literature this narrowing of the field of literature to the subjective and personal was motivated in an interesting way by the desire to achieve greater realism or to arrive at fuller and more accurate descriptions of reality. The early modernists were then invested in a certain subjectivism and yet at the same time wanted to establish a basis for the objective representation and communication of reality as they understood it through their subjectivist position. Even as Pound flirted with a kind of idiosyncratic subjectivism, and as Hulme inherited Bergson’s suspicion of language, they still seemed to hope that it would be possible to capture and communicate individual impressions faithfully in language through a poetics of image and metaphor. In the next chapter, we shall have more to say and to clarify about subjectivity and objectivity in early modernist poetry, as we turn to the work of T. S. Eliot from his early output through to the *The Waste Land*.

2 Eliot, Subjectivity and *The Waste Land*

In the previous chapter, we have presented connections and affinities between the attention to subjective consciousness in T. E. Hulme's and Ezra Pound's imagist poetics and certain tendencies of turn-of-the-century philosophy, exemplified mainly through the ideas of Henri Bergson, as well as the direction taken in the fiction of Henry James and Joseph Conrad as well as Ford Madox Ford. We have emphasized a preoccupation with consciousness and subjectivity, coupled simultaneously with a drive towards objectivity. Both Hulme and Pound formulated poetics centred on a desire to capture the impressions of the individual consciousness in their particularity, and to register experience precisely and vividly in language that would help the reader awaken to habitually neglected aspects of reality and of experience.

These aims can be understood as part of the attempt to push against different sorts of habits and conventions which these writers considered to be filtering mechanisms that distort or falsify reality. Bergson took aim at instrumental mechanisms such as language and rationality. This led him to an anti-intellectualist stance which T. E. Hulme came to accept "with enthusiasm" (Levenson 41). Hulme, in addition, adapted Bergson's views on language and made a distinction between a prosaic language, dealing in abstraction, that simplifies and dulls experience in order to serve practical purposes, and a poetic language capable of capturing the particularity of experience by presenting the reader with a concrete image. Ezra Pound, as we have seen in the previous chapter, formulated an imagist aesthetic that shared key concerns and aims with Hulme's. But Pound, in adopting the vocabulary and rhetoric of science in order to justify his imagist poetics, seems to diverge from Bergsonian anti-scientism. In his reference to the "prose tradition of poetry", he also came to celebrate prose as an ideal of directness and clarity of expression which poetry ought to embrace in order to achieve the ends he set out for it. Despite apparent differences, Pound shared with Hulme and Bergson the central impulse towards the recovery and faithful communication of individual experience, and against falsifying conventions or mechanisms. In terms of literature and poetry, the modernist poets came to identify certain falsifying conventions with aspects of the work of their nineteenth-century predecessors, against whom they—often virulently—defined their own modernizing

poetic projects. Hulme's early avant-gardism first led him to support "the complete destruction of all verse more than twenty years old" (50-1). Later, he would propound the infamous modernist opposition between Romanticism and Classicism, to the great disadvantage of the former, and T. S. Eliot would himself become the most prominent proponent of this opposition in the twentieth century.

The present chapter will proceed to develop an argument specifically about T. S. Eliot, and will start by calling attention in Eliot's early work to concerns similar to those of Hulme and Pound discussed above. After situating Eliot, through an examination of his critical prose, within the same current alongside Hulme and Pound, we will turn to his "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in order to illustrate this kinship, but also in order to demonstrate that Eliot was concerned with the limits of individual subjectivity and showed scepticism as to whether registering individual subjective experience was adequate and sufficient for arriving at shared, objective, communicable truths. Eliot raises questions about this in part through the use of the dramatic monologue form. Finally, this chapter will turn to Eliot's philosophical work in the 1910s and his dissertation on the epistemological ideas of F. H. Bradley, which shows him responding to the problem by formulating a basis for shared truth which effects a move beyond the solitary individual consciousness to a multiplicity of viewpoints standing in relation to one another. Eliot's philosophical ideas, it will be argued, find their literary counterpart in *The Waste Land* and thus shed light on the fragmented poetic structure of the poem, which is built of a heterogeneous collection of subjects and objects with constantly shifting voices and points of view.

2.1 Eliot Among the Moderns: Objectivity in Subjectivity

In addition to Eliot's classicism, his notion of the "impersonality" of poetry, presented in his much-discussed essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent", dominated Eliot criticism for a long time in the twentieth century. But critics in the latter half of the last century started to emphasize the unacknowledged Romantic elements or tendencies in the work of Eliot and other modernist poets from his camp. While some of this criticism has disparaged these modernists' rhetoric for obfuscating their ties to their predecessors,

critics have also had occasion to contextualise, elucidate and reinterpret the import of Eliot's and others' pronouncements when it comes to "personality" versus "impersonality", and to modernist attitudes towards Romantic and nineteenth-century poetry. Our interest here lies not in discussing the merits of what is referred to as "high modernist" classicism or the fairness of Eliot's judgment of Romanticism; nor even, at this point, with the continuities which critics have found between Romantic and modernist attitudes. Instead, what is of concern to us at this point is the way that these things interconnect with Eliot's interest in the question of subjectivity which, it will be argued, is an animating issue in his work up to *The Waste Land*.

Eliot's criticism of the 1910s and early 20s in fact reveals a concern with sincerity and with the expression of emotion which seems at odds with the harshly anti-romantic stance we normally associate with his critical writings. But the context of turn-of-the-century philosophy and early modernist poets' thinking about consciousness, subjectivity and experienced reality, as examined in the previous chapter, can help to shed light on this possible confusion in Eliot's rhetoric. It indicates that the attempt to capture and convey the internal life of consciousness did not necessarily conflict, for these modernists, with the desire for objectivity in their art and accurate representation of the world as it is, or with their campaign against habits of nineteenth-century poetry which they saw as falsifying reality—or, to rephrase Pound's formula, what they saw as art bearing *false* witness.

Some critics have highlighted the fact that the poets of this modernist strand focused their poetics on the subjective life of the individual consciousness and continued to speak of the expression of emotion, and have pointed to these things—rightly perhaps—as tokens of a persistent, unavowed Romanticism. Michael Levenson, as mentioned in the last chapter, makes a distinction between early modernism, which was "defended as anti-traditional, individualist, intuitive, expressive", and the "later [modernist] orthodoxy", to which he attributes the terms "tradition, objectivity, reason or authority ... precision or clarity" (47). Levenson's characterizations here tie the early modernism which he discusses to nineteenth-century Romantic poetics, and suggest that the break with Romanticism would have come at the latter stage. But Levenson may be making his distinction somewhat too broadly. The nuance to be captured here is that terms like "individualist", "intuitive" and "expressive" were not necessarily opposed to

“objectivity” or “precision” in the early modernist mindset we have been describing. Hulme and Pound from early on defended their poetic programs based on a desire for objectivity and accuracy, and sought to achieve these things by attempting to capture individual perceptions and emotions. While the modernists’ early subjectivism may well be one element indicative of the persistence of Romantic tendencies within modernist poetics, these poets’ insistence on objectivity—their eagerness to formulate, through their imagist aesthetic, a basis for objectifying internal states and communicating them in concrete terms—is nevertheless connected to their vocal rejection of their nineteenth-century predecessors. In a sense, the modernist poets’ inward turn can be said to be more directly connected to their predecessors among the novelists, who sought greater realism by restricting their narratives to a governing focalizing consciousness, and were highly esteemed by the moderns, than to the poets of the Romantic and Victorian periods. The modernists’ drive from early on was towards achieving greater realism, greater fidelity to experienced reality. The rejection of nineteenth-century poetry came at least in part as an articulation of this desire, as it was ostensibly a repudiation of poetic habits and conventions that falsified experience. Even if we argue that the modernists handily and unfairly used their predecessors as scapegoats and suppressed or repressed their own ties to them, the point is that the desire for objectivity—which, to reiterate, was not at odds with early modernist subjectivism—was an animating concern from the early stages of this strand of modernism. This is significant because it indicates a continuity, in terms of the preoccupation with objectivity in art, between early modernist poetics and what Levenson calls the “later orthodoxy”, even as modernism moves away from individualist subjectivism. This movement applies to Eliot’s poetics, and the following paragraphs will attempt to show that Eliot starts out from a stance close to that of Hulme and Pound—subjectivist and looking to register experience faithfully. Because the antagonism towards nineteenth-century poets has dominated so much of the discussion of Eliot’s work, we may start by trying to see just what Hulme, Pound and Eliot wanted to push against when they expressed this antagonism.

In his much-discussed essay “Romanticism and Classicism”, Hulme makes it clear that he takes the Romantic period to refer to the entire nineteenth century: “after a hundred years of romanticism”, he states, “we are in for a classical revival” (59). He repudiates Romantic poetry for what he sees as “sloppiness” and “damp” writing, full of

sentimentality—in his words, “moaning” and “whining”. In contrast to this, he champions “dry hardness” and the strict confinement of poetry to “the earthly and the definite” (66). The latter qualities, he laments, are regarded by the Romantically-minded—including his contemporaries—as unpoetic. Around the same time Hulme wrote this essay, Pound used similar characterizations as he drew a contrast between the poetry of the preceding period and what he hoped for in that of the twentieth century. In the “Prolegomena” published in 1912, Pound writes: “as for the nineteenth century, with all respect to its achievements, I think we shall look back upon it as a rather blurry, messy sort of a period, a rather sentimentalistic, mannerish sort of a period”, while the poetry of the next decade, he expects, will “move against poppy-cock, it will be harder and saner ... ‘nearer the bone’ ... austere, direct, free from emotional slither” (*Literary Essays* 11-2; also qtd. in Beasley 20). Pound echoes Hulme’s metaphor of “hardness” as a desired quality for modern poetry, and draws the same kind of contrasts that Hulme does: controlled, restrained poetry that is to the point, stripped of superfluous elements, “austere”, “direct” and “definite”; as opposed to “damp”, “blurry”, “sloppy” writing that can tend towards sentimentality, “whining” and “emotional slither”.

The supposed sentimentalism and excessive emotionalism that Hulme and Pound rail against, as well as the “mannerism” that Pound deprecates, may well have to do with a kind of supposedly immoderate focus on the self. But the main thrust of the remarks quoted above is against all that might be indefinite, imprecise, loose or superfluous, or that falls short—to repeat Pound’s maxim—of the “direct treatment of the ‘thing’ whether subjective or objective” (*Literary Essays* 3). Indeed, it would seem that what Pound means in his formula by “subjective” and “objective” is close to “inward” and “outward”, and his idea seems to be that both the inward and the outward should be thought of as a “thing” or “object”, and thus treated “objectively”—in both a technical sense and the commonplace sense of the word. This line of thinking suggests that Pound and Hulme protest against emotion, or indeed subjectivity, only in so far as these things distract from the object that is at hand.

In effect, when it comes to the relations between the modernists’ censure of nineteenth-century poetry and the question of subjectivity, it is important to keep in mind the operative distinction between “subjective” in the basic sense of having to do with the subject or with the mental life of the individual, and “subjective” in the sense of

influenced by personal feelings and opinions. I have, in addition, used the word “subjectivism” to refer loosely to a focus on the subject, on the individual’s perceptions and on experienced reality. It helps to voice at this point that subjectivism also connects to questions of whether objective, shared truths can exist or be known and communicated beyond the subjective self, questions that take on significance in the subsequent discussion of Eliot. For now, the point I want to make at this stage is that the modernists’ censure of Romantic or nineteenth-century poetry is closer to a repudiation of “subjectivity” in the second sense mentioned above, which involves a kind of subjective vision that diverts one from the “object” at hand—whether inward or outward, “objective” or “subjective”—and distorts reality. On the other hand, Eliot and others seek to acknowledge what we might call “the truth of subjectivity”, or the reality of the life of consciousness. Pound’s emphasis on *direct* treatment of the “‘thing’, whether objective or subjective”, Hulme’s criticism of abstraction and the desire to present the reader of poetry with “a physical thing”, these things are all in the same vein and go hand in hand with the Bergsonian push against conventional and instrumental mechanisms that supposedly stand between us and reality, the desire to undercut any processes that distort or falsify our experience of reality.

The nuance referred to above when it comes to the meaning of “subjectivity”, together with the larger question of falsifying conventions, are key to characterizing Eliot’s aesthetic and critical attitude during the 1910s, and the philosophical outlook that underpins it. As Sanford Schwartz has it, a good deal of confusion in connection to the modernist views of “personality” and “impersonality” arises because Eliot and Pound in fact resort to “two distinct and seemingly antithetical vocabularies” (65, 69). And Schwartz argues, rightly I think, that they are in fact complementary. Pound’s position, familiar by now, alternates between emphasis on the impersonality and objectivity of the artist who has “no personal predilection for any particular fraction of the truth”, and the identification of art with the expression of emotion (Schwartz 66). Eliot’s “impersonal theory of poetry” has, as we know, attracted a lot of attention in Eliot criticism for the better part of the twentieth century. The phrase occurs in “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, and is accompanied by the memorable dictum: “Poetry is not the turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality” (*Selected Prose* 30). However, as Schwartz highlights, Eliot’s

writings from the same period contain passages that appear to be in direct conflict with the above (69). In his essay on William Blake, for instance, published in *The Sacred Wood* along with “Tradition”, Eliot touches on the matter of “the acquisition of impersonal ideas which obscure what we really are and feel” (154). First, we may note here the concern with processes that can falsify our experience—the idea, which we first saw with Henri Bergson in the first chapter, that consciousness is not fully transparent to itself. Indeed, Eliot here attributes this acquisition of impersonal ideas to “the ordinary processes of society” and “ordinary man”. This is clearly the same thing that Bergson talked about when he referred to the instrumental and conventional mechanisms that prevail in everyday life, which include the demands of social interaction and social efficacy. As an aside, for those of us who might be put off by the offhand reference to the “ordinary man”, it may be relevant to recall that Eliot situated his distinction between “the man who suffers and the mind which creates” within the self-same artist, and thus applied it to himself (*Selected Prose* 41). What this amounts to in effect is a kind of dualism that is also to be found in Bergson’s similar distinction between the processes of everyday life and the “real duration” which may be glimpsed in moments when the attention is fixed in a special way.

The second interesting point in the passage cited above is that Eliot blames “impersonal” elements for distorting the subject’s perception of reality, whereas elsewhere he has charged “personality” with the same offence. Eliot’s prime concern can be said, in fact, to be the same as Pound’s: the faithful and direct treatment of the thing at hand. His criticism is directed against that which, in his view, diminishes this fidelity and immediacy, and there are a number of culprits in this area. Under the rubric of “bad” impersonality, we may first list rhetoric. Pound himself had praised Yeats for having “stripped English poetry of its perdamnable rhetoric” (*Literary Essays* 11). Ronald Bush, in his highly influential *T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style*, writes that modernism’s disdain towards rhetoric goes back to Arthur Symons’s famous book on *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, which Eliot read with immense interest. In fact, according to Bush, Eliot was from an early stage keenly aware of rhetoric as a conventional, acquired reflex that afflicts “thought, gesture and speech” and results in insincerity (19-20). Contemporary verse, Eliot claims in 1917, “has tried to escape the rhetorical, the abstract, the moralizing” and “recover ... the accents of direct speech”—

only to go on—with a scepticism that is to his credit—to question whether rhetoric can be eluded even by “the new poets” (qtd. in Bush 20-21). Part of the problem for Eliot is that these reflexes, impersonal because coming from outside forces and influences, distort the subject’s perception of reality as well as expression. As Ronald Bush has it, “acquired gesture betray[s] human impulse and facilitates what Eliot would call ‘the human will to see things as they are not’” (21). Rhetoric, for Eliot, “impede[s] ... expression of feeling” (qtd. in Bush 29).

The same sentiment is in evidence in Eliot’s censure of “ideas” and “opinion”. In his essay on Henry James, mentioned in Chapter 1, Eliot praised James for “his mastery over, his baffling escape from, Ideas” and for having “a mind so fine that no idea could violate it”—the “idea” which Eliot goes on to characterize as “parasitic” (*Selected Prose* 151-2). The same phraseology is repeated in the contrast which Eliot draws elsewhere between Tennyson, “a poet almost wholly encrusted with parasitic opinion”, and William Blake, one who “was not distracted, or frightened, or occupied in anything but exact statements” (*Sacred Wood* 154). “Ideas” and “opinion”, then, are for Eliot external notions that infringe upon the individual’s independent mind and are a source of distraction from the “exact statement” or even the perception of things as they truly are.

Besides rhetoric, another problem is the failure to treat the object with directness and immediacy. This is a complaint that recurs in Eliot’s criticism of nineteenth-century poets. Ultimately, as Bush suggests, Eliot’s ideal was writing that would have a “foundation in the sensuous reality of individual consciousness” (x). In an essay on the contemporary poet Lee Masters, Eliot charged the latter with having a mind that is “reflective, not evocative”, and he called for an “immediate application of ... the senses” (qtd. in Bush x). In his essay on “The Metaphysical Poets”, Eliot memorably levels the same charge against the Victorian poets when he regretfully observes that: “Keats and Shelley died, and Tennyson and Browning ruminated” (*Selected Prose* 65). Eliot’s attitude here is closely connected to Ford Madox Ford’s dictum “never state: present”. Eliot and other modernists’ rejection of rhetoric, of moralizing, of sentimentality, is ultimately predicated on their wish for a sensuous, evocative, descriptive poetics that deals in concrete objects or situations rather than merely comments on them.

But “personality” is for Eliot as much a distraction and a distorter of our true experience as this kind of “impersonality”. Schwartz writes that “Eliot usually identifies

‘personality’ either with the conventional self—the ‘practical and active person’—or with the aesthete, who loses contact with immediate experience in the course of cultivating a self-conscious persona” (69). This understanding and Eliot’s reference to the “practical and active person” (from “Tradition and the Individual Talent”) echo the Bergsonian critique of instrumental mechanisms and conventions that serve the practical purposes of everyday life. These things have to do both with external influences or socialized habits of behaviour and thought, and with the self-interests of the “practical and active person”. The aesthete’s cultivation of a self-conscious persona, on the other hand, points to an important issue in Eliot’s criticism of nineteenth-century poetry and Romanticism in general as well as his turn-of-the-century predecessors: it is what Eliot perceives as an exaggerated and detrimental kind of preoccupation with self. Eliot was a student of Irving Babbitt at Harvard, and is heavily indebted to this—at the time—influential literary critic for his classicist, anti-Romantic attitude. A key element of Babbitt’s criticism of Romanticism is his attack on its supposed egocentric strain and, according to George Bornstein, Eliot’s Oxford University Extension Course lectures of 1916 show that he followed Babbitt very closely (102-3). Thus, Eliot echoes Babbitt’s attacks on Rousseau for elevating, among other things, “the personal above the typical, feeling above thought”, and for his “egotism and insincerity”. The juxtaposition of the latter two terms is telling: as always, Eliot’s concern is with sincerity, and egotism falsifies one’s perception and expression.

The “aesthete’s self-conscious persona” with which Eliot takes issue also has to do with what Pound called a “mannerish” tendency in the poetry of the nineteenth century. Both Pound and Eliot disliked distinctive or eccentric personal expression because they desired to purge the poetic treatment of objects from the intrusion of personality—and this is true whether the objects are “subjective or objective”, internal or external. Pound and Eliot, like Hulme, do not think poetry ought to record that which is “peculiar to an individual” but that “which is really in all of us” (Hulme 194-5). The stuff of poetry has to be a shared and communicable reality. Eliot’s comments in the “Clark Lectures”, despite the fact that these were delivered as late as 1926, shed some light on his earlier thinking as they take up the idea of the “dissociation of sensibility” which he had first presented in “The Metaphysical Poets” from 1921. According to Edward Lobb, Eliot’s view was that “private processes” had supplanted the “shared

external world” as the subject matter of poetry already since the seventeenth and through the nineteenth century (21). For Eliot, the ill that was the dissociated sensibility had to do with an outlook that emphasized the “perceiver” at the expense of the “perceived” (Lobb 24). These grievances accord essentially with the modernist poetics we have been describing.

Now that we have discussed what Eliot means by “impersonality” and “personality”, a possible confusion in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” becomes easier to untangle. “The bad poet”, he writes towards the end of the essay, “is usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious, and conscious where he ought to be unconscious. *Both errors tend to make him ‘personal’*” (43; emphasis added). As Ronald Bush observes, Eliot “played fast and loose with the words ‘personal’ and ‘impersonal’ in his early essays” (5). We would do well to remember, after all, that a good deal of Eliot’s published prose from this period ought to be regarded as journalism, not definitive statements of doctrine (Diepeveen 264). In any case, what we have seen so far, taken together with the passage just quoted from Eliot’s essay, makes it clear that what he means here by “personal” includes what he has referred to elsewhere as “impersonal”. The kind of “personality” corresponding to the poet being “unconscious where he ought to be conscious” is what he spoke of elsewhere as the “acquisition of impersonal ideas”, notions and socialized reflexes that intrude upon the individual’s mind without them being aware of it. The kind of “personality” corresponding to the reverse—the poet being “conscious where he ought to be unconscious”—relates to egotism, excessive preoccupation with the self and the eccentric “cultivation of a self-conscious persona” which Eliot complains about.

Whether Eliot is criticizing or calling for “personality” or “impersonality”, as the case may be, Eliot’s primary concern is with avoiding those mechanisms, conventions or reflexes which distort our perception and experience, and with promoting, as he saw it, a poetics of sincerity, immediacy and objectivity. In the same paragraph of “Tradition” cited above, in discussing the way that poetry registers emotion, Eliot describes the poet’s process as “a passive attending upon the event” (43). Like Pound, Eliot is advocating an attitude of detachment and disinterestedness, even as he adopts a subjectivist stance focused on representing conscious processes and subjective perception. As Eliot writes in “Eeldrop and Appleplex”, a parodic piece featuring

characters based on Pound and himself, the artist must be “detached from [him]self” and able “to stand by an criticise coldly [his] own passions and vicissitudes” (qtd. in Schwartz 69).

So far, we have situated T. S. Eliot, through his prose writing, alongside T. E. Hulme and Ezra Pound, as a participant in propounding some of the central tenets or directives of the early modernist poetics which we have been discussing, and on which we have shed light through our examination of turn-of-the-century philosophy and literature. We shall now turn to a reading of Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”. While this poem illustrates the subjectivist-objectivist tendency which we have identified as central to the Hulme-Pound-Eliot strand of modernism in its early days, I will argue that Eliot’s use of the dramatic monologue in “Prufrock”, as in other poems from the *Prufrock* volume, anticipates his approach in *The Waste Land* (as well as, we might say, Pound’s work from “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley” onward) in additional ways that the critical essays leading up to 1922 do not. These essays may be seen in certain respects as out of step with the poetry, and the epistemological stance in *Prufrock* can be said to look forward to Eliot’s philosophical dissertation and his project in *The Waste Land*.

2.2 “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”: Beyond the Individual Consciousness

Though published in 1917 in *Prufrock and Other Observations*, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, along with other poems from the volume, was conceived during Eliot’s university years, and some version of the poem was completed by 1911 (Dickey 120). While it predates Pound’s Imagism, and while Eliot never became an “imagiste” himself, the poem has affinities with the Imagist approach. When Pound met Eliot in 1914, he remarked in a letter that Eliot had “modernized himself *on his own*”, which, coming from Pound, would have meant that he saw agreement with his own central tenets (Bush xii; italics in original). Indeed, “Prufrock”, though quite different from the typical short Imagist poem, relies in some of its memorable passages on striking images and surprising metaphors and juxtapositions which very much recall Imagist style or

techniques. Examples include the comparison of the evening “spread out against the sky” to “a patient etherized upon a table”, and painting the “yellow fog” as an animal rubbing its back and muzzle on the window-panes (Eliot, *Collected Poems* 3). Eliot lends vivid images to his speaking character which evoke the latter’s feelings and state of mind, as when Prufrock imagines himself “sprawling on a pin”, “pinned and wriggling on the wall”, or thinks he “should have been a pair of ragged claws / scuttling across the floors of silent seas” (Eliot, *Collected Poems* 3). While Prufrock’s monologue is often discursive in character, he never makes overt characterizations or uses evaluative or emotive vocabulary. Instead, the text is rife with stark, concrete, visual and sensuous detail and images. For Sanford Schwartz, the similes and metaphors in Eliot’s poem, in the same vein as the use of image and metaphor advocated by Ezra Pound, bring out novel relations and serve to objectify emotion or states of mind (98-9).

We have talked at length about the modernist emphasis on directness and immediacy. Yet the indirect plays as interesting a role in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, and points forward to Eliot’s approach in *The Waste Land* and other poems. I am talking about Eliot’s use of the dramatic monologue. While Prufrock’s subjective state of mind is evoked through the use of stark images, Eliot invites the reader to reflect on the limits of Prufrock’s subjectivity and the limits of expression, and raises questions about the communicability of authentic experience: “It is impossible to say just what I mean”, Prufrock exclaims (Eliot, *Collected Poems* 6). “Prufrock” thus allows us already to glimpse signs of Eliot’s scepticism regarding an approach based strictly on the solitary consciousness, and, through the indirection of the dramatic monologue, gesturing beyond the confines of individual subjectivity.

Frances Dickey cites the Victorian dramatic monologue as one of the most important of T. S. Eliot’s poetic inheritances. The Victorian poets, he writes, “drew on contemporary advances in the novel to transform the romantic lyric ‘I’ into a vehicle for exploring the individual and his or her relation to society and convention”, and “Prufrock” inherits “this project, particularly from Robert Browning’s *Men and Women*” (121). Dickey’s description is telling. It calls attention to the relation between poetic subjectivism and nineteenth-century developments in the novel—which we have seen with Henry James and Joseph Conrad—towards the reliance on a subjective, focalizing consciousness. In addition, it recalls the tension between the individual consciousness

and the social and conventional processes or mechanisms to which it is exposed. “Prufrock” resembles Browning’s monologues, according to Dickey, in its “historical specificity”, combined with the “personal peculiarity or social isolation” of the speaker (121). But these last elements are perhaps owed more to the influence of the French Symbolist poet Jules Laforgue. According to Barry J. Faulk, “Eliot adopted [Laforgue’s] unique version of dramatic monologue, which gave voice to a specific social type: a highly educated man, both philosophically inclined and somehow streetwise, perpetually uncomfortable in social situations, and a perennial failure in romance” (31).

This peculiar combination—which, of course, is an apt description of Prufrock—makes for a poem that is at once serious and comical. Eliot at times accentuates the comical elements, for instance through the sporadic use of rhyming couplets (like the rhyme on unaccented final syllables at the end of the first stanza: “is it” – “visit”), as well as through Prufrock’s surprising similes and metaphors (in which Prufrock himself contributes a measure of self-irony). These things bring out the speaker’s peculiarity and self-conscious inadequacy, and invite us to contemplate Prufrock’s failings. This goes back to Browning’s dramatic monologues, some of which, we recall, represented the speech of villains upon whom readers could handily pass judgment. The dramatic monologue, according to Michael Whitworth, is a good vehicle for the “impersonality” demanded by Eliot, and, in freeing “the poet from making his or her own experience stand for that of the typical humanist subject”, the form “dramatize[s] the relativity of knowledge” (179). What we have seen from Eliot so far suggests, however, that he would find the “relativity of knowledge” problematic. Indeed he does, and we shall see that more clearly when we discuss his doctoral dissertation. But this is part of the reason why the dimension added by the dramatic monologue form to “Prufrock” makes it, in the context of this thesis, more interesting than Pound’s or even Eliot’s own pronouncements in their critical prose. While the poem uses quasi-imagist procedures in order to represent experience with immediacy, it also problematizes the limits of subjectivity, and of expression and communication. That said, we can still say with Whitworth that while the monologue form dramatizes the relativity of knowledge, it “does not foreswear truths about humanity, but they are embodied in the form of the poem, in the combination of speaker, auditor, and situation, not in the words themselves” (179). And perhaps one of the most compelling aspects of “Prufrock” is namely the

questions that the poem raises about the commonality and communicability of private, subjective experience.

The seriousness in Eliot's poem can be said to revolve around the "overwhelming question" which is alluded to in the first stanza, and again towards the middle of the poem, but that Prufrock is never able to articulate (Eliot, *Collected Poems* 3). The ominous epigraph to the poem, which Eliot quotes from Dante's *Inferno*, points to the central problem of the poem and lends it considerable weight and seriousness. The epigraph quotes the words of Guido de Montefeltro to Dante in the *Inferno*:

If I thought that I were speaking to a soul
who someday might return to see the world,
most certainly this flame would cease to flicker
but since no one, if I have heard the truth,
ever returns alive from this deep pit,
with no fear of dishonor I answer you:

(*Inferno*, XXVII: 61-6).

Guido is only willing to tell Dante about himself because he is sure that no one is able to leave this place, and that nobody outside would learn what he has said. The epigraph thus implies a private and (by implication) sincere confession. This suggests that the Prufrock's monologue is his own private confession, verbalized inside his own mind. In the words of Robert Langbaum, Prufrock makes his confession to "his other self" and "for his own benefit" (qtd. in Whitworth 183). There is thus the strong implication of a parallel between Montefeltro's situation and Prufrock's prison of consciousness (which, incidentally, Eliot would later allude to in *The Waste Land*). This leads us to the issue of "subjectivism" in the particular sense that poses questions about the possibility of arriving at external, shareable, communicable truths, and this happens to be the problem at the heart of Prufrock's failure and anguish in the poem. Of course, Montefeltro's words to Dante, and their implications about Prufrock's monologue, are a source of irony in both poems because Dante does "return to see the world", and both Montefeltro's and Prufrock's words do find their way to other audience. But Eliot's

poem goes on to problematize the expression and communication of Prufrock's subjectivity in ways that do not allow these tensions to be resolved.

Prufrock, as mentioned earlier, brings up the problem directly when he exclaims: "It is impossible to say just what I mean" (Eliot, *Collected Poems* 6). This also occurs in the two instances where Prufrock despairs over the prospect of misunderstanding or miscommunication, or, perhaps more accurately, the prospect of discovering that an essential part of his subjective experience may not be shared by others: "Would it have been worth while, / ... / If one, settling a pillow by her head, / Should say: 'That is not what I meant at all. / That is not it, at all.'" (Eliot, *Collected Poems* 6, 7). T. E. Hulme, as we have seen, wanted poetry to record not that which is "peculiar to an individual" but that "which is really in all of us" (Hulme 194-5). Prufrock here—and by extension Eliot — appears not to share Hulme's optimism that this is possible. The "overwhelming question" that haunts him, he fears, may be "peculiar to" him alone.

The difficulties surrounding the communication of subjective experience also come through in more subtle ways. The distance made possible by the dramatic monologue form thus complicates the use of quasi-imagist techniques. Prufrock's capacity for creating evocative images fails to generate much confidence in his ability to communicate subjective experience faithfully, and does not come close to articulating the "overwhelming question" which looms as a momentous and defining element in Prufrock's experience to which he feels impelled to bear witness. In fact, oftentimes Prufrock, faced with the daunting challenge of expressing his important vision, *retreats* into imagery. When the "Streets that follow like a tedious argument" first lead him to his "overwhelming question", only for him to interrupt himself, he quickly cuts to the scene of the social gathering, the room where "the women come and go" (Eliot, *Collected Poems* 3). When he asks himself: "how should I presume" (that is, how can he presume to speak of his innermost self), he immediately withdraws to the image of the "Arms that are braceleted and white and bare / (But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)", and wonders what "makes [him] so digress" (Eliot, *Collected Poems* 5). Asking himself again: "how should I begin?", he comes up with the following:

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes

Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? ...

I should have been a pair of ragged claws

Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

(Eliot, *Collected Poems* 5).

The only thing he can think of in order to “begin” is to conjure the images from this urban scene; and he soon trails off (the ellipsis mark is in the original) and, in resignation, offers up a self-deprecating image.

Prufrock picks up again after this and, wondering if he has “the strength to force the moment to its crisis”, he resorts this time to the image of his own “head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter”, in an allusion to the story of John the Baptist (Eliot, *Collected Poems* 6). After that, it is the image of “Lazarus, come from the dead” that Prufrock summons as another attempt to get at his “overwhelming question”, which remains out of reach even as it casts its shadow more strongly over the poem. In the last part of the poem, Prufrock evokes Hamlet. So we see that Prufrock’s attempts to articulate his core experience boil down to two (sometimes overlapping) strategies: on the one hand, the use of images, and, on the other, the recourse to shared cultural narratives. Each of Prufrock’s attempts end in failure and retreat, and the success of the poem lies in the evocation of mood while keeping the looming shadow of the “overwhelming question” out of reach. It is also particularly telling that Prufrock ends up falling back to these shared narratives of Western culture when his dilemma is precisely whether his feelings and experience can in fact be shared by others, and whether they are communicable. And these narratives provide no assurance or solace. When alluding to John the Baptist, Prufrock adds that he is nevertheless “no prophet”, and, when he brings up Hamlet, it is only to deny the comparison to himself. It is not clear that any of his strategies can live up to the task, and doubts about the communicability of essential subjective experience remain unresolved.

“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, in many respects, can be said to belong to the modernist poetics which we have presented in these chapters through the critical prose of Hulme, Pound and Eliot himself, together with the epistemological outlook we have accounted for through looking at the work of key turn-of-the-century philosophers,

especially Henri Bergson, as well as the novelists Henry James and Joseph Conrad. This is evident through the poem's focus on the individual consciousness and the use of images in order to evoke the state of mind of the speaking character. But the poem, through the use of the dramatic monologue form, complicates matters because it poses questions about the limits of subjectivity and the expression or communicability of private, subjective experience. It raises the possibility that an imagist poetics may prove to be inadequate for articulating with precision certain kinds of experience, or that some core elements of experience may indeed be—to paraphrase Hulme—peculiar to some individuals. The remainder of this chapter will discuss Eliot's doctoral dissertation on F. H. Bradley, which shows that Eliot was deeply interested in these epistemological questions and, while he felt that establishing a basis for objective and shared truths was indispensable, his approach to this was characterized at first by some scepticism. This is already on display in "Prufrock", and the strategies employed in this poem are extended in *The Waste Land*.

2.3 Eliot's "Theory of Points of View": Towards *The Waste Land*

This analysis began with the formative stages of a modernist poetics which, in the effort to establish a basis for a poetic practice that produces objective or faithful accounts of reality, started out with a focus on the consciousness of the individual subject. Although T. S. Eliot was a relative latecomer to the English scene where T. E. Hulme and then Ezra Pound had been formulating and promoting these ideas, we have seen that Eliot in fact shared many of their basic assumptions. Like Hulme, Eliot was influenced by Henri Bergson. In addition, as we have seen, there were certain affinities between the outlook of these early modernist poets and the trajectory of late nineteenth-century literature, including the work of novelists like Joseph Conrad and Henry James, whom Eliot admired, who sought greater realism by focusing their narratives through the prism of an individual focalizing consciousness. But our reading of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" has suggested that Eliot, while using techniques comparable to Pound's imagist approach in pursuit of the similar goal of capturing subjective experience, was simultaneously engaged with the question of the limits of subjectivity and was less

confident than Pound and Hulme in the theoretical basis for the commonality and communicability of the individual's subjective experience. His use of the dramatic monologue in "Prufrock" raised questions about these issues and the ironic distance generated through this approach already implied a look beyond the individual consciousness.

In the next chapter, we shall see that there were other important factors that colluded with the modernists' and Eliot's personal interest in epistemological questions and pushed Eliot to expand his scope beyond the individual subject. The watershed event of the First World War gave a powerful impetus to poets like Eliot or Pound and confronted them with large scale, "public" themes. But there were also certain deeply entrenched elements in the general poetics available to Eliot and within which he operated, and this meant that a set of expectation or assumptions were handed down to him that played a key role in shaping the poetic product that was *The Waste Land*. These elements include the impulse to write a "long poem", the "epic" tradition and a broadly conceived notion of "historical" subject matter as the most fitting for such an endeavour. It was the collusion between these impulses and Eliot's modernist poetics influenced by philosophical ideas that gave *The Waste Land* its ultimate, distinctive shape.

For now, what remains is to see how Eliot's evolving philosophical position on epistemological matters itself impelled him towards an expansion of scope beyond the individual consciousness. This means looking at Eliot's philosophical work of the 1910s and the way in which it adumbrated his approach in *The Waste Land*. As stated above, "Prufrock" showed Eliot already raising questions about subjectivism and the possibility of arriving at shareable, external truths. Eliot went on to explore these issues in his doctoral dissertation on the ideas of F. H. Bradley, on which he worked up to 1916, and further related philosophical papers which he published around that time. In his dissertation, Eliot sketched a "theory of points of view" which was supposed to provide an epistemological basis for shared objective truth that depended on a multiplicity of points of view, thus moving beyond the individual subject without abandoning the subjectivist premise entirely. It can be argued that a literary counterpart to this idea presented in the dissertation is to be found in Eliot's method in *The Waste Land*. Translated in literary terms, it amounts to the extension of the approach used in the earlier stage of modernist poetry to register the impressions of the individual

consciousness, and endeavouring to voice a multiplicity of subjectivities. In effect, Eliot's shift towards an expanded scope of poetic inquiry and the desire to write a long poem, as well as towards history as subject matter, become entwined organically with his philosophical trajectory and his thinking about the epistemological problems that preoccupied him. This is hinted at in Eliot's essay on Blake, where the expansion of poetic scope is linked to the extension of the subjectivist stance of early modernism: "you cannot create a very large poem", he writes, "without introducing a more impersonal point of view, or splitting it up into various personalities" (*Sacred Wood* 156; Levenson 163).

Eliot's desire to establish a basis for external truths, his look beyond the confines of the individual subject and Prufrock's recourse in the poem to shared cultural narratives already point in the direction of a broader conception of "truth" that goes beyond the psychologistic "subjective" and "objective" approaches to experience. Although still articulated in psychologistic terms and from the perspective of the processes of consciousness, the philosophical solution suggested by Eliot to the problem of solipsism, which, as we shall see in this chapter, locates external truth in a multiplicity of subjectivities, gestures towards a conception of truth as inscribed in a collectivity or community. When this approach is transposed into literary terms and finds its counterpart in *The Waste Land*, it assumes this aspect more fully. This perspective will be the focus of the second half of this thesis, which will explore the poetics of *The Waste Land* as inscribed within a historically constituted regime of thought whose logic identifies "literature" with the "expression of the life of a people", of a "history", a "culture", a "civilization". For now, the remainder of this chapter will complete our discussion of Eliot's thinking about epistemology and the ways in which it can be said to inform the approach and the poetic structure of *The Waste Land*.

"Prufrock" showed Eliot to be concerned with problems related to subjectivism or the "prison of consciousness", as we have referred to it, and raised questions about the possibility of external, shareable truths. The topic comes up again in *The Waste Land*, where, again, a reference to Dante's *Inferno* is involved. In "What the Thunder Said", the last section of the poem, Eliot writes:

Dayadhvam: I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
(*The Waste Land* 69).

Eliot's own annotation to these lines refers the reader to a passage from the *Inferno* where Ugolino della Gherardesca speaks to Dante about being imprisoned and left to starve in a tower (74, 120). But Eliot also adds a second note quoting a passage from F. H. Bradley's *Appearance and Reality*:

My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts or my feelings. In either case my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside; and, with all its elements alike, every sphere is opaque to the others which surround it. ... In brief, regarded as an existence which appears in a soul, the whole world for each is peculiar and private to that soul. (*The Waste Land* 74).

Eliot's inclusion of this passage along with the allusion to Dante makes for a clear nod to the problem of subjectivism, which had long interested him. In the 1910s, Eliot pursued formal training in philosophy, attending the Sorbonne—where he followed the lectures of Henri Bergson—Harvard and, later, Oxford, and his doctoral dissertation, on which he began work in 1913, was on the philosophy of F. H. Bradley (Levenson 179). In Chapter 1, we briefly mentioned Bradley's concept of "immediate experience", which is the Bradleyan counterpart to Bergson's "real duration" and William James's "stream of consciousness" and is similarly meant to describe the fundamental level of experiential reality (Schwartz 20; Levenson 177). But, while Bradley was thus, like those other philosophers, interested in consciousness or experienced reality, the main purport of his work was the rejection of "the idea that the self can be the foundation or the centre of reality" and of the construction of systems of knowledge "on the basis of individual psychology", and he aspired towards "a reality which transcends the self" (Levenson 178, 180). To this end, he theorized what he called the "Absolute", which, he argued,

was a philosophically necessary higher level of reality that integrated or unified the plurality and the contradictions existent at the lower level worlds of raw experience and of common sense (Levenson 178).

Bradley's "Absolute" was rejected—indeed derided—by contemporary philosophers (Schwartz 34; Levenson 180). According to Levenson, Eliot, in his dissertation, is "plainly uneasy about Bradley's Absolute". He states early in the text that this concept lies outside of the scope of his inquiry and "dispenses with [it] in the rest of his argument" (180). In a separate paper published in 1916, Eliot dismisses the concept more explicitly. While Bradley had argued that the reality of the Absolute was a philosophical necessity, Eliot states that "the Absolute responds only to an imaginary demand of thought, and satisfies only an imaginary demand of feeling. Pretending to be something which makes finite centres cohere, it turns out to be merely the assertion that they do" (qtd in Levenson 180). Not only is the necessity of something like the Absolute "imaginary", but the concept also fails to satisfy that supposed necessity, and Eliot goes on to write that "Bradley's universe, actual only in finite centres, is only by an act of faith unified. Upon inspection, it falls away into the isolated finite experiences out of which it is put together" (qtd. in Levenson 181). And yet, as we shall see shortly, Eliot was not content to leave things there either.

Eliot's mention of "finite centres" here brings us back to the passage by Bradley, quoted above, from Eliot's note in *The Waste Land*, and the issue of subjectivism and solipsism. While, as Levenson explains, the notion of "finite centre" was a "peripheral element in Bradley's [metaphysical] system", it became a crucial one for Eliot (180). Eliot speaks of the finite centre, which he equivalently calls "point of view", as a "unit of soul life", or a "unity of consciousness", having "for its object one consistent world" (*Knowledge and Experience* 147, 148). Levenson explains it as "the whole world as it exists for an individual consciousness" at a given moment: "though it is a temporary point of view, while it lasts, it constitutes the whole of reality" (180-1). For Eliot, as far as experience is concerned, Bradley, whom he quotes, is right to say that "finite centres of feeling, while they last, are ... not directly pervious to one another"; and in Eliot's words, "we may be said to live each in a different world" (*Knowledge and Experience* 149). This is, again, the same idea that the Bradley quote from the note in the *The Waste Land* suggests. But Eliot is quick to add that this does not imply solipsism because,

while “each centre of experience is unique”, it is “unique only with reference to a common meaning” (*Knowledge and Experience* 149). Eliot was aware that the rejection of the Absolute carries the risk of “the loss of extra-individual standards and a collapse into solipsism” (Levenson 183). The question was indeed a defining one for Eliot and accompanied him for a long time: in the Clark Lectures of 1926, Eliot complained that Descartes’s legacy amounted to “mankind suddenly retir[ing] inside its several skulls” (qtd. in Lobb 19). As Edward Lobb explains, this for Eliot would mean that “any act of true communication – including poetry – becomes virtually impossible”. This is why the final chapter of his dissertation is namely on solipsism. Eliot still wanted to find some basis other than Bradley’s “Absolute” for moving beyond limited points of view, passing “from two or more discordant viewpoints to a higher which shall somehow include and transmute them” (*Knowledge and Experience* 147-8). As James Longenbach points out, the main issue in the dissertation is the following: “locked in an individual point of view or ‘finite center’, what kinds of truth-claims can we make for our interpretations of ... the world outside us?” (*Modernist Poetics of History* 171). Eliot’s answer in the dissertation was the so-called “theory of points of view”, to which we will turn in a moment.

Another influence that informs Eliot’s thinking about the problem of arriving at shared external truths is the American philosopher Josiah Royce, whose graduate seminar on the “Comparative Study of Various Types of Scientific Method” Eliot attended at Harvard in 1913-1914 (Longenbach, *Modernist Poetics of History* 164). Longenbach recounts Harry Todd Costello’s record of the proceedings of the seminar, which reveals Eliot’s investment in these issues, as well as his rather sceptical turn of thought. According to Costello, Eliot’s work that year centred on the “question of the truth of interpretations”. In a paper on “The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual” which Eliot wrote at the time, Longenbach explains, he argued against the “positivism latent in modern anthropological method”, claiming that the “so-called ‘facts’ of history are inseparable from the point of view or system of an interpretive strategy” (169). Royce himself worked on the question of interpretation, and had devoted the second volume of his study, *The Problem of Christianity*, published in 1913, to the idea of a “Community of Interpretation”, which converges toward truths through an endless “sequence of acts of interpretation” (Longenbach 169-70, 171). Based on this idea, Royce suggested

during the seminar discussion of Eliot's paper that a group of interpreters could reach a "mutual understanding" based on a multitude of interpretations tested against one another. Eliot's reply was that "no interpretation helps another", and that each interpretation "presents a new problem to disentangle" (Longenbach 169, 171). As Longenbach explains, Eliot's response is a testament to his unwillingness at the time to accept a basis for the "continuity between individual minds" that "leapt past the limitations of human knowledge too quickly". We may assume that this is the same impulse that led him to reject Bradley's Absolute. However, Longenbach continues, "Eliot was equally as unwilling to leave the human being trapped in the prison of consciousness" (171). Despite Eliot's sceptical response to Royce mentioned above, the answer to the problem which Eliot proffers later on actually turns out to share characteristics with Royce's.

For Longenbach, Eliot's solution "depends upon a mystical interpenetration of minds rather than a rational comparison of interpretations", and thus differs significantly from Royce's answer (171). Longenbach may be motivated here by the desire to emphasize Eliot's connection to the visionary poetic tradition, which is part of his argument elsewhere. But it seems to me that Eliot, in this instance at least, remains much closer to the philosophy of his time than to mysticism. If his philosophy borders on mysticism, it does so in the same sense as do Bergson's "real duration" or Bradley's "immediate experience"—certainly not Bradley's Absolute, which Eliot rejected. Levenson's presentation of Eliot's "theory of points of view" in fact suggests its dependence on Bradley's conception of "immediate experience" as well as an affinity with Royce's "Community of Interpretation"; and Levenson will help us finally to get to the literary transposition of Eliot's epistemological stance in *The Waste Land*—which is, after all, what is most compelling about it, as opposed to its philosophical validity.

While Eliot rejected Bradley's Absolute, according to Levenson he "faithfully adopted the notions of immediate experience and the finite centre", and these led him to an understanding of experience as a "plurality of perceptual moments" (181). Bradley had resorted to the Absolute in order to move beyond the "finite centre" to a transcendent, supra-rational reality which constitutes a unified and harmonious whole (Levenson 178). Eliot, for his part, Levenson explains, attempted to move beyond the "finite centre" from a "more empirical standpoint" (184). In Bradley's philosophical

system, “immediate experience” precedes any distinctions between subject and object, and even between real and unreal (Schwartz 32; Levenson 184). This position Eliot adopts, but, according to Levenson, he suggests that “a comparison among a *number* of finite centres makes such distinctions possible”: while “no single point of view is sufficient for knowledge”, “only in multiple perspectives does the world become real” (184). “The external world”, Eliot argues, “is a construction by the selection and combination of various presentations to various viewpoints” (*Knowledge and Experience* 142). Insofar as the notion of “immediate experience” upon which Eliot relies refers to a pre-rational level of reality, his approach might differ from Royce’s “rational comparison of interpretations”, as Longenbach suggests. But, as Levenson explains, the “theory of points of view” was meant to avoid a “leap into transcendence”, and “maintained an experiential basis” (185). As the above presentation makes clear, it also resembled Royce’s approach in its reliance on multiple perspectives, which is what interests us particularly in connection to *The Waste Land*.

Levenson begins to make the connection between Eliot’s philosophy and his poetic approach in *The Waste Land* by calling attention to another one of Eliot’s annotations to his poem and the fact that it echoes language from the philosophical paper mentioned above, written shortly following his dissertation. There, Eliot argues that a “pre-established harmony” to provide order among the discordant “monads” (G. W. Leibniz’s counterpart to Bradley’s “finite centres”) is superfluous “if one recognizes two points of view which are quite irreconcilable yet *melt into* each other”, or that “monads are *not wholly distinct*” (qtd. in Levenson 189; italics Levenson’s). Eliot’s note to line 218 of *The Waste Land*, on the other hand, states that “the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, *melts into* the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is *not wholly distinct* from Ferdinand Prince of Naples” (72; italics added). The echo here is more than a matter of vocabulary. There exists a discernible parallel between Eliot’s philosophical ideas and the logic that shapes *The Waste Land*. As Levenson argues, it might be misleading to suggest that Eliot *derived* an aesthetic from his philosophical work, but there is a clear “continuity [in] Eliot’s intellectual perspective” and a “structural homology between his epistemological position” and his aesthetic approach in *The Waste Land* (187).

While Eliot’s epistemology sought to establish the basis of truth and reality in a “plurality of perceptual moments” or points of view standing in relation to one another

to produce a common world, the structure of *The Waste Land* is predicated on assembling together and juxtaposing a large number of moments, scenes, characters and voices. And this is often done in short bursts, by the means of techniques reminiscent of those used in earlier modernist poetry to capture individual perceptions, with perspectives shifting rapidly and dramatically. Thus, we get, within the relatively short space of 433 lines, a large cast of characters. These include some that are of Eliot's creation like the Bavarian countess (likely based, according to Valerie Eliot, on a person Eliot had met at some point; see *The Waste Land* 77), the fortune teller and the young typist; historical figures including Elizabeth I of England; figures from literature ancient and modern and from different religious traditions. All of this is compounded further by Eliot's use of quotation and allusion, which brings in more directly voices other than Eliot's own, creating a doubling of voices. This includes quotations and allusions from and to various literary works by different authors and in different languages, religious texts including in Sanskrit, and parts of songs taken from Wagner as well as ragtime. Thus, the fragmented poetic structure of *The Waste Land*, built out of the juxtaposition of a multiplicity of fragments with constantly shifting narrators and points of view and compounded voices, is informed by Eliot's long literary and philosophical preoccupation with questions of subjectivity and epistemology, and is on one level a literary reflection of the "theory of points of view" which he proposed as basis for external truth in a multiplicity of subjectivities.

The Hulme-Pound-Eliot strand of modernist poetry, as these chapters have demonstrated, was characterized by a vital concern with and a critical tension between objectivity and subjectivity, the desire to create objective poetic accounts of reality and the focus on the individual conscious experience and perception. The early efforts of these poets, particularly in the critical pronouncements and prescriptions of Hulme and Pound, centred on the attempt to counter instrumental mechanisms and reflexes which habitually falsified experience, to create a revitalized language through the use of poetic images and thereby recapture the truth of subjective experience. Eliot manifestly shared this outlook to a certain extent. However, he was not as optimistic that the description of individual, subjective experience was sufficient for arriving at objective, shared and communicable truths, and during the 1910s he actively engaged with subjectivism and

solipsism as a philosophical problem needing to be solved. Thus, there was a significant tension for him between the claims of subjective experience and the felt necessity of finding a basis for objective, shared truths and external standards for judgment. Levenson suggests that Eliot's approach in *The Waste Land*, along with the theory of tradition propounded in "Tradition and the Individual Talent", is his attempt to resolve that tension in the literary domain—as the "theory of points of view" was in his philosophical work—by clustering together multiple points of view. As Rebecca Beasley writes, "the intensely subjective mode of Eliot's and Pound's early verse arose" in part "from their belief, following Bradley and Bergson respectively, that one could only speak with integrity about one's own experience" (82). Eliot's epistemological stance, coupled with a deep-seated modernist distrust of rhetoric, meant that he would not effect the expansion beyond the individual consciousness by resorting to a discursive style of poetry. His solution, informed both by his philosophical work as well as his literary lineage and associations, was to extend the earlier use of Imagist techniques and the dramatic power of the monologue in an attempt to "maintain the integrity of subjective experience, while presenting that experience in an expanded, objective form" (Beasley 89). As mentioned earlier, Eliot's formulation of a basis for external truth in a multiplicity of subjectivities already points in the direction of a broader conception of poetics, which we shall examine in the second half of this thesis. The next chapter will explore a set of deep-seated assumptions having to do with the identification of literature within the general poetics available to Eliot, which explain Eliot's turn towards a more expansive poetic scope going beyond the single point of view, and which had a profound influence on the ultimate shape of *The Waste Land*.

Part II

3 The “Poem Including History”: A Rancièrian Perspective

The first half of this thesis traced a certain progression in the modernist poetics of the Hulme-Pound-Eliot strand of modernist poetry up to *The Waste Land*. Starting from an early focus on the consciousness of the individual subject, associated with tendencies of turn-of-the-century philosophy and literature, we worked our way through Eliot’s scepticism concerning the limits of individual subjectivity to his formulation for a basis for external truth located in a multiplicity of points of view or of subjectivities. Thus, we accounted for the fragmented poetic structure of *The Waste Land* by understanding it as a literary counterpart to the abstract philosophical idea which Eliot developed in response to philosophical-epistemological concerns. Eliot’s desire to establish a basis for shared, external truths, and the nature of his proposed solution which, though still in some ways psychologistic and based experientially in subjective consciousness, grounds truth in a *collectivity* of points of view and of consciousnesses, already gesture towards an alternative perspective which we shall now begin to explore. This chapter will thus offer a complementary, and somewhat more complex, account of Eliot’s shift towards a more expansive scope moving beyond the individual subject, and of the poetic structure of *The Waste Land* as a heterogeneous collage of fragments.

The perspective in this chapter moves to a conception of poetics that is broader in many respects, and which depends essentially on the analysis by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière of what he has called the “aesthetic regime of art” or of “literature” as a specific regime of poetics. The perspective on poetics here is broader, firstly, in the sense that we will inscribe Eliot’s modernist poetics within a larger poetical regime that goes back to the eighteenth century. More fundamentally, it takes a step back and examines how literature itself is defined and identified within a wider, historically constituted poetical regime of thought. The argument in this chapter will proceed in three stages. We will first discuss Eliot’s shift beyond individual subjectivity and to a more expansive scope of subject in terms of a set of conventional expectations in the poetic tradition available to him and his contemporaries, which would have impelled him towards formulating his most ambitious poetic project to date in terms of the “long poem” form, partaking of the genre of “epic” and treating “history” as its subject matter.

James Longenbach, in *Modernist Poetics of History*, studies Eliot's and Pound's thinking about history mainly from a temporal perspective, focusing on the relationship between past and present, and the idea of the contemporaneity of the past. This perspective is useful and will be alluded to in some places, but we will largely deal with history from different point of view. In the first stage of our argument, it will be considered simply as a kind of cipher or marker, an identifier of the subject matter of a work of poetry, which invests the latter with seriousness of purpose and signals its literary ambition. The second stage of the argument will delve deeper into Rancière's analysis of the regime of literature, and centre on the identification of literature, within this poetics as described by Rancière, with the "expression of the life of a people". This perspective suggests it is no surprise that the landmark work of modernist poetry should precisely be one conceived and read as a treatment of the "history of a civilization", or, in Pound's phrase, as a "poem including history". Finally, the last section of this chapter will turn to the question of the treatment history itself within literature. Again, while Longenbach's perspective on the contemporaneity of history is implicitly accepted, the emphasis will not be on the temporal aspect but on the subjects and objects that populate history. The discussion will turn on Rancière's analysis of the inclusive logic of literature within the aesthetic regime, which endows subjects, objects and fragments with historical significance.

Part I of this thesis studied the poetics of *The Waste Land* from the perspective of subjects and objects, subjectivity and objectivity. This second half, in effect, accounts for the poem's ultimate shape from a perspective centred on subject matter and the subjects and objects of literature or poetry.

3.1 The Long Poem, Epic, and History as Subject Matter

In a chapter on "Modern Poetry", James Longenbach presents an account of modernist poetry through the lens of the question of poetic ambition. He draws a contrast between, on the one hand, a nineteenth- and early twentieth-century poetics of "little things" that eschews epic ambitions and the grand claims of a Wordsworth or Shelley, and, on the other hand, a return to these epic ambitions in the work of modernist poets like Pound

and Eliot and the felt need for poetry to address large public themes. According to Longenbach, the transition for many of these poets hinges—as might be expected—around World War I. Michael Levenson, in describing Hulme’s poetics in “A Lecture on Modern Poetry”, recognizes a tendency towards a narrowing of the field of poetry, which he connects to the Bergsonian rejection of “large-scale metaphysical system[s]” and “comprehensive intellectual schema[ta]” (43-44). Longenbach, for his part, suggests that this development is already present in the work of the Victorians, and comes in response to a “highly-developed” sense that “the great claims made for poetry by the romantics were no longer viable” (“Modern Poetry” 102-3). He cites Thomas Hardy, the “imagist Pound” and W. B. Yeats at the turn of the century as poets who shared the “desire to limit poetry’s terrain”, but he goes on to say that “few of the modern poets could remain content with this small world”, and that, though some of them resisted and hung on to a “strategically circumscribed world” (like Hardy, Marianne Moore and Wallace Stevens), they all felt and responded in their way to “the twentieth century’s epic challenges” (“Modern Poetry” 104).

Longenbach calls the poetic products of Imagism the work of “diminished romantics”. While a poet such as H. D. could turn to good account the narrow focus of the Imagist aesthetic and utilize it as a “strategic rejection of an epic imperative” associated with militarism and masculinity, Ezra Pound, “the most self-consciously ambitious poet since Milton”, would not take that option, and was, from early on, “impatient with Imagism’s studiously miniature world” (“Modern Poetry” 106-7). He had resolved, since his youth, to write “the epic of the West”, and was conscious of the legitimate question whether a long Imagist poem was possible—which he nevertheless answered in the affirmative (Longenbach, “Modern Poetry” 107; Whitworth 199). Pound’s work is therefore all along underwritten with a poetic ambition which came to articulate itself, in many respects, in conventional and inherited terms. Longenbach argues that, while Pound’s statements about Imagism in his critical prose make “the poetry sound stubbornly materialistic”, many of the poems themselves have a strong, Yeatsian “visionary undercurrent” that provided one possible outlet or expression of Pound’s poetic ambition, but this “quickly became a dead end for Pound” (“Modern Poetry” 108). Pound’s poetic ambition and his aim to make “serious” art led him towards expanding again the scope of his poetry to deal with public themes, and towards

traditional formal, generic and thematic markers of serious, ambitious poetry: the “long poem”, “epic” and “historical” subject matter. These things apply similarly to T. S. Eliot.

As alluded to earlier, the watershed event of the First World War, critics agree, played a catalyzing role for the shift in Pound’s and Eliot’s poetic aims and approach. Longenbach argues that the war confronted “a generation of studiously diminished lyric poets” with an “epic subject”, and that “all the most ambitious work of the modern poets, coming in the twenties, was at least in part the result of the social and aesthetic challenge of the war” (“Modern Poetry” 109). Pound himself would indeed “credit the world war with instigating all of his later economic and political interest”, which he incorporated into his *Cantos*, and Longenbach adds that “Pound’s effort to write a long poem was coterminous with his effort to write a poem addressing the social catastrophe of the war” (“Modern Poetry” 117). The last part, in fact, describes how many have read Eliot’s *The Waste Land* since the time of its publication.

Before *The Waste Land*, there were Pound’s “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley” and Eliot’s quatrain poems of *Ara Vos Prec*, which marked a period of close collaboration between Pound and Eliot, with the aim of creating a “counter-current” to earlier tendencies of modernist poetry (Longenbach, “Modern Poetry” 119). While this “counter-current” was directed primarily against free verse, which, in Eliot’s and Pound’s view, had degenerated into “general floppiness” and a lack of discipline, these poets associated stylistic considerations with political and ethical attitudes, as Rebecca Beasley explains (56-7). Eliot’s advocacy of discipline and restraint in poetry from around 1917 was thus connected for him to his classicist attitude towards culture, society and politics, emphasizing reason and authority. So, Eliot’s turn towards public concerns can already be glimpsed at this stage in his career. But the “main line of Eliot’s early development”, as Levenson argues, goes not so much through the quatrain poems but “from ‘Prufrock’ through ‘Gerontion’ to *The Waste Land*” (163). “Gerontion”, indeed, begins to address some of the same themes treated later in *The Waste Land*, and seems to stand mid-way between “Prufrock” and the later poem. It raises history as a subject of the poem and addresses the themes of modernity, culture and decay, and it alludes in several instances to the war. While it follows “Prufrock” in employing the dramatic monologue form, the speaker of the poem conjures a diverse cast of characters that bears comparison to that in *The Waste Land*. Levenson notes, moreover, that “Gerontion”

exhibits a “weakening” of the “central consciousness” which becomes “a way of enlarging the poetic domain”: “Gerontion dissolves into history and, in losing a character, we gain a culture” (163).

The expanded scope of Eliot’s poetry, then, is understood by critics such as Longenbach and Beasley as a response to the pressure exerted by the First World War. *The Waste Land* clearly bears the mark of the war, and Beasley goes so far as to call the poem, along with Pound’s *The Cantos*, a war poem (79). Beasley lists the many passages of the poem that refer to the war, including the “Bavarian countess’s childhood memories of the pre-war Austrian empire”, references to “sprouting corpses”, the episode of the wife preparing to welcome her husband home from the war and scenes of post-war collapse. But the influence of the war on the poem is not limited to this content. It extends to shaping the “broader moral framework” that informs the poem, which, according to Beasley, takes as its subject the “disintegration of civilization in the modern world” (80). The First World War did not simply provide subject matter for Eliot’s poem. As many critics agree, it played a part in prompting Eliot and others towards poetic projects of a larger scale and scope. Early modernism as we have examined it had always had high ambitions for poetry, but, whereas before the war the task was seen to be the revitalization of poetic language and the recovery of subjective experience, the crisis of the war prodded these poets in a new direction.

But the war itself did not provide all the terms of this new direction. On the one hand, some features of the pre-war poetics persisted and were built upon, as we saw in the previous chapter. On the other, a set of ideas or assumptions that stretch back longer in the Western poetical tradition regained prominence and informed the project of *The Waste Land* and the shape in which it articulated itself. The following paragraphs will discuss the idea of the “long poem” form, the genre of “epic” poetry and the traditional place for “history” as poetic subject matter.

In her book *On the Modernist Long Poem*, which deals individually with poems ranging from Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, through Hart Crane’s *The Bridge*, to William Carlos Williams’s *Paterson*, Margaret Dickie maintains that all of these poets “shared the ambition to write the long poem” (5). These modernist poets’ “first efforts had been to reduce poetic form, purify language, and focus imaginative attention”; they were committed to “brevity, intensity” and “imagistic precision”, and this might have made

the long poem “appear initially undesirable and unnecessary” (1-2). We might in fact say that Eliot, in *The Waste Land*, remained in many ways committed to these ideals—including even brevity since the poem is built out of small fragments (standing at 430-odd lines, also, the poem is, paradoxically, a relatively short “long poem”). At some point, however, these poets felt impelled to write the long poem. And Eliot himself thought of *The Waste Land* as an important “long poem” project. One of his earliest references that we have to the poem is a New Year resolution for 1920, intimated in a letter to his mother, “to write a long poem I have had on my mind for a long time” (qtd. in Litz 69). The formal element of length, according to Margaret Dickie, is the “salient feature of this otherwise unidentifiable genre”, and the feature that specifically attracted these poets: “long in the time of composition, in the initial intention, and in the final form, the Modernist long poem is concerned first and last with its own length” (6).

The “initial intention” is important if we are to understand the projects of these poems, and part of the answer to why Eliot and others became so intent on writing “the long poem” is quite basic: “the long poem is an attempt at the major poem”, something that befits poets who saw themselves as “serious and ambitious” (Dickie 1). Michael Whitworth states that the long poem “was seen by some as the sign that the poet was capable of ‘sustained effort’”—with the “implications of manliness” that this carried—and that “many poets and critics believed the composition of a long poem was a test that any poet who aspired to be a major poet should undertake” (191). Indeed, nineteenth-century criticism sometimes referred to the early, shorter lyrics of major poets as “a training ground for the long poem”. The long poem was thus viewed as the poet’s path to securing one’s “place in the canon”. But Whitworth also ties the desire to write the long poem to the perception that “the place of poetry in the modern world was threatened”. The long poem promised to be spacious enough to “deal with the full breadth of the modern world”, to move poetry beyond being “a record of fleeting sensations and feelings”, and thus stood the best chance to succeed in “justifying poetry” (192). Whitworth’s remark about the “spaciousness” of the form, in relation to dealing with the “full breadth of the modern world”, suggests a point to which we will have occasion to return towards the end of this chapter: the relation between the modernist long poem and the idea of the novel as the consummate modern form. For now let us note that the formal aspect of length was in a way tied to the felt need to “justify poetry”, and to

anxieties about the poet's place in modern literature and society, but also to the kind of subject matter and content which the long poem was to address. The above sentiments concerning the importance attached to the long poem, and even the idea of shorter lyrics as a preparation for the long poem, can be sensed behind Pound's telling statement in 1922 that "Eliot's *Waste Land* is I think the justification of the 'movement', of our modern experiment, since 1900" (qtd. in Lewis 129).

We can now turn to the question of the epic genre and history as its proper poetic subject matter. Whitworth writes that poets had a choice between "writing a long poem ... and writing a long poem that was self-consciously in the tradition of epic", and at first he seems to suggest that *The Waste Land* is closer to the former than it is to the latter (192). The designation is indeed problematic, because *The Waste Land* looks very different from Homer's or Virgil's canonical epics—but then again, so do Pound's *Cantos*. Pericles Lewis says that *The Waste Land* "contains both lyric and epic elements", and calls the poem a "miniature epic" (145, 146). This is an apt description. There are a number of possible definitions for epic, which Whitworth cites, and these include: a narrative poem "concerned with heroic actions", the narrative of a hero's homecoming and the narrative of a nation (193-4). Although *The Waste Land* is no narrative, the last of these definitions is the most pertinent to the poem and to the poetics within which it is inscribed. Pound reportedly defined epic as "the speech of a nation thru the mouth of one man" (Whitworth 194). And the word "nation" is also highly pertinent to the theme of Eliot's poem which has to do with a "culture" or "civilization". The matter of epic will be dealt with more in-depth in the next section of this chapter, and we will see that Pound's definition above goes back to the eighteenth-century. For now, let us also note the appropriateness of the word "speech" in Pound's definition in connection to *The Waste Land*, where the texture of the poem is made out of the collage of a multitude of "voices".

Pound's other famous definition of epic is: "a poem including history". Pericles Lewis argues that, while *The Waste Land* is much shorter than traditionally recognized epics like those of Homer, Virgil, Dante or Milton, Eliot's poem "does contain history", "both contemporary history and the history of the world understood in mythological terms", and that it addresses "broad, historical questions, the sorts of questions normally addressed by epic"—though it takes a rather different approach to doing that (145). This

is what has led James Longenbach, in his study of the *Modernist Poetics of History*, to call *The Waste Land* “the ultimate ‘poem including history’ produced in the twentieth century” (237). Again, the question of just how *The Waste Land* effects its “inclusion” of history will be the topic of the final section in this chapter.

To sum up the foregoing discussion, what the above suggests so far is that poets who saw themselves as “serious” artists, and sought to secure for themselves a place in the canon, were impelled to write a “long poem”, partaking of the “epic” genre and understood in some way to address broad, “historical” themes. This impulse to write the long, epic poem had been present in the poetics available to English poets for a long time. It had animated William Wordsworth in his prolonged quest for an epic subject of his own—which yielded *The Prelude*. John Keats, who had consciously anticipated a posthumous place for himself “among the English poets”, had as one of his last projects before his death a (second) attempt to write his epic poem on Hyperion. The same impulse would have been operative in Eliot’s (and Pound’s) turn towards a more expansive poetic scope, moving beyond a “diminished” poetics confined to the impressions of the individual subject.

The premise behind the set of conventional expectations outlined above identifies a certain type of subject matter, form and genre as the most “serious”, worthy or prestigious. We shall now begin to dig deeper into the poetics that establishes these assumptions by turning to the work of the French theorist Jacques Rancière, which will form the essential basis for the remainder of this study. Rancière analyses the transformations of poetics and the conception of artistic practices in the West and distinguishes what he calls “regimes of identification of art” which have been dominant at different moments in Western history (*Aisthesis* xi). In *Mute Speech*, his 1998 study focusing specifically on literature or the art of writing, Rancière identifies the “system of representation” (what he would later call the “representative regime” of the arts) as the poetics that dominated in Europe from the Renaissance up to the end of the eighteenth century, before being supplanted by “literature” as we know it (which belongs to the broader “aesthetic regime of art”). What interests us at this point is the “hierarchy of genres” which characterizes this “system of representation”. In *Mute Speech*, Rancière identifies the “generic principle” as one of four core principles of the representative

regime of the arts. “What defines a genre”, Rancière writes, “is not a set of formal rules but the nature of what is represented, the object of the fiction” (45). He continues: “There are fundamentally two sorts of people (and two sorts of actions) that can be imitated: the great and the small”. Thus, “a genre is defined by the subject represented”, and “the subject takes its place in a scale of values that defines the hierarchy of genres”.

Rancière goes on to argue that the new poetics of the “aesthetic regime”, which started to take hold towards the end of the eighteenth century and continues to define art to this day, can be understood as the “term-for-term reversal of the four principles that structured the representative system”, and this includes the collapse of the hierarchy of genres in favour of the “equality of all represented subjects” (50). This last development, as will be argued later on, is highly significant and helps to account for essential differences in the way that *The Waste Land* defines and deals with its historical subject matter, as opposed to pre-Romantic poetry and literature. However, it is interesting to observe, at this point, based on the perspective we have laid out so far in this chapter, that English poetry within the modern regime of poetics, up to the modernists, would seem at first to have retained a vestige of the hierarchy of genres.

We have described Eliot’s *The Waste Land* in the following terms: a long poem, partaking of the genre of epic, dealing with history as its subject matter. The hierarchy of genres of which Rancière and others speak in connection to the classical or pre-Romantic conception of the arts placed epic highest among the literary genres and designated “history” as its proper subject matter. As we can see from looking at the counterpart of epic in the visual arts, i.e. “history painting”, the designation “history” could refer to a range of possible subjects, like classical history, literature, mythology, biblical stories or scenes from real historical events, all of which were seen as demanding the highest “moral force and imagination” (Huntsman 24). *The Waste Land*, interestingly enough, can in fact be said to include elements from all of those domains, though the way they are articulated is obviously very different from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century art. Still, the main point here is the basic way that the designation “history” itself functions, and the fact that it invests Eliot’s poem with seriousness of purpose and becomes a marker or a cipher that signals the poem’s ambition or its pretension to literary prestige. The poem, in its original intention, would seem to subscribe to expectations about what the most substantial poetic effort should look like,

that are inherited from the so-called representative regime. Certainly, the poem's reception would seem to confirm this. Despite the poem's difficulties and ambiguities, it was read by contemporaries and by subsequent generations as the poetical treatment of a great historical subject. If we today find it unsurprising or natural that the landmark poem of modernism should have been the one to identify as a long poem, partaking of the epic genre and dealing with history (broadly conceived) as its subject matter, it may well be because some of the same ideas and assumptions are, to the present day, deeply entrenched in our own outlook towards art (and indeed in our general approach to literary criticism, informing the ways that critics and academics justify the practice and the critical study of literature and art).

We have referred to the assumptions here as in some ways a vestige of the representative regime—which, incidentally, according to Rancière, never disappeared but simply receded from dominance. The idea is that the identification of “history” as subject matter of art remained a marker for “serious” art, even as the conception of the historical subject matter underwent profound transformations in connection to the “silent revolution” that gave rise to the aesthetic regime, according to Rancière. Art historian Henri Zerner makes an observation that can help us make sense of this, if we extend his argument from the arts of painting and sculpture to the art of writing. He points out that Romantic or nineteenth-century thinking about art did not dispose of genres and their hierarchy entirely, but that the “revolution of subject matter was effected from within” (Peyre and Zerner; my translation). Thus, the superiority of history painting was defended even as this genre was argued to include all of the others, such as genre or landscape painting, which were hitherto considered to be “lower”. This extension of the conception of the historical subject conforms very well with Rancière's analysis of the aesthetic regime of art and literature, and this will be the essential basis of our argument in the remainder of this thesis.

3.2 Literature and the “Life of a People”

Our attention so far in this chapter has been directed at the way that the “long poem”, “epic” and “history” functioned as markers or signs that distinguished a certain kind of

poetic project, signalled its ambition and invested it with a special seriousness and prestige. This analysis demonstrated a set of expectations that are embedded within the poetics available to poets like Eliot, and suggested why Eliot would have been impelled towards formulating a poetic project that could be defined in those terms, or to which those labels could be attached. These impulses would have colluded with Eliot's thinking about epistemology in pushing him towards creating an expanded scope for his poetry beyond individual subjectivity. The combination of these elements shaped the form and the content of *The Waste Land*, with its reliance on a multiplicity of voices and constantly shifting perspectives, and its inclusion of an extended and heterogeneous cast of characters and objects—indeed, what we might call “subjects” in more than one sense of the word. The remainder of this chapter will attempt to delve deeper below the more abstract markers identified above. The argument will rely mainly on Rancière's description of the poetics of the “aesthetic regime of art” or of “literature”. We will first continue the discussion of the place of “history” as subject matter within the poetics in question, through a detailed presentation Rancière's proposition about the identification of poetry and literature, within the modern poetical regime, with the “expression of the life a people”. Along the way, readings in Eliot's critical prose will allow us to tie his work to the logic of this general poetics. In the next and final section of this chapter, we will turn to Rancière's related ideas about the development and expansion of the field of history itself and of the conception of historical subjects and objects, which, Rancière's work suggests, is coterminous with an expansive, inclusive logic of literature itself following from the reversal of the principles of the representative regime. This will allow us to discuss Eliot's treatment of history in *The Waste Land*.

Rancière's study *Mute Speech* chooses, as its entry point for the description of the modern poetical regime that displaced the “system of representation”, Victor Hugo's novel *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* and its contemporary reception. Rancière makes much of the reaction of Gustave Planche, a hostile critic of Hugo's novel, who characterized it as a “monstrous work” that, in setting at its centre and animating the stone cathedral, ends up turning living man into stone (Rancière, *Mute Speech* 42-3). Rancière sees Planche's assessment as the response of a reactionary critic which is yet perceptive and “allows us to understand what is at stake in Hugolian ‘petrification’”,

namely the overturning of a poetic system” (43, 49-50). Thus, for Rancière, Hugo’s novel is an embodiment of the new regime of literature.

Earlier we referred to the “generic principle” and the “hierarchy of genres” as key features of the “system of representation” as described by Rancière. A related and equally central point is that the representative system is predicated on the “principle of fiction”, which defines the poem as the “imitation of actions”, and the “principle of decorum”, based on the “appropriateness” of action, speech and language to the condition of the represented action and subject (44, 45). Hugo’s novel “emblemizes the collapse of the [representative] system” by placing the cathedral at the centre—and we should remember that the original French title of the novel is *Notre-Dame de Paris*, the name of the cathedral—rather than individuals and their actions (50). Rancière’s argument, at one level, as Oliver Davis explains it, is that, “because the central subject is a cathedral and because the idea of a kind of language appropriate to a cathedral is incoherent in terms of the poetics of representation, language is liberated from its dependence on the subject and does itself take centre stage” (Davis 103). But this, as Rancière understands it, is different from the orthodoxy about the intransitivity or self-referentiality of modern literature (see *Politics of Literature* 5-6). It is different from the idea of the “affirmation of the individual virtuosity of the writer” or the viewpoint of the aesthete, and has to do with a “complex process of transformation of poetic form and matter” that involves a “history of encounters between the poem, the stone, the people, and the Book” (*Mute Speech* 51). Rancière’s language is characteristically cryptic, but this relation between the “poem”, the “stone” and the “people” is where different strands of his argument converge. It is therefore worthwhile to sketch the thinking that takes Rancière from the stones of the cathedral at the centre of Hugo’s novel to an argument about language, and then to the idea most interesting for our context, which is the identification of the poem or literature with the “expression of the life of a people”. Rancière’s observations and insights into the constitution of a new poetics, which he makes through an examination of a nineteenth-century French novel, turn out to have elucidative—perhaps somewhat surprising—resonances with Eliot’s work. And we will take up a number of these ideas in turn in order to suggest Eliot’s ties to the poetics that Rancière attempts to describe.

The chapter of *Mute Speech* where Rancière develops his examination of Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* is titled "From the Book of Stone to the Book of Life". This title suggests the main direction of Rancière's argument here, which starts from the central position accorded to the stone cathedral, and moves from there towards broader implications about the regime of literature. It is important to see, says Rancière, "the implications of the strange procedure of putting the cathedral in the place of the arrangement of human actions"—which would have been the expected subject from the point of view of the "system of representation" (*Mute Speech* 43). While Hugo's novel "certainly does tell a story, knots together and then resolves the destiny of its characters", it "defines these adventures as another incarnation of what the cathedral itself expresses in the distribution of its spaces and the iconography or relief of its sculptures", and "stages its characters as figures drawn from the stone and the meaning it incarnates. To accomplish this Hugo's sentences animate the stone, make it speak and act" (43). The implication of this shift is the reversal, in effect, of the representative logic that subjected *elocutio*, the "material part" of language, to *inventio*, the "intellectual part" dictating the choice of subject, defining "the poem ... as an arrangement of actions" and governing "the logical order of an action". This is why Rancière says that language "emancipates itself" from the "tutelage" of the subject and, as Oliver Davis—quoted in the last paragraph—has it, "does itself take centre stage". But there is a subtle difference in Rancière's argument from the common claim about the autonomy, intransitivity or self-referentiality of language because, for Rancière, this emancipation is the flip side of "the power of speech granted to the new object of the poem" (*Mute Speech* 43).

This requires some clarification. Through his reading of Hugo's novel, Rancière makes the claim that the "new poetry", "expressive poetry" (he uses the words "poem" and "poetry" in a broad sense that includes the novel) is "made of sentences and images, sentence-images that have inherent value as manifestations of poeticity" (50). This "inherent value as manifestations of poeticity", however, distinguishes itself from the aesthete's "art for art's sake" or the New Critics' formalism, because of the larger meaning of "poeticity". The modern regime of literature is an "expressive poetics that determines [poems] as direct expressions of the poetic power" (67). But the expressive poetics invests not just language but the material world itself with this "poetic power":

“poetry is thus one particular manifestation of the poeticity of the *world*” (59; emphasis added). For “poeticity”, Rancière writes, “is the property by which any object can be doubled, taken not only as a set of properties but as the manifestation of an essence, not only as the effect of certain causes but as the metaphor or metonymy of the power that produced it” (60). This applies not only to the “‘material part’ of language”, but to all represented objects: “such a doubling can be carried out for any object”. And if Rancière describes this “poeticity of the world” in linguistic terms, it is because the poetics in question, in a sense, turns objects themselves into language: “any configuration of sensible properties can be assimilated to an arrangement of signs and thus to a manifestation of language in its primary poetical state”, and “any stone can also be language” (60). The new poetics, in Rancière’s analysis, as exemplified by *Notre-Dame de Paris*, establishes a fundamental “analogy between forms of language”, between words, the “material part” of language, and objects that make up the material world, which are animated, made to “speak and act”, in Hugo’s novel (53). Whereas the equivalence between the various arts in the representative regime had been conceived in terms of their being different ways of “telling a story”, or producing the “imitation of an action”, the unifying foundation of art in the new regime becomes this “analogy between languages”, which is also the “very principle of poeticity”. As Gabriel Rockhill explains, the “unifying principle is henceforth the Word (*Verbe*), the originary language of all languages”, the “immanent power of expression in all things” (Rancière, *Mute Speech* 14).

Because of this analogy, Hugo’s cathedral becomes a “scriptural model”, not simply an “architectural” one (53). This equivalence between the “monument of [Hugo’s] book” and the cathedral as a “poem of stone” is made possible by this new principle of poeticity, and forms the basis of both Hugo’s novel and Gustave Planche’s reactionary critique of it. But Rancière draws the implications further. The book, expressing “the genius’s individual power, becomes like the cathedral of stone, which also expresses ... the anonymous power of its creators, the genius of a common soul” (54). The “creator’s absolute genius” thus becomes analogous to “the anonymous genius that built the collective poem ... of the cathedral” (54). This is an implication of the identification of “poeticity” with an “originary”, “immanent” power of language in its very essence, and of the logic whereby “any object can be doubled, taken not only as a

set of properties but as the manifestation of an essence, not only as the effect of certain causes but as the metaphor or metonymy of the power that produced it". "The original power of the poem", within this new poetics, according to Rancière, "is borrowed from the common power whence all poems originate" (54). Taking his cue from a passage by Hugo identifying the tympanum of a cathedral with "the Word made marble, bronze, and stone", Rancière attributes the principle of poeticity to that of "the Word as the language of all languages", gathering together language's essential "power of incarnation". If the poem, as quoted above, has value as a "manifestation of poeticity", and if the poem is "one particular manifestation of the poeticity of the world", which is attributable to a collective, "common power", then "the value of the poet's singular idiom" is ascribable to its expression of "the collective spirit of a people" (54-5).

The above may appear at first like a singular or eccentric mystico-religious notion. Rancière, indeed, refers to the "common power of the Word" at this point as a "poetico-religious" idea (55). Certainly, the underlying conception at work here has manifested itself in different instances in overtly mystical or religious terms, as in Hugo's reference above to "the Word made marble, bronze and stone" (other examples may be drawn from the English visionary poetic tradition).¹ Additionally, we may justly wonder, at this point, to what extent the example of Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* and Rancière's reading of the novel, in their apparent specificity, can justifiably be seen as representative of a much broader poetic tendency. And Oliver Davis, in fact, calls Hugo's novel "almost too good of an example" and a "super-example" which becomes "emblematic" of the new poetics, not "merely an example of it" (105). Rancière's work, however, does contain further examples that suggest the pervasiveness of the underlying idea, which actually manifests itself in different domains of thought. Gabriel Rockhill explains that the idea of the "immanent power of expression in all things can be interpreted in two ways", "taken in a mystical light" or "rationalized" as in the "new science of history, which called on the testimony of the silent witnesses of the commonplace" (Rancière, *Mute Speech* 14). Examples included in *Mute Speech* and elsewhere suggest that the reach of this idea extends to various intellectual fields from literary criticism to philology to historiography and sociology (the common thread between all of these, as we shall see, can be said to be that they all involve a

¹ See, in addition, Frank Kermode's classic study *Romantic Image*—which, I would argue, has significant overlaps with Rancière's ideas—in which Kermode traces a poetic trajectory from the Romantics down to the modernists and beyond, based on the Image's symbolic power of incarnation.

historicizing attitude). In *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, Rancière would discuss Johann Joachim Winckelmann's "reading" of the *Belvedere Torso* as the "expression of the liberty of the Greek people", and Hegel's position in the *Lectures on Aesthetics* that the art of the past is a "manifestation of the life of a people" (14, 16). We shall remain, however, with *Mute Speech*, and turn to the example of Giambattista Vico's profoundly influential reading of Homer in *The New Science*, which connects us directly to the question of epic. This will also give us occasion to highlight ideas which Rancière takes to be essential to the new poetics he is describing and which, as we shall see, reappear in Eliot's context, in his criticism and, of course, in *The Waste Land* itself.

Giambattista Vico's magnum opus *The New Science* was published in 1725 and, while he was relatively unknown in his own time, his ideas concerning history and culture were more widely diffused from the nineteenth century onwards and broadly influenced both the humanities and the social sciences (Costelloe). The novel thesis put forth by Vico on the nature of Homeric epic and the identity of "the true Homer" proved to have a deep and lasting influence, and in fact can be said to stand behind Pound's definition of epic, quoted previously, as "the speech of a nation thru the mouth of one man". Vico's intention in his reading was to reject "the current view that the writings of Homer were the product of a sophisticated philosophical mind", that the Homeric epics were the allegorical expressions of "esoteric wisdom" formulated by an individual (Pompa 137-8). As Rancière has it, Vico wanted to refute a "paganistic" reading of the works of Homer as allegorical expressions of an "ancient and admirable wisdom" (*Mute Speech* 59). In making his case, however, Vico effectively articulated a novel and far-reaching historical conception of poetry or literature. Vico argued that the language of the Homeric poems that "delight in cruelty, immorality and drunkenness" bespeaks a certain stage of culture and rule out—render anachronistic—any reading into them of "philosophical speculation" in the modern sense (Pompa 138). As Leon Pompa explains, Vico's argument turns out, in effect, to be based on a fundamental assumption that "any given society is unified by communal modes of thought and attitude which are the products of the history of its own institutional developments" (139). Human creations, from Vico's perspective, are "historico-sociological" products. "The real significance of the poem" and its "historical interest" thus lie in the "historico-sociological circumstances", shared communally, that produced it (138-9).

For Rancière, “Vico’s refutation of the allegorical character of poetry” on the one hand, assures its status, on the other, as symbolic language”, as the “sensible manifestation of a truth or even ... the self-presentation of a community through its works” (59). Vico’s basic assumption invests the poem with the power to express a collective truth. Rancière makes the claim that “the quest for the ‘true Homer’”, starting with Vico, effectively “changed the status of poetry”. As Homer became “the voice of ancient Greece ... the voice of the crowd, belonging to no one”, poetry no longer referred to “the activity that produces poems” but to “the quality of poetic objects” (which is what we saw in Rancière’s analysis of Hugo’s novel). This transformation of the idea of poeticity, evidenced in Vico’s reading of Homer as in *Notre-Dame de Paris*, is concomitant with the identification of the poem or—literature generally—with the “expression of the life of a people”. And this identity is intimately connected to epic, which, since Vico, “summarized the question of the nature of poetry itself” (*Mute Speech* 79). As this new poetic regime emerged, epic ceased to be “the representation of gods and heroes” and their actions, “in a specific compositional and metrical form”, and instead became “the expression of the life of a people”, corresponding to “a certain state of language”, reflecting “a state of relations between thought and world”.

In reviewing Rancière’s analysis of Hugo’s “book of stone” and Vico’s modern reading of Homer, we have come across a number of things that find clear echoes in some of the most discussed ideas from Eliot’s critical writings of the 1910s and early 20s. I am talking about Eliot’s theory of the “dissociation of sensibility”, first presented in “The Metaphysical Poets” and later in the *Clark Lectures*, and his “impersonal theory of poetry”, presented in “Tradition and the Individual Talent”. An examination of these ideas will help to confirm Eliot’s links to the general poetics described by Rancière.

Edward Lobb, in *T. S. Eliot and the Romantic Critical Tradition*, examines at length Eliot’s theory of the “dissociation of sensibility”, which, he argues, “constitutes a kind of historical myth which centres on the idea of a crisis in language” (5). Lobb himself suggests that there are links between this idea and Romantic or nineteenth-century thought (5-6). Given what we have seen of Rancière’s analysis of the larger poetics that took root from the late eighteenth century, of which Romanticism is one expression, three elements already stand out as familiar in Lobb’s statement quoted

above: the *historical* outlook of Eliot's theory, and the connection that it makes between a state of *language* and collective modes of feeling and of *thought* ("dissociated" versus "unified" sensibilities). Eliot writes in "The Metaphysical Poets" that the "dissociation" is "something which had happened to the *mind of England* between the time of Donne or Lord Herbert of Cherbury and the time of Tennyson and Browning" (*Selected Prose* 64; emphasis added). Whatever the merits of Eliot's theory of "dissociation" (with its polemical intent and the value judgments attached to it), it evidences an outlook that is very much in line with the basic premises of what Rancière is describing, and suggests Eliot's belonging to the same modern tradition of thought. As Rancière tells us, Giambattista Vico's reading of Homer implies a correspondence between "a mode of language" and "a certain state of its development", and an identification of this "stage of language" with "a stage of thought" (*Mute Speech* 57). The definition of "poeticity" is found in terms of "a state of language" which is "a specific way that thought and language belong to one another" (59). Poetry thus comes to be identified as the embodiment of a knowledge belonging to "the historical consciousness of a people" (58). Eliot's theory of the "dissociation of sensibility" is itself an attempt to describe the "historical consciousness of a people" through the lens of poetic language and the claim that the latter embodies a specific, collective mode of thought.

It is also worthwhile to note that elements of Eliot's theory about the "dissociation of sensibility" bear a striking resemblance to the thesis articulated in another foundational Romantic text: Friedrich Schiller's "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry". Eliot praises his Elizabethan and early Jacobean poets of "unified sensibility" by noting in their verse the "direct sensuous apprehension of thought", or the "recreation of thought through feeling" (*Selected Prose* 63). "A thought to Donne", Eliot writes, "was an experience", whereas "Tennyson and Browning ... do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose" (64). Schiller, for his part, speaks of an original state of "sensuous unity" and a "harmonious whole" made up of "the senses and reason, the receptive faculty and the spontaneously active faculty" (qtd. in Lobb 46). As Rancière explains, Schiller introduces a discontinuity by distinguishing between "two ages of poetry, naïve and sentimental", where "'naïve' is the poetry whose production is inseparable from the spontaneous consciousness of a world that itself does not distinguish the natural from the cultural or the poetic from the prosaic", and which is

characterized by “the continuity between subjective feeling, collective mode of life, common religion, and artistic form” (*Mute Speech* 75). Eliot’s “unified sensibility” happens also to be one that does not separate the “poetic” from the “prosaic”. We shall come back to this point later on, but, as Eliot writes in “The Metaphysical Poets”, it is a sensibility that “constantly amalgamat[es] disparate experience”, and that takes the “noise of a typewriter or the smell of cooking” to be as relevant to poetry as “fall[ing] in love, or read[ing] Spinoza” (*Selected Prose* 64). Rancière’s reference above to “common religion” as an ingredient in Schiller’s earlier stage of poetry, continuous with “subjective feeling” and a “collective mode of life”, is also interesting when we are discussing Eliot, who suggests a relation between the unified sensibility of Renaissance poets, or Dante in the Middle Ages, and the availability of a unified, shared, universal system of belief (See Lobb 13-4, *passim*). The same logic can be discerned when in the questions both Eliot and Pound about the “possibility of writing a long poem” or an epic poem in an age that lacks “intellectual consensus” and where “belief systems have become fragmented” and “the ‘grand narratives’ are in dispute”; about whether the “nation” is able to “speak through the mouth of one man” when “the nation does not speak and think with one voice” (Whitworth 199-200).

Finally, there is of course the striking similarity, noted by Edward Lobb, between Eliot’s and Schiller’s historical theses: they both resemble an Eden narrative, a fall from some kind of primitive state of harmony and unification (47). The difference, however, may be that Friedrich Schiller, in a sense, sets out to justify “sentimental” poetry as “the poetry proper to modernity” (although he does call for “an ideal poetry to overcome the separation” imposed by the sentimental age), whereas Eliot continues to lament the loss (Rancière, *Mute Speech* 75-6). Remarking that “in one or two passages of Shelley’s *Triumph of Life*, in [Keats’s] second *Hyperion* there are traces of a struggle toward unification of sensibility”, he laments: “But Keats and Shelley died, and Tennyson and Browning ruminated” (*Selected Prose* 65). And he goes on to write: “Our civilization, as it exists at present ... comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. ... we get, in fact, a method curiously similar to that of the ‘metaphysical poets’”. Thus, Eliot suggests that modernity itself calls for a poetry of “unified sensibility”. What is interesting is that Schiller and Eliot ultimately share the same basic

premise, which is that the kind of poetry that can or ought to be produced is associated with the condition of the age or the state of civilization that renders it possible or demands it.

Let us now turn to Eliot's essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and his "impersonal theory of poetry", which allow us to uncover further striking resonances with some of the principles discussed by Rancière as characteristic of the new regime of "literature". Already, the title of Eliot's essay itself announces the idea and gets to the heart of the matter: the two poles of "tradition", a collective or communal entity, and the individual; which, Eliot wants to argue, do not stand in contradiction to one another. "If we approach a poet", he writes, without being overly preoccupied with "the poet's difference" from others, "especially his immediate predecessors", we find that "not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously" (*Selected Prose* 38). Lest we mistake "tradition" for merely "following the ways" of previous generations in a "blind or timid adherence to its successes", Eliot warns that "tradition is a matter of much wider significance". He explains that the crucial and indispensable component of what he means by "tradition" is the "historical sense". This "involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence", and leads the poet to write "with his own generation in his bones" and a feeling of "the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country". The "wider significance" which Eliot assigns to his conception of "Tradition" thus moves the latter beyond a matter of poetic influence or antiquarianism, and identifies "literature" with a culture and a civilization—what we might call the "life of a people". Hence his references to "the literature of Europe", "the literature of [one's] own country", as well as "the mind of Europe" and "the mind of [one's] own country" (39).

The "historical sense", additionally, makes a writer "most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity" (Eliot, *Selected Prose* 38). Eliot goes to pains to emphasize the contemporaneity of "Tradition", putting forth a structural conception of it as something that "has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order", and remains dynamic, constantly modified by the "supervention of novelty", such that "the past [is] altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" (38-9). This is what leads James Longenbach in *Modernist Poetics of*

History to describe Eliot's "historical sense" (as well as Pound's thinking about history) as an "existential historicism" (the term is borrowed from Fredric Jameson), from the perspective of which "history does not exist as a sequence of events that occurred in the past", but as the historian's present-day effort to interpret the past (13-4). Eliot's emphasis on the contemporaneity of "Tradition" serves to distinguish his ideas from mere antiquarianism but also to ground his conception of literature in a living history and the living culture that produces it. According to Rancière, the modern conception of the poem and poetics is such that "every age and every civilization 'bears its literature, just as every geological age is marked by the appearance of certain species of organized orders that belong to a single system'" (69). Eliot's "existential historicism", which posits the contemporaneity of the past and its monuments and conceives of "poetry as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written" (*Selected Prose* 40), allows him to look upon "the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of [one's] own country" as one such "species of organized orders that belong to a single system". But the fundamental premise of the association between literature and civilization belongs firmly to Rancière's poetics of literature in the aesthetic regime of thought.

Going back to Eliot's claim that "the most individual parts" of a poet's work are those where "Tradition" asserts itself—his assertion that the individuality of the artist does not stand in opposition to the collective "Tradition"—we in fact find the idea almost identically put forth by Rancière as a defining principle of the new poetical regime that took root in the West with Romanticism and its offshoots in the nineteenth century. "Romantic genius", Rancière writes, "is that of an individual only insofar as it is also that of a place, a time, a people, a history" (*Mute Speech* 69). Just as Eliot not only denies the contradiction between individual and collective genius, but further asserts their identity, so does Rancière uncover the same identity at the heart of the regime of literature: "Literature as an expression of individual genius and literature as an expression of society are the two versions of a single text" (70). As noted in the previous paragraph, Eliot's "historical sense" associates "literature" with the "mind" of a culture or civilization. In Rancière's description above, "history", "time", "place" and "people" are organically intertwined terms of the identity between individual and collective genius. This identity, for Rancière, is nothing but another name for the "power of

poeticity”, which makes the poem “a book of life, sculpted from the tissue of collective life”, manifesting “the exactly reciprocal expression of an individual creative genius and the poeticity inherent in a common world” (69, 81).

Before we proceed to add further remarks on the idea of civilization, let us just note one final similarity to be discerned between Eliot’s argument in the “Tradition” essay and Rancière’s analysis of the regime of literature. Eliot argues that the cultivation of the “historical sense” and the sense of tradition amounts to a “process of depersonalization”, a “continual surrender” of the self as it “is at the moment to something which is more valuable” (*Selected Prose* 40). Rancière, for his part, turns to Hegel’s discussion of the relation between the individual and the “anonymous voice” of the collective, which must manifest itself through the voice of the individual (“the speech of a nation thru the mouth of one man”). He observes, quoting Hegel, that “the objectivity of the epic poem requires that ‘the poet as *subject* must retire in the face of his *object* and lose himself in it” (*Mute Speech* 80; emphasis in original). Again, the similarity between Eliot’s formulation and the one cited by Rancière is remarkable (“continual surrender ... to”; “lose himself in”). In the previous chapter, we had read Eliot’s “depersonalization” of poetry, his “impersonal theory of poetry”, in terms of epistemological considerations and the drive towards objectivity, noting the emphasis on detachment and disinterestedness and the description of the poetic process as a “passive attending upon the event” (*Selected Prose* 43). Certainly, that reading is valid and supported by Eliot’s resort to psychologistic terms in his explanation. But Eliot also suggests explicitly that the “impersonality” of poetry flows from “Tradition” and the “historical sense”, and this is because the poem, for Eliot, expresses the collective tradition. The perspective developed throughout this section allows us now, perhaps, to complete our reading, begun in the last chapter, of Eliot’s statement that “the bad poet is usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious, and conscious where he ought to be unconscious” (*Selected Prose* 43). For poetry-making to be simultaneously “conscious” and “unconscious” is for it to participate in the oppositions—which, according to Rancière, are two sides of the same coin—between “the poetics of the unconscious genius of peoples and that of the creative artist” (*Mute Speech* 66).

“Literature”, as defined by the modern poetic regime, “is ‘social’”, says Rancière (*Mute Speech* 64). The new conception of “poeticity” at the heart of the modern regime of literature amounts to an expressive poetics in which “language speaks in the first place of its own provenance”, and this provenance could be “ascribed to the laws of history and society”. Thus, the “essence of poetry is identical with the essence of language insofar as the latter is itself identical with the internal law of societies”. The assumptions which we have described as constitutive of the regime of literature are identified by Rancière as belonging to a broader regime of knowledge that touched various disciplines of thought and transformed attitudes concerning history, society, culture and civilization as well as literature.

We find expressions of this poetics in the work of nineteenth-century novelists, historians and sociologists alike. Honoré de Balzac wrote that man “has a tendency to express his culture [*mœurs*], his thoughts, and his life in everything that he appropriates to his use” and exposes the principles of “the history ... of Manners” (qtd. Rancière, *Mute Speech* 65). Before writers like Balzac or Hugo, “it was historians of the origins of modern European civilizations such as [Prosper de] Barante and [François] Guizot who propagated the new understanding of literature by studying the relationship between its development and institutions and manners”. The same tendency was behind the “critique of the formalism of theories of the social contract and the rights of man”, and “the demand for an organic society in which laws, customs, and opinions reflect one another and express a single principle of organic cohesion”, and the conception of literature presented itself, partly in answer to this demand, as “the language of societies rooted in their histories and grasped in their profound organic life”. But this does not mean that this conception belonged mainly to political reactionaries, and Rancière points out that “the new idea of literature was imposed not so much by the counter-revolutionaries as by the supporters of a third way, in-between Jacobin revolution and aristocratic counter-revolution” (65).

The exemplary figure among these, according to Rancière, was that of Madame de Staël. In her book *De la littérature dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* [*On Literature's Relations to Social Institutions*], she sets out with a primarily political, as opposed to aesthetic, goal. Her aim, she writes, is not “to establish a poetics”—by which she seems to mean establishing normative standards for production and evaluation

of artistic works—but to show “the relation that exists between the literature and the social institutions of each century and each country”, and to draw comparisons “between the political situation of peoples and their literature” (qtd. in Rancière, *Mute Speech* 65-6). As Rancière explains, Madame de Staël in the process is effecting a reversal of the system of representation. For, in the representative regime, “it was impossible to dissociate the reasons for the fabrication of a poem from judgments concerning its value”, the purpose of “poetical science” being to state “what poems ought be in order to please those whose vocation was to judge them” (66). Now, the “poem is what it ought to be as the language of the spirit of a time, a people, and a civilization”. For Rancière, thus, there are two kinds of poetics, a “normative poetics” (that of the representative system) which “says how poems should be made”, and a “historical poetics” that says “how they are made ... how they express the state of things, language, and manners that gave them birth” (67).

The implications of the identification of literature with the “life of a people” within the regime of literature described by Rancière, based on the fundamental principle of “poeticity”, are far-reaching. They not only impact the conception of the art of writing within this regime, by poets, novelists and literary critics, but also shape conceptions of societies, culture and history. “Literature and civilization”, Rancière concludes, “are terms that imposed themselves simultaneously” (68). “Literature considered as the free creation of individual genius”, he writes, “and literature considered as testimony to the spirit or manners of a society derive from the same revolution that, by making poetry a mode of language, replaced the principle of representation with that of expression”. Thus, the inventors of “literature”, as a specific conception of the art of writing—among whom Rancière lists the Frenchmen Sismondi, Barante, Villemain, Guizot, Quinet, Michelet, Hugo and Balzac (including, therefore, figures from various disciplines along with literary authors)—at the same time “invented what they called ‘civilization’ and we call ‘culture’” (68).

Jacques Rancière’s compelling analysis of the regime of literature which took root in the West from around the end of the eighteenth century and through the nineteenth emphasizes the centrality of an identification between literature, as conceived within this regime, and a matrix of intertwined terms which we may subsume under the headline: “the life of a people”. Terms like “history”, “society”, “nation”, “culture”,

“civilization” can all be said to belong to this matrix. And we may add to these T. S. Eliot’s “tradition” and the “mind of Europe” or the “mind of [a] country”. On the other side we have “literature”, the “poem”, the “monuments” of art and culture and the institutions of a society, which are all expressive of the “life of a people” and are part and parcel with it.

We have looked at parts of two of Eliot’s most discussed critical essays from the period leading up to *The Waste Land*, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” with its “impersonal theory of poetry” and “The Metaphysical Poets” with its idea of the “dissociation of sensibility”, and we have discerned that the ideas propounded in these writings parallel Rancière’s analysis of the regime of literature in striking ways, and that Eliot’s outlook shares some of the key premises and assumptions of this regime. *The Waste Land* itself, however, is perhaps the most significant example or product of Eliot’s ties to the poetics in question. Indeed we might place *The Waste Land* among the exemplary works of this poetics when it comes to modern poetry more generally, certainly at least in the English language. A poem defined in terms of the “immensely ambitious task of analysing the history of civilization” is doubly determined by the regime of literature: it not only depends on the identification of literature with the expression of the “life of a people”, or the expression of the “history of a civilization”, but also on the regime of thought that, in Rancière’s terms, was simultaneously responsible for inventing the concept of “civilization”. Moreover, the reception of Eliot’s poem is itself a testament to the deeply entrenched assumptions which we have been presenting as constitutive of the regime of literature. *The Waste Land* immediately assumed the status of a poetic monument. Ezra Pound was quick to proclaim it “the justification of the ‘movement’, of our modern experiment, since 1900” (qtd. in Lewis 129). The poem immediately came to be seen as emblematic of the poetry—and more generally of the literature—of its time, and this continues to be the case, as for Rebecca Beasley who describes it as not simply a major modernist poem, but as having “largely defined what we mean by modernist poetry” (79). Even more significantly, the poem was seen as emblematic of *its time*. While Eliot himself would much later belittle the poem as “the relief of a personal ... grouse against life” and merely a “piece of rhythmical grumbling”, for Eliot’s contemporaries, as Pericles Lewis says, the poem

“created the sense of speaking for an entire culture in crisis; it was swiftly accepted as the essential statement of that crisis and the epitome of a modernist poem” (129-30). Rancière’s analysis offers us a powerful insight into the poetics that made possible such a poem as *The Waste Land*, in its conception and reception, and suggests why the landmark poem of modernism could not have been other than one claiming to “speak for an entire culture”, and had to take “history”, broadly conceived, as its primary subject matter.

3.3 The Inclusive Logic of Literature: Historical Subjects, Objects, Fragments

Having now discussed the identification of *The Waste Land* and its subject matter by attributing its conception as a “poem including history” to the logic of a generalized poetics that defines “poetry” or “literature” in terms of the “expression of the life of a people”, we shall now turn to the way history itself is conceived within this poetics. In the first part of this thesis, we followed T. S. Eliot’s literary and philosophical concern with subjectivity, which led him from an initial focus on the consciousness of the individual subject to a more expansive approach designed to gesture towards external, shareable, objective truths by incorporating into the poem a multitude of subjectivities through a collage of fragments made up of descriptions, lyric passages, dialogues, quotations, allusions... The present chapter has sought to account for the same shift from a different, complementary perspective, by looking at inherited assumptions and expectations that are inscribed within a broader conception literature in the poetics available to Eliot. Rancière’s perspective on the identification of “literature” in the aesthetic regime with the “life of a people” explains the compelling power of these expectations, but can also shed light on Eliot’s quest for an epistemological framework that renders possible external, shared truths, as well as on the answer that Eliot devised for his problem, which places truth in a collectivity of subjectivities.

Rancière’s analysis of the regime of literature has allowed us, so far, to establish the basic logic of *The Waste Land* as a poem that takes “history” as its subject matter—in Rebecca Beasley’s terms, a poem tasked with “analysing the history of a civilization”,

or, in Pound's, a "poem including history". But what is the subject of history itself, and what is to be included in the "poem including history"? Rancière's work will continue to be our guide and help us to make sense of Eliot's answer these questions and of the shape that his poem was to take. Rancière's *Mute Speech*, along with an earlier volume titled *The Names of History*, drive home the intimate links between the historically constituted ideas of "history" and of "literature". *The Names of History* and *Mute Speech* offer parallel arguments to the effect that the logic of the new poetics drives history and literature toward an ever-widening scope of subject matter and the inclusion of previously excluded objects. The remainder of this chapter will present these arguments and suggest that this inclusive logic is at work in shaping Eliot's collage of fragments. This reprises Henri Zerner's argument, mentioned in the first section of this chapter, about the extension of the conception of historical subjects in art to include new kinds of objects. In presenting these arguments, we will additionally have occasion to link Eliot and his context to the nineteenth-century French literature that forms the primary basis for Rancière's analysis, further reinforcing Eliot's connections to the poetics described by Rancière.

Rancière's *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge* is on one level a critique of the *Annales* school of historiography that established itself in France in the twentieth century. As Rancière writes, he chooses to call his book a study of the "poetics of knowledge" because his target is the way that the historiography of the *Annales* school employs "a set of literary procedures by which a discourse escapes literature, gives itself the status of a science, and signifies this status" (*Names of History* 8). His point is that *Annales* historiography tries to suppress its own literary nature in its attempt to establish its historical practice as scientific, but that, ultimately, history and literature retain a close kinship as modes of knowledge with a common origin. "The human and social sciences", he writes, "are children of the scientific age ... But—we forget this too easily—the age of science is also that of literature" (8). In one of his notes, Rancière acknowledges his debt to Roland Barthes, who, as Oliver Davis explains, argued that the real objects of the past "out to which the historian's discourse reaches can only ever figure in his or her writing as a 'reality effect'", one that "novelists are no less capable of contriving ... in fictional texts" (*Names of History* 117n1; Davis 58-9). *Annales* historians like Fernand Braudel emphasized a radical shift in orientation for the

historian's object of study, from "chronicles of the exploits of kings and generals" and "the surface froth of political events" to "deep social, economic and natural activities and processes ... examined over long periods of time" (Braudel's well-known idea of *longue durée*) (Davis 58). But history-writing does not, by that token, escape its literary nature: "history is, in the final analysis, susceptible to only one type of architecture, always the same one—a series of events happens to such and such a subject. We may choose other subjects: royalty instead of kings, social classes, the Mediterranean, or the Atlantic rather than generals and captains" (Rancière, *Names of History* 2). In the end, history, according to Rancière is basically literary since it must "name subjects" and "attribute to them states, affections, events" (*Names of History* 2; Davis 63).

But the radical shift, submitted by Braudel, in the proper subjects and objects in the study of history remains highly significant, and is in itself indicative of the kinship between history and the modern regime of literature. Based on the ideas which we have presented from Rancière's *Mute Speech*, it should be evident that this shift in the subjects and objects of history parallels the collapse of the hierarchy of subjects that defined the so-called "representative system" that dominated up to the late eighteenth century. The actions and speeches of royalty and military heroes cede their place as the privileged subject of literature and history alike, as part of the same revolution in poetics that transformed these discourses around the beginning of the nineteenth century. The exemplary figure for Rancière when it comes to the domain of history is the nineteenth-century French historian Jules Michelet. The shift emphasized by Braudel can indeed be traced back to Michelet, a figure admired both by *Annales* historians and by Rancière himself. As Hayden White, in his foreword to the English edition of *The Names of History*, explains, Michelet was responsible, more than anyone else, for "identifying and bringing ... to life" the "People" as a historical subject (xv). For Rancière, Michelet is the inventor of a "republican-romantic paradigm of history" wherein the name and voice of an individual are relevant insofar as they stand for something broader, are "synonymous with the voice that passes across him, synonymous with all the places and all the generations that find voice in his speech" (42, 47). In White's paraphrase, "the new subject of history is nothing other than all the persons and groups who died mute, unnoticed, and unheard but whose voices continue to haunt history with their repressed presence", or, in other words, the new subject of history includes "collectivities" that can

be synonymous with “anonymous forces” (xv, xvii). Michelet’s “seemingly bizarre tropes”, which endow with voices “a natural phenomenon such as ‘mud’”, objects such as “damp and filthy houses”, or a “cultural practice such as the ‘harvest’”, bring Rancière and White to suggest that he prefigures the modernist writing of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf or Marcel Proust (xvii-viii). Underlying such literary procedures, Rancière’s work suggests, is the poetics of the regime of literature, based on the principle of poeticity, which identifies the power of literature with the expression of the life of a people, starts to include new kinds of objects and subjects previously deemed unpoetic or unworthy and brings the collectivity to speak through these objects, and through fragments that stand for an abstracted “people”, a culture or a civilization.

If Jules Michelet, as Oliver Davis puts it, “is a pioneer in that he contrives a way for hitherto ineligible subjects – the poor, the masses, ‘ordinary people’ – to enter historical narrative”, into the domain of history, this is also a dynamic that Rancière, in *Mute Speech* and elsewhere, places at the heart of the new regime of literature, most prominently through his reading of Gustave Flaubert (Davis 66). Flaubert’s novel *Madame Bovary*, according to Rancière, emblemizes the overturning of the representative system’s generic principle, with its attendant hierarchy of subjects, and the “principle of decorum”, which fits certain actions and discourses to characters and objects in accordance with their nature and place in the hierarchy of subjects (*Mute Speech* 45). In place of the “distribution into genres”, we find “the antigeneric principle of the equality of all represented subjects”, and, “in opposition to the principle of decorum, the indifference of style with respect to the subject represented” (50). It is not merely a question of Flaubert’s choice of the petty provincial life of Emma Bovary as his subject (and his characterization of his novel as a “book about nothing”), but also Flaubert’s literary treatment of Emma and the characters and objects surrounding her, which is captured by Flaubert’s definition of “style” as an “absolute manner of seeing things” (Rancière, *Mute Speech* 115).

An “absolute manner of seeing things”, Rancière explains, means precisely that “they have been freed from the modes of linkage proper to characters and their actions that defined the genres of representation”—i.e. from the so-called “principle of decorum”—and from any “determinate set of ideas about how a given situation should produce a given feeling, a feeling an action, and an action an effect”. It helps here to

recall Erich Auerbach's characterization of Flaubert's style as *Sachlicher Ernst*, "objective seriousness" (490). The idea is that Flaubert treats subjects and objects hitherto regarded as low or vulgar with the same seriousness of style, tone or register of language as he would any other. For Flaubert, it will be recalled, all objects of description require uncompromising artistry, attention and diligence in the search for "*le mot juste*". In *Politics of Literature*, Rancière states that "Flaubert made all words equal just as he suppressed any hierarchy between worthy subjects and unworthy subjects, between narration and description, foreground and background, and ultimately, between men and things" (8). To the displeasure of a few hostile critics, he "welcom[ed] into his novels a plethora of apparently 'inconsequential' details and 'unmotivated' descriptions of 'incidental' objects ... and organiz[ed] the text such that these details, objects and descriptions make an equal claim on the reader's attention as the characters and the plot" (Davis 116). Auerbach's description of Flaubert's work is worth quoting at length:

The serious treatment of everyday reality, the rise of more extensive and socially inferior human groups to the position of subject matter for problematic-existential representation, on the one hand; on the other, the embedding of random persons and events in the general course of contemporary history, the fluid historical background—these, we believe, are the foundations of modern realism, and it is natural that the broad and elastic form of the novel should increasingly impose itself for a rendering comprising so many elements. (*Mimesis* 491).

This passage is striking in connection to our object of study, Eliot's *The Waste Land*. For Eliot's poem does virtually all of the things Auerbach mentions here. Within its four hundred-odd lines, it includes a remarkably heterogeneous cast of characters and objects, woven together in a shifting and elastic form, and endowed with "problematic-existential" significance as composing a broad historical picture. While the novel, specifically, occupies a rather privileged place both in Auerbach's and in Rancière's analyses, the terms in which both of them speak about the novel can in fact be applied to modernist poems, and above all, perhaps, to *The Waste Land*. We will have occasion

towards the end of the chapter to suggest connections between the novel and Eliot's poetry and poetics.

Let us, however, turn to the poet Charles Baudelaire as a figure forming a telling link between Eliot and the poetics that Rancière describes based on his readings of nineteenth-century French literature. Eliot, of course, repeatedly acknowledged—indeed wilfully underscored—the importance of nineteenth-century French verse to his development as a poet. Referring to Arthur Symons' book on *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, he wrote in 1924: "The book was my first introduction to modern French verse and in this way had the most immeasurable influence on my own poetical evolution" (qtd. in *The Poems of T. S. Eliot* 358). Then again in 1930, he wrote: "I myself owe Mr. Symons a great debt: but for having read his book, I should not, in the year 1908, have heard of Laforgue or Rimbaud", or read Verlaine and Corbière. And he continued: "I look back to the dead year 1908; and I observe with satisfaction that it is now taken for granted that the current of French poetry which sprang from Baudelaire is one which has, in these twenty-one years, affected all English poetry that matters". As the last part shows, Eliot effectively traces his debt to modern French to the originary figure of Charles Baudelaire (even though the 1908 edition of Symons' book did not yet include a chapter on Baudelaire). He is not alone in this, since, according to Barry J. Faulk, there was a "universal agreement" among the French Symbolists themselves "that the movement's master was a poet from an earlier generation, the premier poet of urban life, Charles Baudelaire" (30).

The significance of Baudelaire has precisely to do with the inclusive logic of the regime of literature as described by Rancière. "It was Baudelaire", writes Faulk, "who forced lyric poetry to deal with seedy Parisian realism. ... Baudelaire's own poems returned obsessively to the social reality of Paris, with vivid, timely detail: his poetry is peopled by the city's demimonde, as well as the dispossessed poor Baudelaire expanded the notion of modern poetry to include contemporary circumstance such as the changing spaces or demography of the modern city" (30). *The Waste Land* bears the influence of Baudelaire in its "unfixed perspective" which "recalls the flâneur's [an invention of Baudelaire's] impressionistic, disinterested view of the city" (Faulk 36). Baudelaire also figures in *The Waste Land* through a number of allusions and a direct quotation at line 76 which concludes "The Burial of the Dead": "'You! hypocrite

lecture! —mon semblable, —mon frère” (Eliot, *The Waste Land* 59). The quotation is from “Au Lecteur” (“To the Reader”), the prefatory poem to Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*). The poem may perhaps be regarded as a microcosm of Baudelaire’s volume, showcasing its fascination with the sordid, the erotic and the banal (terms often characterizing one and the same thing). We can describe Eliot’s poem in similar terms, pointing to its inclusion of references to sprouting corpses and banal sexual encounters. The larger point, again, is not simply the inclusion of such elements in poetry, nor even the mere affirmation of a paradoxical *Esthétique du mal* (to borrow the title of Wallace Stevens’s poem). It is the fact that the poetry endows them with momentous significance, with what Auerbach calls “problematic-existential” seriousness, and in effect brings these characters and objects to speak for something as vast as history. This is indeed articulated explicitly by Eliot himself in his appreciation of Baudelaire: “It is not merely in the use of imagery of common life, not merely in the use of the sordid life of a great metropolis, but in the elevation of such imagery to the *first intensity*—presenting it as it is, and yet making it represent something much more than itself” (*Selected Essays* 341).

Faulk refers to Baudelaire as “the nineteenth-century’s great cosmopolitan, to whom no culture or experience is exotic or alien” (31). These terms in fact echo Eliot’s characterization of the poets of “unified sensibility” in “The Metaphysical poets”: “The poets of the seventeenth century, the successors of the dramatists of the sixteenth, possessed a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience” (*Selected Prose* 64). And it so happens that Eliot refers to Baudelaire in the same essay as “the great master of the nineteenth” century, likening him to Racine, the “great master” of seventeenth-century French literature (66). Earlier in this chapter, we made a rapport between, on the one hand, Friedrich Schiller’s idea of a poetry that does not separate the “poetic” from the “prosaic” and, on the other, Eliot’s idea of a sensibility that “amalgamate[s] disparate experience”, and sees falling in love and the “noise of the typewriter” as objects equally relevant to poetry (*Selected Prose* 64). By now, the suggestion should be evident that this can be understood as part of the inclusive logic of the regime of literature. For Eliot, as for Baudelaire, no experience or object is alien to poetry or to literature.

The reference above to the “poetic” and the “prosaic” brings us to the question of “prose”, and gives us occasion to suggest a number of connections between the novelistic tradition and Eliot’s brand of modernist poetry. In the first part of this thesis, we mentioned Ezra Pound’s reference to a “prose tradition of poetry” and to “prose” as an ideal of clarity, precision and objectivity, connected Ford Madox Ford’s work and artistic outlook. But there is a further side to this, consisting in the push for poetry that includes the “prosaic”. Ford “appealed to poets to look the contemporary world ‘in the face’”, not to shy away from any aspect of it; and Pound, for his part, commended art “that dares to go to the dust-bin for its subjects” (qtd. in Levenson 110). Pound asks for art that seeks the prosaic and even the “low” or “ugly”. His call for art that “dares go to the dust-bin” is as clear an articulation as any of the Baudelairean legacy discussed above.

Eliot deals with the matter of prose in a highly interesting though little discussed short essay from 1921 titled “Prose and Verse”. The essay starts off as a reflection on the merit of “prose-poetry”, but turns into a consideration of the meaning of and relationship between “prose” and “poetry”. Eliot’s conclusion is to “object to the term ‘prose-poetry’ because it seems to imply a sharp distinction between ‘poetry’ and ‘prose’ which I do not admit” (*The Waste Land* 164). While “the distinction between ‘verse’ and ‘prose’ is clear”, he states, that “between ‘poetry’ and ‘prose’ is very obscure” (159). Another passage worth mentioning in this essay calls to mind Friedrich Schiller’s well-known notion of the aesthetic “play impulse”, together with Rancière’s idea of the inclusive logic of literature, in connection to the matter of “prose” and “verse”. “Versification”, Eliot writes, “brings in something which is not present in prose, because it is from any other point of view than that of art, a superfluity, a definite concession to the desire for ‘play’” (164). But verse, on the other hand,

is always struggling, while remaining verse, to take up to itself more and more of what is prose, to take something more from life and turn it into “play”. ... the real failure of the mass of contemporary verse is its failure to draw anything new from life into art. And, on the other hand, prose, not being cut off by the barrier of verse which must at the same time be affirmed and diminished, can transmute

life in its own way by raising it to the condition of “play,” precisely because it is not verse.

This passage is telling. Eliot here is asserting the same inclusive logic of the regime of literature that Rancière describes and, at the same time, validating the privileged place that Rancière accords to the novel, to prose writing, as an especially apt bearer of this regime. “The novel”, writes Rancière, “is the genre of what has no genre ... it has no principle of decorum” (*Mute Speech* 51). For Eliot, the success of art depends upon its ability to draw “more from life” into itself, and verse does that by aspiring to the condition of prose, which itself is less cramped by ideas of what is appropriately poetic. “We seem to see clearly enough”, Eliot writes in the same essay, “that prose is allowed to be ‘poetic’; we appear to have overlooked the right of poetry to be ‘prosaic’” (160). Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, in many ways, exemplarily reasserts this right, and aspires to the condition of the novel. And if we glance at the poem side by side with modernist novels of the time by James Joyce or Virginia Woolf, we get a strong sense that Eliot is very right in asserting that the “distinction between ‘poetry’ and ‘prose’ is very obscure”.

Let us drive further the kinship between *The Waste Land* and the novel. If Flaubert’s bold choice of subject in *Madame Bovary* is the exemplary case in Rancière’s analysis for the inclusive logic of the regime of literature, it happens that we can point to a direct counterpart in *The Waste Land*. We cited above Eliot’s reference to falling in love and “the noise of a typewriter” as experiences equally relevant to poetry. It just so happens that the counterpart to Emma Bovary in *The Waste Land* is none other than a typist and her own love experience (if we may call it that). Lawrence Rainey writes: “It is difficult today to appreciate just how innovative Eliot was in making a typist a protagonist in a serious poem. Prior to *The Waste Land* typists had appeared almost exclusively in light verse, humorous or satirical in nature” (Eliot, *The Waste Land* 108n222). As he explains further, while typists’ “ever increasing presence in offices after 1885 was registered ... in fiction and early film”, they were often integrated into “genre fiction”, or “melodramatic” and “lurid” novels up to about 1910. In 1910s and 20s, Rainey writes, “typists became a subject increasingly explored by writers working in the tradition of realism” (109). We can disagree with Rainey about how innovative the

mere inclusion of the typist is in itself sixty-five years after *Madame Bovary*, but the observation remains very significant for what it tells us about the connection between Eliot's poem and the tradition of the realist novel going back to Flaubert.

Flaubert was a towering figure for the modernists—Eliot's contemporaries—and his legacy and influence was ubiquitous. When Ezra Pound wanted to praise Ford Madox Ford for his objectivity, he said "you would find his origins ... in Flaubert" (qtd. in Levenson 106). For Ford, "the novel's artistry return[ed] to England" only "through the recent efforts of [Joseph] Conrad and [Henry] James", who had picked up the torch mainly from Flaubert (Levenson 56). As Levenson writes, "when he [Ford] was not acknowledging Conrad, he was acknowledging James" (116). And of course, the terms of his commendation of James as a "passionless and pitiless observer", cited in Chapter 1, are Flaubertian par excellence. Like Ford, Eliot also had great admiration for both Conrad and James. In the first part of this thesis, we emphasized Conrad's and James' legacy in terms of an epistemological-narratological tendency that saw the possibility for greater realism through limiting the narrative's point of view to that of an individual focalizing consciousness. We can see this tendency radicalized in modernist novels and indeed in *The Waste Land* itself, and Rancière saw glimpses of that already in Flaubert. In *Politics of Literature*, as Oliver Davis explains, Rancière sees in Flaubert's writing a tendency to dissolve "the familiar world of people and actions into its pre-individual atomic constituents", into a "pre-individual world of impersonal sensations and fragments" (117). But let us also take note for a moment of the wider implications of "realism", not simply in the sense of "realistic", but as a specific incarnation of the poetics of the regime of literature. As Auerbach's and Rancière's readings of Flaubert help us to see, realist poetics was not just a matter of realistic representation. It involved more fundamentally the endowment of ordinary characters and everyday objects and experiences with historical-existential significance. This legacy of the nineteenth-century novel is also one that is picked up by Eliot. When Eliot, in a 1927 essay on Shakespeare, writes that "the great poet, in writing himself, writes his time", he adds a footnote referring to Flaubert (*Selected Essays* 117). Later still, he would describe Flaubert as an analyst "of the individual soul as it is found in a particular phase of society", and claim that "sociology" and "individual psychology" are two "aspects of one thing" (*Selected Essays* 178). In his essay on Henry James cited in Part I of this thesis, Eliot describes

“the general scheme” in James’s novels as “not one character, nor a group of characters in a plot The focus is a situation, a relation an atmosphere The real hero, in any of James’s stories, is a social entity of which men and women are constituents” (*Selected Prose* 151). We may add that all kinds of objects, not just men and women, become constituents of the social entity, and Eliot’s comments here offer further evidence of his ties to the regime of literature described by Rancière, which identifies literature with the expression of society.

Another great admirer of Flaubert among the modernists is of course James Joyce. “For Eliot and Pound alike”, writes Rebecca Beasley, “the novelists they found most instructive were the nineteenth-century French realist novelist Gustave Flaubert and the contemporary they saw as Flaubert’s major inheritor, James Joyce” (83). And Joyce will help us further our argument accounting for the poetics of *The Waste Land*, and tying the poem to the novel and to the regime of literature described by Rancière. Shortly after the publication of *The Waste Land*, Eliot’s short essay “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth” appeared in *The Dial*. Although Eliot does not have a great deal to say in this essay, critics have rightly latched on to it as an important and telling statement in connection to *The Waste Land*. For Beasley, “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth” is “as much an explanation of *The Waste Land* as it is of *Ulysses*” (84). This is because of Eliot’s description in the essay of the “mythical method” whereby Joyce “manipulat[es] a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity”, between the events of Leopold Bloom’s and Stephen Dedalus’s story and the narrative of the *Odyssey*, as a “way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (*Selected Prose* 177). Eliot critics mainly agree that the above describes the mythic framework of the Grail legend, inspired by Eliot’s readings of J. G. Frazer and Jessie Weston, which Eliot introduced into *The Waste Land* and emphasized in the annotations he added to the poem; but the general consensus is also that this “mythic framework was grafted on to the poem at a late stage”, and that the poem Eliot wrote remains a less ordered and unified work than some (including Eliot) might have wanted to suggest (Beasley 85). My emphasis in reading Eliot’s *Ulysses* essay will fall on three ideas: fragmentation in *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, the “mythical method” in opposition to the “narrative method”, and the relationship between “novel” and “epic”.

Eliot starts off his essay on *Ulysses* in answer to Richard Aldington's criticism of Joyce as a "prophet of chaos" (*Selected Prose* 175). Part of Eliot's defence, as mentioned above, is that Joyce's "mythical method" supposedly inscribes the chaos within an ordered scheme provided by the Odysseus myth. But he also defends the "formlessness" of Joyce's text (177). Let us talk then about the fragmentation itself, which is the most recognizable feature of Joyce's and of Eliot's texts. I would argue that there is a noteworthy difference between the two texts in this regard. This thesis opened with a reference to Edmund Wilson's 1922 essay "The Rag-Bag of the Soul", which identified a modernist approach that centres on the "cross-section of the human consciousness of a single specific human being", which itself is characterized by fragmentation (Brooker 78). This description, it seems to me, applies rather more to *Ulysses* than it does to *The Waste Land*. In Joyce's novel, the fragmentation of the text would seem to be motivated (in much of the text, though there are notable exceptions to my point) by what we may call a radical impressionism that seeks to capture the anarchic nature of the stream of consciousness. Although psychological-epistemological concerns, as argued at length in Part I of this thesis, did play an essential role in inspiring Eliot's general approach and the fragmentation in *The Waste Land* (as well as his poetic method in individual fragments that make up the poem), I would argue that the fragmentation in Eliot's poem is of a different order. Even if we were to accept a reading of *The Waste Land* that posits a unified, presiding consciousness (identified by some, following suggestions in Eliot's annotations, with the Tiresias character), this presiding consciousness would still be of a different order from the stream of consciousness of the individual subject.

Let us enlist once again Rancière's analysis in order to develop our reading of the fragmented poetic structure of *The Waste Land* as a "poem including history". Rancière in fact treats briefly the question of the "fragment" in *Mute Speech* through the figure of A. W. Schlegel. Far from being "the mark of an unfinished or detotalized status proper to modern works", the fragment, Rancière affirms, is, "the finite figure of an infinite process" (76). He adds—in a comment particularly relevant to *The Waste Land*—that "fragmenting the works of the past means undoing the bonds of their representative unity in order to bring (back) to life their romantic nature as garlands of expressive fragments, hieroglyphs of a natural and linguistic poem" (76-7). In Rancière's analysis, this can be

understood as an implication of the principle of the poeticity which endows objects with significance as expressions of the poeticity inscribed in the “life of a people”. In *The Waste Land*, fragments, whether they are lyrical fragments, fleeting images, short scenes, pieces of dialogue, allusions or quotations, always seem to stand for something larger—tradition, culture, history—precisely by virtue of their fragmentary nature. It is perhaps by this token that this “long poem” can get away with being relatively short and gives the impression of spaciousness and inclusiveness—or, as Barry J. Faulk describes it, “a poem of unique density”—and claim its place as a commanding poetic monument (37).

Rancière, in addition, refers to the “fragment” as “the new expressive unity that replaces narrative and discursive unities of representation” (*Mute Speech* 76). This characterization brings us to an interesting observation about the “mythical method”. Rather than discussing as a framework of mythical narrative that is superimposed in order to give the appearance of order to an otherwise chaotic structure, I would like to call attention to the fact that Eliot defines the “mythical method” in opposition to narrative: “Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method” (*Selected Prose* 178). If the mythical method does describe the structure of *The Waste Land*, then let us consider precisely as a non-narrative structure. We can understand this opposition to narrative in terms of linearity and in terms of the question of the unity of the work of art. Firstly, we may approach the matter by considering the “mythical method” as what Joseph Frank calls “spatial form”, which opposes to the sequentiality of narrative the simultaneity suggested by the “spatial” metaphor. The idea, introduced by Frank in his influential essay “Spatial Form in Modern Literature” is, it should be noted, in harmony with what James Longenbach characterizes as Eliot’s “existential historicism”, which stands in opposition to a linear conception of history (13-4; see also Beasley 67-9). Rancière’s work in *The Names of History* may suggest a precedent for this literary treatment of history, again in the figure of Jules Michelet. As Hayden White writes in his foreword to the book, “Michelet goes into the archives not in order to read ... documents as the dead indices of events now past, but in order to immerse himself in those documents as fragments of the past still living in the present” (xvi). Furthermore, “instead of interpreting the documents, Michelet lets them *speak* for themselves by *showing* them to us”. Thus, such an approach would seem to prefigure not only Eliot’s

“existential historicism”, but also his use of fragments and quotations or allusions. And White finally characterizes Michelet’s literary approach, which brings documents, fragments, objects and natural phenomena to speak for history, as “antinarrative” (xviii).

In order to move further ahead our understand of the role of the fragment within the anti-narrative structure of *The Waste Land*, let us turn to the mythical method’s opposition to narrative in terms of the question of unity. For narrative is defined not merely in terms of linear progression but, going back to Aristotle—for Rancière, the founding figure of the representative regime—in terms of a coherent and closed sequence consisting of a beginning, a middle and an end. Spatial form itself not only controverts or stands in tension with the linearity of narrative (or that of the reading experience), but it also compromises and opens up the unity of the work as a self-enclosed whole. For Frank, following R. P. Blackmur, the “space-logic” of *The Waste Land* or *The Cantos* is partly attributable to the “disconnectedness” of the text, to its fragmented nature. This disconnectedness forces “syntactical sequence” to be “given up for a structure depending on the perception of relationships between disconnected word-groups” (14-5). According to Frank, this entails that judgment or interpretation are continually suspended, awaiting the perception of new relations. We can argue that, as a result, closure is delayed indefinitely and never achieved. This creates an open-endedness in the form, and, in turn, reinforces the power of the fragment always to reach beyond itself and stand for something indefinitely larger, as we have suggested.

The above perspective, in fact, calls to mind Mikhail Bakhtin’s characterization of epic, in his “Epic and Novel”, as indifferent to beginnings and endings—which brings us to our third point in connection to Eliot’s essay on *Ulysses*. In Michael Whitworth’s words, “unlike the novel, [epic] does not need to reach a point of closure, nor does it need to begin at a significant moment” (194). Bakhtin, in fact, still says that “there is no place in the epic world for any openendedness, indecision or indeterminacy” (16). But this is because he maintains a distinction between the epic and the novel which is not as relevant to our perspective, given the way we have defined our terms, and the fact that we are here dealing with a modern epic. Bakhtin relegates the epic to a walled-off “absolute past” (which rules out the possibility of a modern epic) and assigns the contemporary world as the novel’s domain. This division does not interest us here, since we identify the question of epic in different terms, as it is apprehended through the prism

of the regime of literature, generally with the expression of the “life of a people”. This will mean, in effect, that we collapse the distinction between epic and novel.

From our perspective, both epic and novel are open-ended, both are indifferent to closure. When Eliot, in his essay, defends the “formlessness” of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, I think he is talking about the absence of the conventional novelistic progression from beginning, through middle, to end. Eliot declares that *Ulysses* is not a novel, and that “the novel ended with Flaubert and with James” (*Selected Prose* 177). Again, our terms differ from Eliot’s. Eliot would seem to be emphasizing one aspect of, say, Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, having to do with its narrative structure, and identifying that as “the novel” or “the novel form”. Rancière, on the other hand, seems to present only the opposite aspect, the one that tends towards open-endedness or even disorder. Both aspects, I would argue, can be said to be present in *Madame Bovary*, and Rancière seems to neglect this, but we are justified in following his emphasis because that is the aspect that gets amplified in the work of Flaubert’s disciples—for instance Joyce. The novel, for Rancière, is the “false genre”, the “non-generic genre”, the “anti-genre”, the “genre of mixed genres” (*Mute Speech* 51, 55, 78). It is the form that is not a form (for Auerbach, a “broad and elastic form”). Yes, Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* may be said to have a unified plot with a beginning, a middle and an end, but many elements in the book at the same time undermine the unity, break into it and break it open: the choice of subject, the “‘unmotivated’ descriptions of ‘incidental’ objects”, the mediocre ordinariness of the cast of characters... For Rancière, those are the things that are most “novel”-like about the book. Similarly, we may note that the events in Joyce’s *Ulysses* are enclosed within twenty-four hours, but the book, at the same time, in any number of ways in fact makes a travesty of the classical “unity of time” otherwise known as the “twenty-four-hour rule”. The “formlessness” which Eliot defends in Joyce’s *Ulysses* is what makes it a novel in our sense, not the opposite, and it is simultaneously that which makes it epic in our sense, because it renders it expansive, inclusive and able to signify the “life of a people”, to be an expression of a collectivity. The novel is the “successor to the lost epic” because it effects the “infinite repetition of the act that repoeticizes every prosaic thing”, that makes any object able to stand for the poeticity of the world as the expression of a collectivity (Rancière, *Mute Speech* 78, 84).

These things are true of *The Waste Land* perhaps to an even greater extent than *Ulysses*, because it can be said to be even more radically fragmented than Joyce's novel. The poem's fragmentation cannot in truth be said to be motivated by a radicalized impressionism seeking to capture the fragmented conscious experience of an individual character. Eliot's poem pushes fragmentation to a new order, simply because it lacks the stabilization provided by plot and a definite, consistent cast of characters. Instead, it is a very loose collection of short vignettes, fleeting images and fragments, shifting perspectives rapidly, cycling through unidentified, indeterminate narrators, with a large and heterogeneous cast of characters that lack all development. *The Waste Land* is able to be more radical in this respect than *Ulysses* perhaps simply by virtue of its relative shortness, and because it is aligned with "poetry" in the conventional sense, whereas *Ulysses* is still closer to the conventional "novel" with characters and plot. But what we have seen is that the boundary between "poem" and "novel" is very obscure, as Eliot himself has it. And modernist works perhaps are prime examples of this obscurity. If the novel, as Rancière says, is a "false genre", or a "form that is not a form", this is also a perfect characterization of the modernist "long poem" (indeed, most of the poetry we recognize as modernist can have a claim to this characterization). Our contention here, finally, is that *The Waste Land*, in much the same way that it is inscribed in the regime of literature analysed by Rancière, is intimately tied to the "non-genre" of the novel as identified within this poetics: as an expansive, elastic, inclusive form and a bearer of the poetics that invests fragments with the expressive power of a collective entity.

3.4 Conclusion

Part I of this thesis examined connections and affinities between turn-of-the-century philosophical thinking about consciousness and epistemology and a modernist poetics, represented in the main by T. E. Hulme and Ezra Pound, centred on the objective rendering of the impressions and conscious life of the individual subject. We then proceeded to situate T. S. Eliot within the same poetic tendency, and to trace a certain progression in his thinking about epistemological questions, which compelled him to look beyond the individual consciousness. His scepticism concerning the limits of

individual subjectivity led him to attempt to formulate a philosophical basis for external, shared truths. His answer, outlined in his philosophical papers on F. H. Bradley, was to ground external truth in the coalescence of a multiplicity of perspectives or a multiplicity of subjectivities. This abstract philosophical idea, we argued, found its counterpart in the fragmented poetic structure of *The Waste Land*, which gathers together a large array of heterogeneous elements, drawn from highly diverse sources, with rapid shifts of perspective, ultimately creating a complex collage of fragments.

The second part has sought to offer an alternative—yet complementary—perspective on Eliot’s move beyond the individual consciousness and towards an expansive poetic form based on a multiplicity of fragmented subjectivities. This alternative perspective is based on a broader conception of poetics and depends essentially on Jacques Rancière’s analysis of the aesthetic regime of literature which took root in the West from the late eighteenth century. We attributed Eliot’s move towards a more expansive scope, going beyond the individual, to a certain set of conventional expectations in the poetic tradition, which impelled poets like Eliot or Pound to formulate their most ambitious poetic projects in terms of the “long poem”, partaking of the genre of epic and dealing with historical subject matter. Rancière’s analysis of the logic of the aesthetic regime of literature offers, in the first place, a rationale for these expectations: the very conception of literature within this poetics, shaped in part in connection to the question of epic, is deeply intertwined with that of history, by virtue of the principle of poeticity which identifies literature with the “expression of the life of a people”. Finally, the last stage of our discussion turned to the question of what constitutes the historical subject matter of literature, and Rancière’s work in *The Names of History* and in *Mute Speech* permitted us to examine the inclusive logic of literature, which expands the conceptions of historical and literary subjects alike and tends to embrace and “poeticize” prosaic objects and invest fragments with historical significance. Eliot’s ties to the poetics described by Rancière were suggested through an examination of his theories of the “dissociation of sensibility” and “Tradition”, which demonstrate his adherence to the premise that identifies literature with the “life of a people”. We also highlighted connections between Eliot and his context, on the one hand, and the French literary tradition which is the primary focus of

Rancière's analysis, as we sought to demonstrate how the inclusive logic of literature is expressed in Eliot's own writing.

The Waste Land itself, finally, emerges as an exemplary poem where the principles of the aesthetic regime of literature articulate themselves in a particularly heightened form. Based on the central principle of the identification of literature or the poem with the "expression of a the life of a people", it is no surprise that the landmark work of modernist poetry should have been one defined, received and read to this day as the poetic treatment of the "history of a civilization" or, in Pound's phrase, a "poem including history". The inclusive logic of literature also manifests itself in radical form through the highly fragmented structure of the poem, which assembles together a heterogeneous array of fragments, with a multiplicity of perspectives and voices doubled through allusion of quotation, and invests these fragments with historical-existential significance as subjects and objects expressive of a history, a culture, a civilization. In Rancière's analysis, Hugo's novel about the cathedral is, as Oliver Davis calls it, a "super-example", because the work itself resembles the monument of the cathedral—in Rancière's words *is* a cathedral, and a "monument of [a] book" (Davis 105; Rancière, *Mute Speech* 53). Much the same can be said of what is often referred to as the "landmark" poem of literary modernism—and this is further justified by Joseph Frank's reading of the poem as a "spatial form". Eliot's poem turns a "waste land" of objects, subjects, fragments—in its own words, a "heap of broken images"—into the language of the poeticity of a collective way of life or the expression of the life of a people. It is through this process that it becomes, itself, *The Waste Land*.

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