

T.S. Eliot and the Search for the Disciplined Self

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the cogency of Eliot's claims for discipline in relation to the selves and personae depicted in his poetry from 1907 to 1920. Eliot maintained a lifelong affiliation with the classical ideals of order, discipline and authority. These models were the cornerstone of his sensibility, and Eliot devoted his literary career in tirelessly expounding and reinforcing the importance of these virtues in art, literature and all spheres of one's public and private life. This study attempts to explore the relationship between the individuals depicted in Eliot's poetry, and discipline. It considers whether the personae in the poetry are capable of a similar allegiance to an external authority, and whether the disciplined self, fully in control of its passions and desires, emerges in the poems after such a connection.

This study argues that Eliot's poetics contradict the standards of these classical ideals, even while his literary criticism strives forcefully to assert them. In his poetry, this is translated in the creation and depiction of individuals trapped in the prison of their ego, unable to transcend themselves or act meaningfully in the social world. The chapters in this thesis chronologically study various personae, such as the 'Mandarins', 'J. Alfred Prufrock' and 'St. Sebastian' to explore their efforts to realize an association with an external authority. The final chapter considers whether 'tradition' and the 'historical sense' enable 'Gerontion' to realize the self-transcendence which his predecessors found so elusive.

This study shows that while the individuals in Eliot's poetry (1907-20) feel the necessity for an affirmation with an external authority, such as a philosophical system, religion or history, they are unable to form this desired relationship. This results in the portrayal of negative models of selfhood in the

poetry, which, in turn, poignantly emphasizes Eliot's urgency for just such a classical discipline.

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Abbreviations

Quotations from the poems of T.S. Eliot are from *Inventions of the March Hare* edited by Christopher Ricks (London: Faber, 1996), *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber, 1969), and *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound* edited by Valerie Eliot (London: Faber, 1971). Quotations from the longer poems, such as 'Gerontion', *The Waste Land*, *Ash-Wednesday*, and *Four Quartets* are taken from *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot*.

T.S. Eliot's works referred to in the thesis:

<i>AW</i>	<i>Ash-Wednesday</i>
<i>CP</i>	<i>The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot</i>
<i>Facsimile</i>	<i>The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts</i>
<i>G</i>	'Gerontion'
<i>IMH</i>	<i>Inventions of the March Hare</i>
<i>Letters</i>	<i>The Letters of T. S. Eliot</i>
<i>SE</i>	<i>Selected Essays</i>
<i>SW</i>	<i>The Sacred Wood</i>
<i>TWL</i>	<i>The Waste Land</i>

Henri Bergson's works referred to in the thesis:

<i>MM</i>	<i>Matter and Memory</i>
<i>TWF</i>	<i>Time and Free Will</i>

Introduction

Eliot tirelessly expounded the need for maintaining classical ideals in art, literature, religion, and in all areas of public and private life. An early untitled fragment of four lines from *Inventions of the March Hare* points to a struggle with this subject:

O lord, have patience
Pardon these derelictions –
I shall convince these romantic irritations
By my classical convictions. (lines 1-4)

Eliot did not provide any dates for these verses, but Lyndall Gordon has suggested that they were written sometime before 1914 (84), and they are indicative of his eagerness to conform to the classical ideals even at such an early period in his life. In subsequent years, his desire to assimilate classical standards deepened, and gathered force. Again in 1916, he expressed sympathy with classicism, defining it as '*restraint* in art, *discipline* and *authority* in religion, *centralization* in government' (qtd. in Schuchard 27). His post-conversion preface to a collection of essays, *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1928), described his orientation in similar terms: 'classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion' (ix). Eliot held a lifelong allegiance to the classical ideals of 'restraint', 'discipline', and 'authority'.

The purpose of this study is to explore Eliot's concept of discipline, the cornerstone of his classicism, in the context of the selves or personae created in his early poetry (1907-1920), and to consider to what extent they are able to realize this ideal. The individuals emerging from the poems are, therefore, the primary focus of this study. For Eliot, the classical models were essential to

counter the Romantic tendency of exalting the '*personal and individual* above the *typical*', which had led to the malaise of '[i]ntense egotism' prevalent in both art and society (qtd. in Schuchard 27). In opposition to an idolization of the personal, Eliot believed in a renunciation of the self, possible only through a 'continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality' (Eliot, *Selected Essays* 17). This study examines such claims for a classical self, and questions what the poems reveal about Eliot's exhortations to disregard the 'inner voice' perpetuating the 'eternal message of vanity, fear, and lust' (*SE* 27). It enquires whether the selves are capable of a discipline which enables an allegiance to a higher authority, such as tradition, religion, or a community of other selves, or whether they succeed in merely succumbing to the exigencies of their own ego.

The central contention of this thesis is that while the personae of Eliot's early poetry aspire to this discipline, their efforts fall short of their classical ideals. This study observes how this is reflected in the poetry by the creation and depiction of individuals, trapped in the prisons of their ego, unable to transcend themselves, or act meaningfully in the social world. They fall prey to the very life-denying egotism which Eliot warned against, or which Langbaum has diagnosed as 'the *loss of self*' (119). The 'dialogue of the mind with itself' (qtd. in Schuchard 4) which ensues in these poems brings into stark relief the consequences of such an imprisonment within the ego; the shipwrecked self is deprived of all nourishment, and begins to wither. Ironically, the frightfulness of this plight poignantly emphasizes the need for identifying with an authority outside the self. The study functions along the tension and fault lines between the yearning for some form of discipline, and the wilfulness of the ego which contests this desire. It derives its importance and originality through the rereading of Eliot's early work as poetry of the self. In doing so, it imparts an

understanding of the classical ideals and the reasons for Eliot's insistence on them. In 'Convictions (Curtain Raiser)', an early piece from *Inventions*, one of Eliot's marionettes declares a languishing desire for true love:

"Where shall I ever find the man!
 One who appreciates my soul;
 I'd throw my heart beneath his feet.
 I'd give my life to his control." (23-26)

The wish for some form of control articulated here points to the first stirrings of such a quest, echoes of which were to reverberate in the poetry of subsequent years. It is, therefore, apt to consider what Eliot meant by the classical ideals of order, authority, and discipline.

Eliot's aversion to Romanticism led him to devote his literary and critical efforts to counter what he perceived as its debilitating effects in both society and art. In 1916, he defined Romanticism as a movement which 'stands for excess in any direction. It splits up into two directions: escape from the world of fact, and devotion to brute fact. The two great currents of the nineteenth century—vague emotionality, and the apotheosis of science (realism) alike spring from Rousseau' (qtd. in Schuchard 27). In addition to identifying Rousseau as the precursor of romantic egotism, this indicates Eliot's distrust of both vagueness and sentimentality, faults which he detected and criticised in Swinburne's verse and prose writings: 'it is not merely the sound that he wants, but the vague associations of idea that the words give him. . . . It is, in fact, the word that gives him the thrill, not the object' (*SE* 326). On another occasion Swinburne's verse incurs Eliot's reproach for being a 'fluid haze' (61).

In opposition to haziness, obscurity and confusion, Eliot insisted on exactness, precision and accuracy, and these are the merits for which he

favoured not only the religious writings of Hooker and Lancelot Andrewes, but also the style of Dryden over Swinburne: 'Swinburne's words are all suggestions and no denotation. . . . Dryden's words, on the other hand, are precise, they state immensely, but their suggestiveness is often nothing' (*SE* 314-15). Words for Eliot have a distinct function of denoting and transmitting meaning; once this is neglected they signify nothing, creating imprecision and vagueness which results in the 'weakening and demoralizing' of language as evidenced in the case of Swinburne (315). In his critical writings, Eliot repeatedly argues for a restoration of vigour and robustness to the English language, a state in which language 'is so close to the object that the two are identified' (327). Eliot reiterates this need for precision on numerous occasions: in an essay on Shakespeare he states that 'In reality there is precise emotion and there is vague emotion. To express precise emotion requires as great intellectual power as to express precise thought' (135). It is this virtue for which he praises writers such as Blake: '[his] is the poetry of a language which has undergone the discipline of prose' (318). Similarly, a comment on Baudelaire's poems reveals what he considered the virtues of the classical ideal: 'Their excellence of form, their perfection of phrasing, and their superficial coherence, . . . seem to me to have the external . . . form of classic art' (385-6). An insistence on discipline emerges as the cornerstone of Eliot's sensibility, one around which not only several of his critical theories, such as 'impersonality', 'depersonalization' and 'objective correlative', but also his religious and political affiliations, were formulated.

Eliot insisted on the need for discipline in the use of language, and also in the depiction of emotion in art. He felt that discipline could control the 'excess' and extravagances of sentiment which he attributed to the legacy of the

Romantic sensibility. The term 'objective correlative' which he coined derives from this selfsame ideal, and determines for the artist a formula for depicting emotion in creating art. It is a succinct formulation of Eliot's oft-repeated exhortations for the artist to exercise control in the process of creation. Eliot described the 'objective correlative' as the 'only way of expressing emotion in the form of art', and defined it as 'a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts . . . are given, the emotion is immediately evoked' (SE 145). This theory relies on an exact and precise correspondence between the emotion which the artist wishes to portray and the external facts which arouse it. Eliot elaborates on this when he declares *Hamlet* a failure precisely because it depicts Hamlet possessed by an emotion exceeding its object; Gertrude is not a just cause for the feelings of extreme disgust which Hamlet bears for her.

Eliot described the classicist point of view as 'essentially a belief in Original Sin—the necessity for austere discipline', and in literature interpreted it as a movement 'away from both realism and purely personal expression of emotion' (qtd. in Schuchard 28). Eliot revisited the concept of original sin in 1930, when he quoted a passage from T.E. Hulme towards the end of his essay on 'Baudelaire': '[man] is endowed with Original Sin. While he can occasionally accomplish acts which partake of perfection, he can never himself *be* perfect. . . . Order is thus not merely negative, but creative and liberating. Institutions are necessary' (SE 392). This suggests how vital he deemed the role of discipline in exercising and maintaining a control on the demands of the ego. Such control, he believed, could prevent an artist from creating works which are a mere outpouring of subjective emotion. It also indicates Eliot's antipathy towards expressions of subjective and personal emotion in art. As his classical

sensibility developed and matured, this recurring need for order and harmony emerged as a defining element, governing matters of his private life, and also informing much of his literary and critical practice.

In 1919, these classical standards provided the foundation for Eliot's theory of 'impersonality' developed in his seminal work 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', considered by some to be the 'locus classicus of [his] concept of tradition' (Schwartz, 'Eliot's Ghosts' 16), and the centrepiece of his literary and critical programme. This essay inaugurates Eliot's regimen of austere discipline for the artist, entailing 'a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality' (SE 17). Here, Eliot prescribes a process of 'depersonalization' (17) for the poet, insisting emphatically that the poet has 'not a "personality" to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality' (20). He describes the mind of the mature poet as a 'finely perfected medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations' (18), while the artist himself attends upon the process impassively. The scientific metaphors of a 'catalyst', 'shred of platinum', and 'receptacle' which are used to characterize the mind of the poet suggest a detachment and unobtrusiveness; the poet should remain as inert and dispassionate as a platinum filament during the creative process. Eliot urged this self-effacement, stating that the artistic process demands from the artist 'a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable' (17). For him, classicism similarly constitutes an eschewal of the self to an outside authority; it is the belief that 'men cannot go on without giving allegiance to something outside themselves' (26). In art, this allegiance is owed to 'tradition' and the 'mind of Europe' (SE 16).

Impersonality emerges as a theory, or a mechanism for exercising control on the self when creating art. Eliot emphasizes this by discussing the case of Blake, whose genius he recognized, but believed that if it had been 'controlled by a respect for impersonal reason, for common sense, for the objectivity of science, it would have been better for him' (*SE* 322). Blake is reproached for indulging too much in his own ideas and philosophy at the expense of his poetry, which could suffer from a resulting egocentricity and 'formlessness' (321). Donne is similarly implicated in his religious writings and sermons, addressing his subject with insufficient detachment with the result that they are dominated by his personality. In contrast, Eliot praises Andrewes, who was able devote himself so completely to his subject that his emotion is generated by it, adequate to it, and thus altogether of a higher order than that of Donne. Where Andrewes's emotion is 'purely contemplative' (341), Donne's is personal and inadequate to its religious correlative. Donne was unable to exercise spiritual control; his mind, unlike that of da Vinci or Andrewes, could not go out and 'bec[o]me a part of things' (Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* 27) so essential to the regimen of austere discipline for the artist.

It is this struggle towards self-effacement and depersonalization on the part of the artist, a 'continual self-sacrifice', which Eliot implores. However, he does not deny the role of emotion in art; he admits that a poet's feelings and experiences are the raw materials for any artist, and it requires skill to transcend and transform them into the 'emotion in his poetry' (*SE* 21), different from subjective emotion because 'It is a concentration, and a new thing resulting from the concentration, of a very great number of experiences' (21). The passivity of the artist during the creative process creates works which aspire to the timeless, and the sublime, worthy of a place in the tradition of great art. Eliot

maintains that this is the supreme end for an artist: 'to transmute his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal' (137). This was something both Shakespeare and Dante were able to achieve.

Eliot's appropriation of the classical ideals to literature, politics and religion alike in his 1928 preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes* is significant. It indicates that a need for order and discipline did not just extend to the arts and literature, but to all areas of his public and private life. A similar insistence on the need for such classical standards amongst individuals and society was advanced through his prose writings. In 'The Function of Criticism', Eliot employs Middleton Murry's dialectical terms of 'Outside Authority' and the 'Inner Voice' (*SE* 29) to argue his case. He criticizes the inner voice because those who possess it 'are ready enough to hearken to it, and will hear no other', and will invariably follow the maxim of "doing as one likes" (27). He attempted to reinstate the supremacy of an outside authority, against the malicious and egotistical claims of the inner voice. He felt that just as untempered demands of the personality could reduce literary works to crude self-expression, as in the case of Yeats and Hardy, so individuals devoid of discipline could wreak disorder, anarchy, and chaos in society. He once commented that the 'human soul . . . is neither good nor bad; but in order to be good, in order to be human, requires *discipline*' (qtd. in Ricks 229). After his conversion Eliot increasingly began to view religion and the church as one of the foremost institutions with the spiritual authority to supply this discipline for an individual.

Similar to Eliot, Babbitt insisted on the necessity of individuals to exercise restraint and self-control. However, Eliot was unable to reconcile himself with Babbitt's humanism which, like that of Matthew Arnold, prioritized the individual

over divine supernatural matters, and sought to replace man as a repository of those values once granted to religion. Babbitt's theory of a healthy society functioning on individuals checking and controlling themselves according to their own 'private notions' and 'judgement' (SE 438), without resorting to an outside authority, seemed fantastical to Eliot. He argued that while humanism was valuable to society in its contributions of 'tolerance, equilibrium and sanity' (450), it assumed as a prerequisite that such a society is 'founded on definite belief' (451).

Eliot believed in the supreme authority of religion as a fountainhead of those values and beliefs which could discipline the claims of the ego, especially as he insisted that the romantic vision of man capable of perfection was a fallacy; he agreed with Hulme that 'there is an *absolute* to which Man can *never* attain' (SE 452). This is the basis for Eliot's claims for a religion; he was convinced that discipline for the self was only possible through a religious attitude. In making a case for religion, Eliot argued that the force of religion essentially derives from '*inner* control', and even in its most organised forms, 'with all the powers of inquisition and punishment imaginable, still the idea of the religion is the *inner* control—the appeal not to a man's behaviour but to his soul' (438).

While these exhortations for self-discipline are the cornerstone of his classical sensibility, they are ironic in the light of his own poetry. Eliot himself commented that 'A man's theory of the place of poetry is not independent of his view of life in general' (qtd. in Hynes 64), and by dint of this same principle this thesis aims to study to what extent the individuals and selves depicted in Eliot's poetry are capable of allegiance to an 'outside authority'. Eliot believed that the "principle of classical leadership is that obeisance is made to the office or to the

tradition, never to the man” (SE 29); this study will explore whether the selves in Eliot’s verses realize this self-transcendence. The central contention of this thesis is that Eliot’s poetics contradict and impugn the standards of these classical ideals, even while his literary criticism strives forcefully to assert and reinforce them.

Although this may seem a subversion of Eliot’s literary programme, it is one which is well documented. One of Eliot’s earliest critics, John Crowe Ransom, remarked that there ‘were other Eliots besides the critic. Specifically, there were three Eliots, and the other two were the poet and the religionist’ (*New Criticism* 136). He drew attention to the disjunction between the critical and the poetical Eliot, with the latter being Hyde and the former Jekyll; and although ‘somewhere in Jekyll’s pervasive wisdom was the word which justified the Hyde’ (136), the two did not cohere despite efforts to align them. In the context of such views, the project aims at a better understanding of this inherent discontinuity in Eliot, by examining the aspect of his classicism which engages with an individual’s quest for self-control.

During his lifetime Eliot turned down several requests for a biography of his life, insisting that such information was extrinsic to the appreciation of art. His prose writings sought to promote and reinforce this stance, contending that the ‘emotion of art is impersonal’; it has its ‘life in the poem and not in the history of the poet’ (SE 22). However, after his death, the hegemony of New Criticism which upheld such views, insisting that biographical information was unnecessary in the evaluation of an artist’s work, gradually declined. This coincided with the emergence of new and hitherto unseen material regarding Eliot’s personal life and early poetry, first with Valerie Eliot’s publication of *A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts of The Waste Land* (1971), in

which Eliot is quoted to have said that *The Waste Land* had been to him ‘only the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life’ (1). In subsequent years, the publication of *Inventions of the March Hare* (1996), followed by *The Letters of T.S. Eliot* volumes one and two in 2009, and volumes three and four in 2012 and 2013, have continued to shed new light on Eliot’s personal life and his early poetic voice.

This instigated Eliot’s critics and scholars to a re-evaluation of his poetry in the light of these new materials, leading them to declare that: ‘Certainly it is easy now to read the whole sequence of his serious and major non-dramatic poems as a kind of spiritual autobiography’ (Fraser 87). More recently, Bernard Brugière has reiterated the same point: ‘since Eliot’s death . . . biographical information that was inaccessible has been unearthed and it appears that the poetry can properly be read, after all, in an autobiographical perspective’ (86). Critics like Schuchard, Gordon, and Raine have contributed valuable studies in this context, examining the pressure of the life on the poetry. However, while this study is certainly informed by these works, the primary attention remains on the self in the poems which Moody identifies as ‘the *poet* we come to know in [the poetry]’ who is ‘an elected self, a personality deliberately fashioned in the medium of language, and whose only real existence is in the poetry’ (xvii). While this study does consider, and refer to the personal details of Eliot’s life which recent scholarship has made available, the focus remains the selves which emerge from the poems, as distinct from Eliot’s personal self which is constructed from autobiographical content, and is thought to be reflected in the poetry. This is in line with Grover Smith’s observation that for a poet the ‘work of making poetry . . . encapsulates his past selves’, and ‘crystallizes out of his journey through time a permanent “now,” a poetic identity’ (*The Use of Memory*

10). It is with this identity that my study is concerned. Raine contends that Eliot's poems, such as 'Gerontion', 'The Hollow Men' and 'Animula' articulate his personal and private inability to 'live fully'. He juxtaposes the romantic Eliot 'who rued the cautious circumspection of our sluggish hearts' with the 'ascetic' Eliot who 'finds that his will to renounce the temporary illusion of the temporal is weaker than his helpless passion for the natural world' (40). Although my study explores similar tensions in its move away from a biographical approach it is more in line with Mayer's study which proposes that Eliot's poetry is 'essentially a psychic poetry, a poetry about consciousness' which is 'expressed in a new form, [of] the psychic monologue' (vii).

This attention to the personal, and almost autobiographical, tendency of Eliot's poetry, stimulated by new developments in Eliot studies, has also generated a renewed interest in its deeply subjective and romantic nature. It is now widely acknowledged that Eliot's career is not as monolithic as generally perceived, but diverse, bearing signs of a late Romantic ancestry. Robert Langbaum has placed Eliot in the line of Arnold and Baudelaire, while Donald Davie in pronouncing Eliot a 'late-Romantic sensibility' (80) has declared that his poetry from 'Prufrock' to *Little Gidding*, 'is a movement from Laforgue to Valéry; the body of poetic theory which illuminates and explains it is not in Mr Eliot's essays nor anywhere else in English, but in French'. Davie's distinction points to a paradox lodged at the centre of Eliot's poetics, that while denouncing the egotistic aestheticism of the nineties, and associating it with vague sentiment, Eliot himself had been practicing it in his art. Davies further states that 'The urgent question to ask is: "Was the late Mr Eliot an Imagiste?" And the right answer is . . . "No, the late Mr Eliot was a symbolist, though he has written *des Images* as have many good poets before him' (85).

This dichotomy between the outwardly classicist and inwardly romantic Eliot has also received a lot of critical attention. Many critics have tried to understand it by attempting to reconcile this dissonance. Sanford Schwartz argues for a need to accept the uneasy coexistence of the classic and romantic in Eliot: 'it is unnecessary to set the "classical" Eliot against the crypto-"romantic," the poet who conforms to "tradition" against the "individual talent" who produces "new and sudden combinations"' ('Eliot's Ghosts' 19). He suggests that the 'tradition' depends on the creativity of the individual talent, and complements it by creating novel works of art, thus making the relationship a necessary formula. Brooker, too, proposes that the "self-annihilation", "self-sacrifice" and "self-surrender" mentioned in Eliot's essay are not 'isolated events, but part of a dynamic and continuous dialectical process' ('Writing the Self' 42). The negation of the individual self enables the artist to realize a more permanent self through his created work. Schwartz comments that while there has been a prejudice towards construing Eliot's work either entirely in light of his classicism, or entirely in light of his radical modernism, the 'Tradition' essay testifies to a coexistence of these incongruous strands.

While this study does not set out to recapitulate this well-rehearsed debate, or provide further evidence to demonstrate Eliot's latent romanticism, and the dichotomy between his 'elegant prose' and 'jagged poetry' (Brooker, 'Writing the Self' 41), the discussion does intersect with the parameters defined by this discourse. It does so by revealing the presence of an often solipsistic self in Eliot's poetry; this is more a natural outcome of the research, rather than its professed or overt aim. Its chief value, however, lies in its exploration of the meaning of such a classical discipline in relation to the selves, their own quests for this control, and the reality which emerges from the frustration of such

efforts. The poems' portrayals of negative models of selfhood bring into sharp relief the reasons for Eliot's urgency for a classical regimen, and ultimately lead also to a better understanding of his embrace of the Anglo-Catholic denomination of Christianity. This subject has invited renewed interest with the publication of Barry Spurr's recent study. The discussion in this thesis contributes to this by enabling a new and better understanding of the discipline which prompted this puzzling conversion. 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' continues to invite commentary and debate among Eliot scholars. Regarding the concept of 'self-surrender and the related idea of impersonality' enshrined in this work, Frank Kermode commented that 'It is possible that the discussion of these topics is, in the end, the most valuable part of Eliot's essay' (xiv). This view illuminates the continued relevance and cogency of this elusive concept, and emphasizes that enquiries in this context contribute to a wider discourse which seeks to understand Eliot's classical ideals.

The research follows a chronological order, and proceeds through a close reading of Eliot's poetry from 1907 to 1920, but within this framework also goes back and forth, providing comparative readings of Eliot's poetry between earlier and later periods. The research will draw on the philosophical works which inform Eliot's writings and influence his thought, especially the works of Bergson, Hulme, Maurras, and Babbitt. As this project also takes into account the wider social, cultural, and historical factors contributing to his thought, my approach is interdisciplinary—historical, philosophical, and psychological. The resources to which this project refer include Eliot's *Inventions of the March Hare*, and *The Complete Poems and Plays*, as well as Valerie Eliot's *Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts of The Waste Land*, along with the vast collection of letters, essays, and book reviews which Eliot wrote during his

literary career for various journals, newspapers, and magazines, including *The Athenaeum*, *The Egoist*, and *The Times Literary Supplement*. The essays and editorials he wrote for *The Criterion* during his leadership of this journal will also be studied alongside his critical collection of essays, especially *The Sacred Wood* (1920), *Selected Essays* (1932), *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), *On Poetry and Poets*, and *To Criticize the Critic* (1965).

The study is divided into four chapters. The first chapter attempts a close look at Eliot's early verse published in *Poems Written in Early Youth*, as well as the previously unpublished poems from *Inventions of the March Hare*. These poems are important for the insight they afford into Eliot's earliest depictions of the self, and the beginning of their uneasy, and often ambivalent, relationship with discipline. The discussion emphasizes the influence of Laforgue, whose persona of the dandy Eliot adapted in the poems titled 'Mandarins'. The contention here is that the dandy's persona of imperviousness represented to Eliot the discipline he sought to temper the demands of the ego. Ironically, however, the perfection of mandarin attitudes merely intensifies the personae's self-consciousness. This chapter argues that the poetry of this period extensively treats the subject of the self, and is preoccupied with it to such a degree that it is characterized by a deep subjectivity and individualism.

The second chapter focuses on the years 1909-11, and offers original readings of the poems from this period in the context of Bergson's influence. The contention is that during this period, Bergson's philosophical system embodied the discipline which, Eliot hoped, could enable him an escape from the confines of the self. However, as the readings of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' indicate, far from affording a release, this system only succeeds in effecting a reaffirmation of the prison walls of the ego, and within them the

fortification of a solipsistic self. Chapter 3 explores the period 1911-14, when, having abandoned Bergson's metaphysics, Eliot found himself once more at the crossroads of a spiritual dilemma. His quest for discipline led him to study different religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, and he converted this in his poetry through experiments with the ascetic discipline of the Christian saints. However, a lack of religious intent, and a preoccupation with adopting a saint's renunciation of the worldly translates only into an obsession with the self. Alongside the poems from *Inventions*, this chapter also observes three lesser known fragments, 'After the turning of the inspired days', 'So through the evening, through the violet air', and 'I am the Resurrection and the Life', thought to be written around this period, and first published in 1971, with the *Facsimile* edition of the fragments and drafts of *The Waste Land*. The study argues for the significance of these for intimations of Eliot's later religious conversion in 1928.

Longenbach has suggested that Eliot was unwilling to leave the self 'trapped in the prison of consciousness' (171), and in 'Gerontion' Eliot introduces the historical sense—a counterpart of tradition—to assert that the individual is not isolated, but connected to a community of selves. The mind of 'Gerontion' is intended to subsume that of Europe, conscious not only of its own existence, but simultaneously of other minds in time. This last chapter aims to explore the cogency of such claims for the historical sense. My thesis alludes to *The Waste Land* during the course of its discussion, but because it aims to focus on Eliot's early experiments in *Inventions*, it is not in its scope to cover a detailed study of this work. The thesis chooses to stop at 'Gerontion' as this coincides with the publication of the 'Tradition' essay which formulates Eliot's classical ideals.

In *Four Quartets*, Eliot yearns for 'the still point of the turning world' (*The Complete Poems, Burnt Norton* 64):

The inner freedom from the practical desire,
The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded
By a grace of sense (72-75)

The marionette's sentimental wish for 'control' has become grave, more sophisticated. However, arriving at the still point is not possible without comprehension of the turning world, wrecked with aggressive desires, compulsions and suffering, and completely bereft of compassion and grace.

Chapter 1

Inventions of the March Hare and the Early Quest for Discipline: 1907-1911

This chapter explores what Eliot's early poetry (1907-1911) reveals about the emerging relationship of his personae with the discipline and self-control which he so emphatically propounded in his prose writings. The poetry of this period delineates Eliot's earliest representations of the self, and can afford important insights into the beginnings of the self's associations with order and authority. The discussion will draw on Eliot's early verse published in *Poems Written in Early Youth, Prufrock and Other Observations*, as well as the previously unpublished poems from *Inventions of the March Hare*.

Eliot writes in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' that 'The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality' (SE 17). This oft-quoted comment is associated with his theory of impersonality which he tirelessly propounded, in his campaign to rescue poetry from what he considered to be the excesses of emotion associated with Romanticism. Eliot was eager to secure poetry on the basis of order, discipline and authority: 'Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality' (SE 21). In opposition to self-expression, emotion and flights of fancy, he proposes order, restraint and control. These comments contrast with Eliot's early verse, which depicts various selves immersed in the process of examining their own thoughts and actions. This immersion intensifies to the extent that all experience is turned inward, to be examined minutely to such a degree that these poems become what John T. Mayer has called 'portrayals of increasingly complex interior conflicts' (4), obsessed with the ego and its deliberations. The pre-

eminence of an individual's private thoughts and emotions which emerge in the early poems, challenge and run contrary to Eliot's insistent claims for a disciplined self—a paradox which many Eliot scholars have commented on. Mayer argues that 'Eliot is more preoccupied than is generally acknowledged with what Coleridge calls the mind in its "self- involution," consciousness engaging its own self-awareness by continually turning its thoughts, feelings, and environments back on itself' (4). More recently, Jayme Stayer has stated that the poems from the *Inventions* continue to be absorbed with 'the problem of solipsism, or how the internal self relates to external realities, especially realities that are sordid or at odds with conventional feelings' (111).

Eliot's first attempts at verse writing (from the age of seventeen, when he was at Smith Academy) are memorable for their sentimental emotions, indulgence in private reveries, and evocations of vague moods, through which they receive their subjective and romantic character. Eliot once remarked about Hardy's characters that 'It is only, indeed, in their emotional paroxysms that most of [them] come alive. This extreme emotionalism seems . . . a symptom of decadence; it is a cardinal point of faith in a romantic age, to believe that there is something admirable in violent emotion for its own sake' (qtd. in *IMH* 119). Eliot's aversion to his romantic inheritance is ironic in the light of his own apprentice poems. A glance at these earliest attempts soon reveals the nature and extent of their romantic borrowings in terms of theme, content and form. An early poem which Eliot wrote during his undergraduate years at Harvard, and published in the *Harvard Advocate* in 1907, is titled 'Song':

When we came across the hill
 No leaves were fallen from the trees;
 The gentle fingers of the breeze

Had torn no quivering cobweb down.
 The hedgerow bloomed with flowers still,
 No withered petals lay beneath;
 But the wild roses in your wreath
 Were faded, and the leaves were brown. (*CP* 1-8)

Images from the natural world dominate: trees, gentle breezes, blooming hedgerows. The cobwebs are 'quivering', the hedgerow is blooming with flowers, and the breeze has 'gentle fingers': nature is viewed in characteristic Romantic fashion, aided by the use of sentimental poetic vocabulary. Where nature is depicted as vital, and full of energy, the beloved's flowers are withered. Natural imagery provides metaphors for the narrator's state of mind: the 'wild roses' in the beloved's wreath were not in bloom, but 'faded' and dry, suggesting obliquely that something was wrong. They function as a symbol of disappointment through which we are meant to understand the narrator's mood. The nature of the disappointment is not made clear, and there is a sense that the narrator's pain and longing exceed the melancholy that the faded roses are asked to convey. In addition to the excessive emotion, the Romantic images of faded roses and brown leaves give the poem its sombre mood. Although an early experiment in which Eliot is trying to find his own distinctive voice, 'Song' expresses the themes—disappointment, longing, dashed hopes, unfulfilled desires—which will make regular appearances in his later poetry.

The recurring image of flowers—in bloom, in decay, sometimes fresh, at other times withered—runs consistently throughout these early pieces. Eliot depends on the flower as a symbol and image, as, for example, in 'Before Morning', published in the *Advocate* in 1908, the following year:

This morning's flowers and flowers of yesterday

Their fragrance drifts across the room at dawn,
 Fragrance of bloom and fragrance of decay,
 Fresh flowers, withered flowers, flowers of dawn. (*CP* 5-8)

While the 'East was weaving red with gray' (1), the flowers at the window expect to be invigorated by the fresh morning breeze: 'Petal on petal, waiting for the day' (3). However, the freshness and serenity of dawn are soon subsumed by the heady fragrance of flowers, which drifts into the room, mixing with the fragrance of the previous day's decaying flowers. This overpowering perfume is reminiscent of hothouse scents—heady and decadent. The refrain 'Fresh flowers, withered flowers, flowers of dawn', along with the repetition of 'flowers', smother the poem with floral colours and perfume. The effect is of being stifled: the senses of smell and sight drown under this intoxicating spell. Each quatrain is a closed chamber in which the overwhelming aroma of the flowers mingles and accumulates, becoming overpowering, to the point of nausea. In its use of the flower images, this poem has distinct echoes of Swinburne, whose poetry frequently made use of wild roses and eglantines. The title—'Before Morning'—suggests a vague and intermediate state between night and day, when the last traces of night mingle with the first rays of the rising sun. Such is the mood that the poem attempts to evoke: a hazy state of mind in eager anticipation of the first light of the day, but, here, gradually overwhelmed by floral perfume. Such depictions of imprecise and shadowy states of minds, coupled with the arousal of intense responses achieved through the use of sensuous flower imagery, are of the essence of late-Romantic poetry.

These early pieces from Eliot's apprenticeship are too indebted to late-Romantic metaphors and subjects. However, the trajectory of Eliot's poetic experiments was soon to be significantly altered by his chance reading of Arthur

Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* in 1908. Through this book, he became acquainted with French Symbolist poets such as Verlaine, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, and most importantly, Jules Laforgue. Eliot paid numerous tributes to Laforgue during his artistic career, regarding him as a poet in whom he discovered 'the recognition of a temperament akin to one's own' (Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic* 126). He commented in 1950: 'Of Jules Laforgue, for instance, I can say that he was the first to teach me how to speak, to teach me the poetic possibilities of my own idiom of speech' (126). Through Laforgue, Eliot was introduced to a new, more conversational style in poetry, and found himself compelled by his 'mannerisms and themes, his cynical laconic tone, his self-parody, his self-conscious emphasis on *ennui*' (Svarny 48).

What followed was a series of poems written in the manner of Laforgue, which afforded Eliot an idiom in which he could express the poetry that he was longing to write, and which the voice of the English poets of the romantic tradition had been unable to inspire. 'Convictions', written in January 1910, is an early Laforguean experiment in its employment of a direct, more colloquial language and wry, ironic posture:

Two, in a garden scene
 Go picking tissue paper roses;
 Hero and heroine, alone,
 The monotone
 Of promises and compliments
 And guesses and supposes. (*IMH* 8-13)

A courting scene between hero and heroine is described, but here it is stripped of its conventional sentiment and emotion, so that it becomes ironic and comical. The romance is conveyed in a laconic, terse manner. The interplay of

heartfelt declarations and avowals of love, usually associated with such scenes, is instead expressed abruptly as 'The monotone / Of promises and compliments'. Even the flowers that the couple is picking in the garden are not real, but 'tissue paper roses', suggesting the narrator's impatience with all manner of sentiment, and his haste to describe it with a minimum of fuss. Where previously had been found 'Fresh flowers, withered flowers, flowers of dawn' (*CP*, 'Before Morning' 4), here they are emptied of their alliterative associations and transformed into 'tissue paper roses'. This style is a forerunner of Eliot's preference for a more measured and prosaic manner of expression, in contrast to the more rhetorical, sentimental utterings, used for example, in 'Song: The moonflower open to the moth': 'Whiter the flowers, Love, you hold, / Than the white mist on the sea' (*CP* 5-6). Eliot once wrote to Mary Hutchinson: 'I like to feel that a writer is perfectly cool and detached, regarding other peoples' feelings or his own, like a God who has got beyond them' (qtd. in Donoghue 133). He continues, 'But this sort of cold detachment is so *very* rare'. An affiliation with Laforgue's manner of expression was very appealing for Eliot as it allowed him to develop the '*rare*' style of 'cold detachment' which he was so keen to adopt. It also marks the beginnings of the ironic voice which Eliot was to make distinctly his own

'Convictions', the introductory poem and the 'Curtain Raiser' of *Inventions*, also depicts Eliot's earliest articulation of the question of a self's relation to discipline and restraint, a preoccupation which will reverberate through the subsequent experiments of Eliot's notebook. In this poem Eliot sketches the 'marionettes', who reappear in other poems, such as 'Humouresque', but function here, both, as a mask for the poetic voice and a metaphor for helplessness. The poem's title itself is ironic as the poem's chief

protagonists are mere puppets, incapable of possessing any thoughts, let alone '[c]onvictions'. In fact, their sentimental desire for some form of control mocks their vulnerability and sheer incapacity to affect any kind of action:

“Where shall I ever find the man!
 One who appreciates my soul;
 I'd throw my heart beneath his feet.
 I'd give my life to his control.” (*IMH* 23-26)

This utterance is melodramatic and exaggerated, and Eliot's sneering tone is apparent, yet underneath the layer of sarcastic humour the wish for an association with some form of discipline for the self is keenly felt, and is unmistakably present. 'Convictions' also depicts a condition in which the human existence is mechanical and governed entirely by the physical laws of cause and effect, evident in the discussion of Eliot's knights who are 'talking of effect and cause, / With "learn to live by nature's laws!"' (15-16). The exclamation mark suggests the narrator's derision. Eliot's disdain of the scientific approach towards explaining and accounting for the matters occurring in human consciousness is also expressed in later poems, such as 'The smoke that gathers blue and sinks' and 'He said: this universe is very clever'. Although a very early experiment, 'Convictions' not only articulates an urgency for an individual's affiliation with some kind of discipline, but its disparaging attitude towards the physical laws suggests that Eliot was already deeply engaged in discovering a solution for this troubling problem, and that the scientific formulae could not constitute that framework of authority by which an individual could live.

In contrast to individuals who wish for some discipline to govern their lives, 'Convictions' also functions as a satire of those who are powerless to

exercise any control in their lives because they are devoid of any guiding principles or self-control. As a result, they are trapped in a life filled with, what the narrator feels, are vain pursuits: the monotonous courting episode, and 'a lady with a fan' pining for true love, serve as examples. These characters are consumed by their own self-importance:

They see the outlines of their stage

Conceived upon a scale immense (*IMH* 3-4)

Their self-aggrandisement is such that they are oblivious to how ridiculous they appear in 'these keen moments' (29). It is another irony that, being helpless creatures themselves, the marionettes are portrayed as mimicking human beings who are equally wooden and powerless in their lives, consumed by frivolous ambitions. Ricks, in *Inventions*, cites Symons's observation of Jarry's use of marionettes in *Ubu Roi*, which also illuminates Eliot's use of them:

a generation which has exhausted every intoxicant, every soluble preparation of the artificial, may well seek a last sensation in the wire-pulled passions, the wooden faces of marionettes, and, by a further illusion, of marionettes who are living people; living people pretending to be those wooden images of life which pretend to be living people (103)

Elsewhere, too, in *Inventions*, there are poems which indicate Eliot's severe resentment of individuals who are puppet-like and automated in their mindless adherence to social and religious conventions, such as the apathetic inhabitants of the city of London bound to their daily routine of 'marmalade and tea at six' (*IMH*, 'Interlude in London' 3). Eliot is able to concentrate a sense of futility in this image, evoked by the wry precision of the adjectives and the

particular hour of six o' clock. 'Spleen' attacks the self-assured crowd of people who flock to church every week:

Sunday: this satisfied procession
 Of definite Sunday faces;
 Bonnets, silk hats, and conscious graces
 In repetition that displaces
 Your mental self-possession
 By this unwarranted digression. (*CP* 1-6)

Moody comments that: 'Eliot's natural impulse was to detach himself from feelings and experience, to be the coolly conscious observer, not the celebrant, of his sensibility' (18). The ironic voice allows Eliot this detachment. He is able to retain his 'self-possession' in the midst of emotions which threaten to give way to anger. This aloof stance is evident in his measured personification of 'Life', as a bald and aging man, who wastes away 'hat and gloves in hand' (*CP*, 'Spleen' 13), while people like the Sunday church-goers, incessantly repeat the rehearsed routines of their lives, incapable of living meaningfully, and completely unaware of this life-denying entrapment. Through the pose of the uninterested observer Eliot could avoid direct comment in favour of obliquity, a guise he practiced repeatedly in *Inventions*.

However, in an identical fashion to those individuals who struggle in their pursuits for self-control, the narrating voice in *Inventions* counters difficulty in its efforts to remain unobtrusive. In 'Mandarins: 4', the 'I' that has been trying to suppress itself behind the elaborately constructed Laforguean masks is suddenly revealed:

Still one more thought for pen and ink!
 (Though not indicative of spleen):

How very few there are, I think

Who see their outlines on the screen. (*IMH* 1-4)

The observer is absorbed singularly in a private thought which takes the form of a monologue. He adds hastily, that he does not mean to sound vexed. This use of irony succeeds in having the opposite effect: by claiming that he is not vexed, one suspects that he is. He remarks how people fail to perceive the shallowness of their social selves, implying that people are too caught up in their social appearances to recognize any deeper meaning to their lives. The observing 'I' attempts to undercut the seriousness of this thought by adopting the well-practised, casual, tone:

And so, I say, I find it good

(Even if misunderstood)

That demoiselles and gentlemen

Walk out beneath the cherry trees (5-8)

Later, in commenting on the conversation, the observer again tries to remain objective, but betrays his presence through the choice of adjectives he assigns to measure the quality of the conversation: 'The conversation dignified / Nor intellectual nor mean, / And graceful, not too gay . . . ' (11-13). Just as one assumes that the conversation is dignified, there is a line break, and stepping past this suggests that it is actually neither dignified, nor serious. The sentence breaks off after describing the conversation as 'not too gay', and after a pause, the observer, in which he recollects his composure, ventures a final comment, invariably ironic, with overtones of bitterness: 'And so I say / How life goes well in pink and green!' (14-15). The observer attempts to adopt the mask of the indifferent commentator, unaffected by his observations, but fails, the self taking over assertively: 'And so, I say, I find it good'. It also shows the beginnings of

the use of the monologue, which Eliot was to develop further in his subsequent poetry ('Portrait of a Lady'). The language is not literary but conversational, indicating a preoccupation with following the contours of the rapidly developing thoughts of the observer.

Although the speaker of 'Still one more thought' attempts to adopt a detached and impersonal pose, it remains a contrived effort, conscious of its own self-effacement. Symons takes a similar view when he comments that Laforgue's style is a 'self-conscious ideal, becoming artificial through its extreme naturalness; for in poetry it is not "natural" to say things . . . in the manner of the moment, with however ironical an intention' (104). Eliot's subsequent poetical efforts (1910-11) consist, in particular, of the exploration and perfection of attitudes of indifference, crystallized in Laforgue, in the persona of the dandy. The dandy has connotations of frivolity, pompousness and superficial display. In Laforgue, however, the dandy is closer to the 'practice of austere, impassive elegance evinced by the early Regency exemplars such as Beau Brummel' (Svarny 49). Svarny identifies Laforguean dandyism with the 'aristocratic, ironic cult of the self'.

In Eliot, the dandy is associated with the 'mandarin', a term which has connotations of power and influence, and is often linked with figures of authority, such as politicians and bureaucrats. Ricks invites us to 'Compare a run of four stanzas in Byron . . . where the mandarin is taken as a type of cultivated indifference' (*IMH* 127). A sustained devotion to the indifferent pose assumes an urgency for Eliot in the early experiments of *Inventions*. This indicates his continued efforts to circumvent 'the tumultuous outcry of adjectives, the headstrong rush of undisciplined sentences' (*SW* 17) which he associated with the language of the romantics, and later, with excess and

emotion, both equally perverse to his sensibility. It also suggests that, for Eliot, such a stance could provide some restraint, and perhaps suggest an alternate model of selfhood, one which could promise a release for the individuals trapped in their mindless devotion to a life lived out of habit. Eliot wrote a sequence of four short poems titled 'Mandarins' in August 1910, and they read as studies in the posture of a cool, ironic detachment. The first of these begins with the perceptions of an observer as he watches one of the mandarins:

Stands there, complete,
 Stiffly addressed with sword and fan:
 What of the crowds that ran,
 Pushed, stared, and huddled, at his feet,
 Keen to appropriate the man? (*IMH*, 'Mandarins: 1' 1-5)

The crowds are depicted as swarming towards the mandarin, in awe and admiration of his stature and mien. They push, and struggle past each other in order to catch sight of him, and when they do, they can only stare at him in awe and adulation. They are described as being 'huddled, at his feet', a gesture suggesting the self-abasement suffered humbly to gain his audience and favour. But he is unmoved, indifferent at most: 'With fixed regardless eyes – / Looking neither out nor in – / The centre of formalities' (10-12). Against the backdrop of crowds which humble themselves before him, the mandarin rises swanlike, impervious and indifferent to his popularity and image as hero. While the crowds surrender their dignity in the act of gathering at his feet in worship, the mandarin wraps his dignity tightly around himself. He is detached from the fervent attempts of the masses to be present in his aura and partake in his strength and glory. The mandarin is 'complete' and inviolate in his dignity with 'fixed regardless eyes'. He chooses to betray no sentiment.

'Stands there, complete' sums up accurately the goal Eliot is trying to achieve. The mandarin is an embodiment of the self, idealized for being self-contained, self-sufficient; requiring no contact with the outside world. The terse style of the poem matches the detachment of the mandarin who is sketched in a few strokes. The verses in the poem are as compact and tight as the mandarin himself. A counterpart of this aristocratic hero is sketched in 'Mandarins: 3'; he is the 'eldest of the mandarins' (*IMH* 1) and is similar in his demeanour of imperviousness:

A stoic in obese repose,
With intellectual double chins,
Regards the corner of his nose (2-4)

Although his obesity and 'double chins' make him appear ridiculous, even to the cranes that fly past, he is too arrogantly engrossed in perfecting his outward mien to notice this. Through this obsessive preoccupation, he, too, desires to achieve the ideal of the indifferent self.

The 'Mandarin' sketches read as an exercise in the construction of a self which is imperial, and untrammelled by the outside world. The posture of indifference functions as a mask, behind which the true self may be concealed and protected. This corresponds to Symons's account of the mask in Laforgue:

He has invented . . . an inflexible politeness towards man,
woman, and destiny. He composes love-poems hat in hand, and
smiles with an exasperating tolerance before all the
transformations of the eternal feminine. . . . He will not permit
himself, at any moment, the luxury of dropping the mask: not at
any moment. (109-110)

The adoption of a disinterested pose towards the outside world, and a suitably oblique mode of expression, were congenial to Eliot. He came to prefer this style to that of the sentimental utterings associated with the Romantics. He believed that ‘there may be a good deal to be said for Romanticism in life, there is no place for it in letters’ (*SW* 32). These poems reveal him absorbed with perfecting this pose and idiom. The cultivation of the indifferent persona represents a form of discipline which could provide the guise behind which the mandarin conceal their pain, disappointments and suffering, and remain in control. However, the attention towards the perfection of this outward persona assumes such an exigency that it translates into an egotistical obsession with the self, and the mandarins lose all awareness of outside reality: ‘And what of all that one has missed! / And how life goes on different planes!’ (*IMH*, ‘Mandarins: 3’ 11-12). This comment attempts to appear inconsequential, and in doing so, it attracts attention to itself, and expresses more meaningfully a dissatisfaction with the mandarin pose. The implication is that indifference effects an imprisonment within one’s own ego, a confinement in which the ability to live fully is completely obliterated. Eliot himself voices this view when he comments of Byron: ‘to a man so occupied with himself and with the figure he was cutting nothing outside could be altogether real’ (*On Poetry and Poets* 195).

These poems depict Eliot’s various wrestlings with the problem of the self’s relation to discipline. Cuda makes a similar point in his comment that ‘Questions of self-control—and the doubts and fears associated with relinquishing it—assume a singular urgency in Eliot’s early poems’ (35). Despite the preoccupation with these matters, a satisfactory solution remains elusive for Eliot, and the recurring image in several of these early pieces is that of the

trapped individual. 'Interlude in London' (April 1911) evokes a dull, gloomy city of sudden rains, whose inhabitants remain perpetually bound within their houses, and by implication, within their own selves:

We hibernate among the bricks
 And live across the window panes
 With marmalade and tea at six
 Indifferent to what the wind does
 Indifferent to sudden rains
 Softening last year's garden plots (*IMH* 1-6)

The inhabitants of this city are incapable of living fully—they 'hibernate', and are capable only of being 'Indifferent'. The business of living is conducted passively, 'across the window panes'. The malaise is so deep-rooted that individuals fail to notice or respond to the change in seasons. While spring arrives, breathing new life in nature and going about 'Inspiring mouldy flowerpots' (9), individuals fail to respond and remain untouched. Spring is unable to inspire them to come out of their state of hibernation, and they remain 'apathetic, with cigars' (7), detached and 'Careless'. Not able to respond to the vitality of spring, they continue to live a sterile existence, shut in their brick houses, and bound to their superficial routines of 'marmalade and tea at six'. This poem appears to be inspired by Eliot's brief visit to London in 1911, about which he wrote to his cousin Eleanor Hinkley from Paris (April 1911):

At London, one pretended that it was spring, and tried to coax the spring, and talk of the beautiful weather; but one continued to hibernate amongst the bricks. And one looked through the windows, and the waiter brought in eggs and coffee, and the

Graphic (which I conscientiously tried to read, to please them)

(*Letters* 17)

The image of the isolated individual recurs in other poems of this period, such as 'Interlude: in a Bar' (1911) and 'Paysage Triste' (1914). 'Entretien dans un parc' (1911) can be regarded as development of the 'Mandarins' sequence as it continues the presentation of a solitary persona, but also provides a glimpse of its anguished consciousness. In this poem, the ironic posture of the detached observer is abandoned, and instead the rapidly unfolding thoughts of the intensely self-conscious speaker are pursued through a monologue. The poem depicts an individual walking beside his beloved and contemplating the disclosure of his feelings for her: an act he fails to accomplish. In his self-awareness he endlessly examines his innermost thoughts: he is afraid of being rejected once he has revealed his true feelings, and this weakness frustrates him as it translates into his inability to seize the moment and perhaps discover a meaningful contact with another individual. He becomes ensnared in a painful state of paralysis, haunted by his own misgivings. The metaphor of a boiling cauldron conveys the state of his agitated mind, simmering with a host of conflicting thoughts: 'Round and round, as in a bubbling pot / That will not cool' (*IMH* 22-23). A failure to connect with another self converts into the protagonist's agonizing confinement within his own mind (and by implication, his own self), indicated first by the metaphor of the 'bubbling pot', and later, the 'blind alley':

– Up a blind alley, stopped with broken walls

Papered with posters, chalked with childish scrawls! – (26-27)

The 'childish scrawls' may be interpreted as those thoughts which initially incited him to make his declaration, but now, in his self-imprisonment, serve as

a mocking reminder of his failure. Cuda has suggested that ‘these early speakers are not sure whether to hold on or let go, whether relinquishing control is a dangerous threat or a welcome release’ (36). However, these early selves do not consider self-surrender merely as a form of ‘release’—welcome for its own sake and for the relief it promises from painful self-examination—but as a means to associate with an external identity. The desire for these individuals is not to retain their self-control, or abandon it once it becomes cumbersome, but to surrender it to another self or an authority outside the self. Hence, the speaker in ‘Entretien’, failing to assert an affinity with his beloved, considers a release from his plight in terms of an association with another deity:

Some day, if God –

But then, what opening out of dusty souls! (*IMH* 33-34)

The poem stops at the frontiers of this metaphysical speculation. The possibility of a self-discipline defined by religious parameters is proposed but not entertained, implying a reinforcement of the existing situation. This suggests that a quest for some form of self-control is present, but the solution is as yet elusive. Consequently, these poems begin to appear as increasingly rooted in the minds of their protagonists, obsessed with the ego and its deliberations, and conveying intensely personal, subjective realities. In fact, another (undated) poem, ‘Introspection’, reinforces the image of the mind as a ‘blind alley’, and is emblematic of this malaise:

The mind was six feet deep in a
cistern and a brown snake with a tri-
angular head having swallowed his
tail was struggling like two fists
interlocked. (*IMH* 1-5)

The mind is submerged in a cistern of its own reflections. The phrase 'six feet deep' has connotations of the grave: the mind cut off from all sources of vitality is depicted as dead and buried. An intense sense of claustrophobia is heightened by the images of the snake swallowing its tail, and the interlocked fists; punctuation marks could offer a break in the flow of the sentences, and their absence enhances the poem's steadily building atmosphere of dreadful life-denying horror. Unable to form an association with anything external, the egotistical self is forced to retreat inwards, where it is swallowed whole by its own thoughts and fears. From such thought it is possible only to recoil in terror and disgust. In his essays, Eliot criticized Romanticism for being 'a short cut to the strangeness without the reality', and insisted that it led 'its disciples only back upon themselves' (SW 31). It is ironic that while Eliot earnestly tried to distance himself from the Romantic self-imprisonment, his poems of this period struggle at this impasse, and continue to be afflicted by their predecessors' predicament.

While poems such as 'Introspection' communicate the frustrated efforts of individuals who desire an affiliation with an external authority, *Inventions* also depicts Eliot's perceptions of the squalid and broken city, and the fragmentation in the society around him. These, in turn, provide an important insight into Eliot's increasing sense of urgency for the ideal of self-discipline, and explain why the protagonists in his poetry also reflect this acute need. From 1909-1910, Eliot wrote a group of three poems which read as sketches of the wretchedness of city life. These poems—'First Caprice in North Cambridge', 'Fourth Caprice in Montparnasse', and 'Second Caprice in North Cambridge'—are loosely based on the slums around the Cambridge area in Massachusetts, where Eliot was attending university as an undergraduate. They were also later to become the

series of poems comprising the 'Preludes', and they express vividly Eliot's experience of the sterility and isolation in the society around him. The 'Second Caprice' (November 1909) invokes a cold and uninviting cityscape:

This charm of vacant lots!
 The helpless fields that lie
 Sinister, sterile and blind –
 Entreat the eye and rack the mind,
 Demand your pity. (*IMH* 1-5)

The charm of the city is sarcastically associated with its 'vacant lots', indicating, perhaps, that people had ceased to inhabit them. The abandonment acquires a more sordid aspect by the associated images of 'ashes and tins in piles, / Shattered bricks and tiles' (6-7). The fields, too, are barren, characterized by the adjectives 'helpless', 'sterile and blind', denoting a loss of productivity. These images evoke an acute sense of brokenness: the city is not living and vital, but vacant, sinister, and indeed 'the débris of a city' (8) which can only 'Demand your pity'. Personal expression is eschewed for the ironic pose—'This charm of vacant lots!'— and the wry, unemotional response 'Demand your pity'. Van Wyck Brooks described the city (Boston) during this time as one of 'sad sterility, the fruit of emotional desiccation' (qtd. in Ackroyd 39). Eliot felt an irritation, bordering on aversion, with the narrowness of this society, as well as despair in general for the human condition trapped amidst the chaos of modern cities dedicated to the rapid onslaught of progress and materialism. Eliot experienced these feelings of sterility and isolation not only in St. Louis and Boston, but also in Paris and, later on, London.

The fragmentation and emotional desiccation which profoundly disturbed Eliot, and which his early poetry vividly expresses, are closely linked to the

ideals of progress, materialism, and the advance of science as witnessed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Robert Langbaum identifies this emotional desiccation as ‘the declining vitality of the self in literature’, and relates it to ‘mass production, mass markets, mass media, to increasing urbanization, industrialization, specialization, and to the increasing alienation of the self . . . from all its specialized functions’ (7). The modern cities were sites of such mass production, and its accompanying malaise: the sterile self. Poets like Eliot, and Baudelaire, Thomson, Davidson, and Dowson before him, sought to express these experiences through poetry.

Alongside this sense of fragmentation in society, Eliot was also deeply conscious of a profound feeling of spiritual longing, which intensified with his maturity, partly because of his estrangement from his family’s Unitarian beliefs. He once commented, ‘I was brought up outside the Christian fold, in Unitarianism’ (qtd. in Sigg 8). As early as June 1910, he depicted in ‘Silence’, an experience of a moment when one is carried beyond the limits of temporal constraint and made aware of a higher truth: ‘At such peace I am terrified. / There is nothing else beside’ (*IMH* 15-16). Eliot later said about this experience, ‘You may call it communion with the Divine or you may call it temporary crystallization of the mind’ (qtd. in Gordon 24). ‘Silence’ also portrays a moment of that self-transcendence which Eliot desired through an association with classicism, but so far remained elusive for him. In the poem, ‘the garrulous waves of life’ (*IMH* 3) cease to exist; the self experiences a release from its own preoccupations, and a connection with a higher entity, characterized here, as ‘peace’ (15) and stillness. Ronald Schuchard has described this as ‘an ecstatic visionary experience’, one that remained important in Eliot’s life (121). Eliot uses various terms, such as ‘peace’, ‘Absolute’ and ‘God’ in several of his early

poems, and they signify his nascent concept of the Divine.

The first of the two poems in the group 'Easter: Sensations of April' (April 1910) also considers the possibility of self-surrender through an affiliation with 'God'. The observer regards a child:

The little negro girl who lives across the alley
Brings back a red geranium from church;
She repeats her little formulae of God. (*IMH* 1-3)

The flower, this time is a red geranium, seems symbolic of the little girl's faith and belief. A tinge of envy is felt on the part of the observer as he comments that she repeats her 'little formulae' with such certainty and assurance.

However, the tone becomes noticeably wistful, as he acknowledges that his geraniums, his 'formulae of God', have decayed: 'Withered and dry / Long laid by / In the sweepings of the memory' (10-12). The poem ends with the refrain of the opening lines: 'The little negro girl across the alley / Brings a geranium from Sunday school' (13-14). Ricks notes Eliot's excision of the intended last line (following line 14): 'She is very sure of God' (*IMH* 23). The phrase is abrupt; its tone is mildly mocking, almost attempting derision of the girl's unquestioning faith, yet, at the same time, expressing a profound longing for just such a certainty which was consistently eluding Eliot. However, deciding to delete this line, Eliot ends the poem with the same refrain with which it opens. This intimates that Eliot's poetry is strongly motivated by the desire for a religious and spiritual affirmation, but that these efforts are continually frustrated, leaving the poet rooted in an intense egotism, locked in the life of the mind.

The Unitarian religion Eliot had inherited from his family was unable to organize or provide an explanation for this experience of fragmentation and spiritual emptiness; nor could it provide an affirmation of those values that could

afford any degree of consolation or solace amidst the chaos and confusion surrounding him. Eliot's condition was very much like one of the selves depicted in *The Waste Land* who, steeped in despair and eluded by hope, is forced to voice an anguished plea: 'I can connect / Nothing with nothing' (*TWL* 301-2). But for Eliot in 1911 the search for a religious substitute, or a tradition, found renewed inspiration and vigour in the vitalist philosophy of Henri Bergson. The next chapter examines this influence on Eliot, and explores whether Bergson's metaphysical system could offer him a relationship with the external authority he so fervently sought. Eliot was at the crossroads of a spiritual dilemma at this time, and his encounter with Bergson deeply influenced him. In the years to follow, the quest for a system of values and order would lead Eliot not only to other philosophical systems, such as Eastern philosophy, but also other religions such as Buddhism. But for the present, Bergson's philosophy offered him much needed reassurance; it presented a system of values and beliefs that could provide some explanation and coherence in a world divested of meaning.

Chapter 2

Bergson and the Reflections of Individualism

Eliot once remarked: 'My only conversion, by the deliberate influence of any individual, was a temporary conversion to Bergsonism' (*IMH* 411). Bergson was enjoying enormous popularity in France during the early twentieth century, and the public lectures that he delivered at the Collège de France afforded him great renown beyond the immediate circles of the university. Sanford Schwartz writes that for 'the younger French intellectuals who flocked to his lectures he was known as the "liberator"—the man who had redeemed Western thought from the nineteenth-century "religion of science"' ('Politics of Vitalism' 288). Bergson continued to exert an important influence on Western thought until the outbreak of the First World War, and his philosophy had wide-reaching implications for a number of fields including art, theology, and science. Eliot spent a year from October 1910 in France, and it was at the Collège de France that he attended Bergson's weekly lectures. Eliot was strongly influenced by certain strains of his philosophy which he found congenial: 'I was certainly very much under . . . (Bergson's) influence during the year 1910-11, when I both attended his lectures and gave close study to the books he had then written' (*IMH* 412).

Eliot continued to be preoccupied with the relationship between the self and discipline, and was deeply engaged in the search for a higher authority, a system of values which the fragmented self could identify with, thereby granting it a release from its isolation within the ego. At the same time, he was unable to reconcile himself with the materialist perspective which proposed that 'nothing can exist outside the gigantic mechanism of causes and effects; necessity

moves the emotions in my mind' (qtd. in Levenson 40). He was resentful of such a scientific outlook which, he believed, could only reduce human beings to mere machines, devoid of self-control and capable only of a puppet-like adherence to social customs. Various early poems, such as 'Spleen', 'Mandarins' and 'Goldfish: Essence of Summer Magazines', direct Eliot's sarcasm at such a lifeless existence. Concerned as he was by the compromise of standards and morals in a scientific age, the shift away from a mechanistic viewpoint, as promoted by Bergson, would have appeared very appealing to Eliot. 'Bergson attracted Eliot at the time', writes Mayer, because the 'empiricist view of life based solely on matter is a partial and inadequate view, extrapolated from only a part of reality' (78). Although the influence of Bergson on Eliot proved temporary, and Eliot would later move on to define his position in terms corresponding to those of F.H. Bradley, it lasted long enough for him to produce the 'Preludes', 'Rhapsody' and 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', among others.

'He said: this universe is very clever', an early poem dated March 1911 and composed in Paris, indicates Eliot's deep involvement with ideas and concepts encountered at Bergson's lectures. The poem states that the physical laws have successfully explained the universe. 'The scientists have laid it out on paper' (*IMH* 2), its inner workings reduced to formulae: 'Each atom goes on working out its law' (3) and can never act outside it. The tone is detached, yet does not fail to convey Eliot's deep engagement with the spiritual crisis in a world composed entirely of atoms, where consciousness has become a mere by-product of this composition, deducible by the self-same laws. Another Bergsonian poem, written that same month, 'The smoke that gathers blue and sinks', similarly explores the possibility of human action in a mechanized world.

The opening lines depict a scene in a bar which is smothered with the ‘torpid smoke of rich cigars’ (*IMH* 2). Consumed with the after-dinner drinks, the speaker regards the repugnant prospect

Of matter “going by itself”
 Existence just about to die
 Stifled with glutinous liqueurs
 Till hardly a sensation stirs
 The overoiled machinery . . . (6-10)

This idea weighs upon the speaker’s mind with an intensity which is as ‘overpowering’ (4) as the cigar smoke pervading the room. The contemplation of this idea for the speaker is equivalent to imagining existence dying altogether. He observes how ‘glutinous liqueurs’ can stifle normal human functioning, and compares that to the stifling effect of physical laws in the realm of spontaneous action.

The speaker is unable to imagine spontaneity and freedom in such a world of matter in which all human actions are deducible by physical laws, leaving no room for new, impulsive actions. Stripped of spontaneity, human beings are reduced to pieces of ‘overoiled machinery’. He ponders the possibility of freedom: ‘What, you want action? / Some attraction?’ (*IMH*, ‘The Smoke that Gathers’ 11-12). But when he hears the music of ‘The piano and the flute and two violins’ (14) he feels that this, too, is mechanical. The entire after-dinner scene, the music, the singing, the dancing, takes on a mindless, automatic character, so that the room resembles the thoughts in his mind ‘Of matter “going by itself”’. The sarcastic tone expresses Eliot’s repulsion with the mechanistic view: ‘That’s the stuff! / (Here’s your gin / Now begin!)’ (22-24).

In opposition to such a mechanistic view (which sees human beings as mere machines), Bergson's vitalist philosophy maintained that materialism and scientific laws may well account for the universe, but they remain unable to account adequately for such phenomena as human action, thought and consciousness. In opposition to mechanism, he put forward concepts of dynamism, free will and intuition, transforming human beings from mere automata to independent beings capable of novelty and of exercising freedom and spontaneity. In proposing such novel ideas, Bergson rescued human beings from their bondage to the physical laws of cause and effect, and restored to them their human character. Therein lies the source of Bergson's appeal to Eliot. He believed that an affiliation with Bergson's metaphysics could be life-affirming: it could liberate human beings from their lifeless existence of rehearsed routines, and render a connection with an external framework of values, which could provide nourishment and vitality to the individual disintegrating within the confines of its own subjective realities. The discussion in this chapter aims to explore to what extent the individuals (in the poems of 1909-11) are capable of the self-discipline, which could enable the association with the Bergsonian system.

'Preludes III' was written in Paris in July 1911, and belongs to a group of four poems which read as vignettes of city life. They incorporate the three fragments, 'First Caprice in North Cambridge', 'Fourth Caprice in Montparnasse' and 'Second Caprice in North Cambridge', which Eliot jotted down earlier in his *Inventions*. All four 'Preludes' centre around the experiences of a solitary self wandering around the city at night. A squalid, broken and decaying city is evoked in these pieces. 'Preludes I', for example vividly imagines the city on a winter evening, with gusty showers relentlessly beating down on broken

chimneys and tattered blinds. The observer's feelings of loneliness can be deduced from his observation: 'And at the corner of the street / A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps' (*CP* 11-12). Eliot converts his experience of desolation and estrangement in sprawling cities into poetic material in a way reminiscent of the French Symbolists and their precursor, Baudelaire.

Acknowledging this debt, Eliot writes:

from Baudelaire I learned first, a precedent for the poetical possibilities . . . of the more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis, of the possibility of fusion between the sordidly realistic and the phantasmagoric . . . From him, as from Laforgue, I learned that the sort of material that I had, the sort of experience that an adolescent had had, in an industrial city in America, could be the material for poetry (*IMH* 390)

The 'Preludes' in particular, and later on *The Waste Land*, draw on Eliot's experiences of modern cities, and convert this into subject matter for poetry.

'Preludes III' begins with an image of a restless self who is unable to sleep at night:

You tossed a blanket from the bed,
You lay upon your back, and waited (*CP* 24-25)

The verb 'waited' suggests that this self is anticipating something, the arrival of which is imminent and causing it much anxiety and restlessness. The next lines reveal the nature of the anticipated event:

You dozed, and watched the night revealing
The thousand sordid images
Of which your soul was constituted;
They flickered against the ceiling. (26-29)

The event, in fact, is the self gaining a rare insight into its dark and innermost recesses which normally remain elusive, but are revealed here as the self watches passively. The enjambment on 'revealing' encourages a hurrying on to the following line to learn the import of the night's revelation. Surprisingly absent is the ironic tone heard frequently in many of the early poems, such as the wry observation in the 'Second Caprice': 'This charm of vacant lots!' (*IMH* 1). This time the observer in this poem is detached.

The vision that the subject is anxiously awaiting is a source of contemplation because it reveals the truth about the innermost depths of the self. The idea of an inner self depicted here corresponds to Bergson's concept of duration: 'We should therefore distinguish . . . two very different ways of regarding duration, two aspects of conscious life' (*Time and Free Will* 128). Bergson defines the outer life as 'the numerical multiplicity of conscious states', and the inner life as real duration 'whose heterogeneous moments permeate one another'. For Bergson, the discontinuity between the two types of consciousness engenders two selves: the outer self, which is adapted to social life and acts in the material world of cause and effect, and is in fact a spatial representation of the inner 'fundamental' self which can be identified with our 'fluid inner states' (*TFW* 129). In 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', Prufrock's desire to 'prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet' (*CP* 27), refers to the outer self which Bergson articulates.

In 'Preludes III', the outer consciousness of the perceiving self, which tosses and turns nervously, is juxtaposed with the inner fundamental self, and is identified with the 'thousand sordid images / Of which your soul was constituted' (*CP* 27-28). Bergson regards these inner states (or the soul) as the source of all truth, life and reality, accessible through a 'vigorous effort of analysis' which he

calls intuition, a method of deep introspection (*TWF* 129). He explains that our outer self is more active, and is better equipped to cope with everyday life than the inner self; consequently, 'consciousness prefers it, and gradually loses sight of the fundamental self' (128). As the inner life of the fundamental self is alienated, it requires a willful act of intuition to restore it to us. In 'Preludes III', it is by an act of intuition that the self has been provided with a rare insight into the life of its immediate experience. The poem intimates that the action is taking place at night, a time when the pressing engagements of the day recede and allow the self to approach to the state of introspection. This enables the contemplation of the inner life of immediate experience, which in the case of this poem only succeeds in revealing 'sordid images'.

The observation, 'And when all the world came back' (*CP*, 'Preludes III' 30), suggests that while the vision lasted, the outer world ceased to exist for the self. The rhyming couplet which follows, points to the gradual return of consciousness as it assimilates the world around itself: 'And the light crept up between the shutters / And you heard the sparrows in the gutters' (31-32).

These are the longest lines in the poem, and depict the slow return to reality, as if the self were awaking from a dream. When consciousness returns, the scene is the self-same city, mechanized, eliciting the usual automated responses. The self has gained an insight which transforms the vision of its external surroundings:

You had such a vision of the street

As the street hardly understands (33-34)

However, the poem concludes with the self resuming the motor habits of everyday life: 'Sitting along the bed's edge, where / You curled the papers from

your hair' (35-36). The verbs suggest the same passivity with which the poem opens: clasping, curling, sitting.

The acts of freedom that Bergson places alongside the acts of intuition do not materialize. For Bergson, human beings, in their everyday lives, seldom act as free agents, but are tied to their habitual functioning; it is by intuiting duration that human beings can become free, their alienated inner life restored to them. Bergson places freedom in our 'most immediate experience' (Guerlac 102). Eliot's poem merely makes a disappointing return to the outer consciousness of everyday existence, closing with the image of the self sitting inert, clasping the soles of her feet 'In the palms of both soiled hands' (*CP* 38). The acts of novelty which can be performed by grasping the fundamental self are not generated. Not only is reality facing inward, the action of the poem also occurs internally, and outward action is minimal, denoted by verbs denoting passivity, inaction: 'lay' and 'waited' (25), 'dozed' and 'watched' (26). Intuition, as a means to grasp reality, merely draws the self inward, to regard the contents of its own consciousness, and hence attaches importance to the reality of the inner life. Reason and intellect are disregarded in the Bergsonian system; reality is to be understood and perceived through the channels of the self. This reinforces the primacy of the ego. Ironically, an association with the inner life translates not into a release, but a further continuation of the individual's self-imprisonment.

Another poem written in Paris, 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' (March 1911), continues the motif of a solitary figure wandering through a city at night. The poem begins at midnight:

Twelve o'clock.

Along the reaches of the street

Held in a lunar synthesis,
 Whispering lunar incantations
 Dissolve the floors of memory
 And all its clear relations,
 Its divisions and precisions. (*CP* 1-7)

The street at night appears mesmerized under the spell of moonlight, its 'lunar synthesis' has a similar effect on the mind of the wandering observer; the contents of his memory fuse and intermingle. In a symbolist fashion a gloomy city is portrayed, with a dreamlike quality, evoked by the street illuminated by moonlight which blurs the concrete shapes of both memory and reality, confusing its neat 'divisions and precisions'. The entire milieu is imbued with a phantasmal dreamlike quality, reminiscent of the decadence associated with the nineties. There can be observed in these verses a correspondence between the contents of the street and memory: both are held under the spell of lunar incantations, denoting a relation between the two which the poem, as it progresses, explores further. Also, the image of midnight shaking the memory as a 'madman shakes a dead geranium' (12) intimates that the memory, already under the lunar spell, has had its contents shaken, perhaps to be summoned later.

Sure enough, in the following stanza, the observer's attention is drawn to a woman standing in a doorway; he notices that the 'corner of her eye' is twisted like a 'crooked pin' (*CP* 21, 22). The adjective 'crooked' in turn summons 'A crowd of twisted things' (24): a twisted branch, rusty springs. In fact, as the poem progresses, this pattern repeats itself. The observer is drawn towards certain objects, and actions on the street which, in turn, prompt corresponding images in his memories—the automatic action of the cat that

slips out his tongue to devour a morsel of butter, triggers a random memory of a child similarly slipping out his hand to clutch a toy. During the course of the night, the street is only able to summon dissociated, disparate recollections for the observer: a twisted branch, broken springs in rusty factory yards, old crabs. These wretched images do not offer the promise of comfort or joy, but a weariness, a Laforguean ennui, a bitter disappointment.

The poem's emphasis on memory finds a correspondence in Bergson, who states in *Matter and Memory*, that: 'There are . . . two memories which are profoundly distinct' (150-51). The first is true memory which contains the totality of our lived experiences. The second, predisposed to action, is one 'in which our body has condensed its past into motor habits' (*MM* 241). The poem is structured around the spatial division of time denoted by clock time—'Twelve o' clock', 'Half-past one', 'Half-past two' (*CP* 1, 13, 33)—and in direct opposition is placed the duration of consciousness where the memory retrieves past recollections. For Bergson, true memory 'Coextensive with consciousness . . . retains and ranges alongside of each other all our states in the order in which they occur, leaving to each fact its place and, consequently, marking its date' (*MM* 151). He assigns the virtues of precision and orderliness to true memory. In the poem:

Midnight shakes the memory

As a madman shakes a dead geranium. (*CP* 11-12)

Once the neat arrangement of memory is disturbed, there is room for a deeper synthesis to occur and the memories can permeate each other. The alliterative effect of the words '[m]idnight', 'memory', and 'madman' is to draw an increased attention to the memory, implying subtly that the contents of the memory will have a bearing on the development of the poem's action.

Regarding the manner in which present action retrieves corresponding recollections from the vast realms of true memory, Bergson observes: 'that a recollection should reappear in consciousness, it is necessary that it should descend from the heights of pure memory down to the precise point where *action* is taking place . . . , it is from the present that the appeal to which memory responds comes' (*MM* 153). In the poem, the speaker's attention is drawn by the street lamp to the moon itself, which is portrayed here as female: 'She winks a feeble eye, / She smiles into corners' (*CP*, 'Rhapsody' 52-53). But her face is marred by smallpox, she has 'lost her memory', and is frail:

'She is alone
With all the old nocturnal smells
That cross and cross across her brain.' (59-61)

The night presents the observer with the image of a withered old moon, and immediately his memory responds with a corresponding image of decaying flowers:

The reminiscence comes
Of sunless dry geraniums
And dust in crevices (62-64)

Further, the moon's association with the smells of the night, prompts the recollection of unpleasant 'female smells in shuttered rooms' (66). Women in Eliot's poetry are often associated with madness, as for example in a later prose poem 'Hysteria', where the observer narrates how the laughter of his beloved has the awful effect of engulfing him, so that he becomes consumed by it: 'I was drawn in by short gasps, inhaled at each momentary recovery, lost finally in the dark caverns of her throat, bruised by the ripple of unseen muscles' (*CP* 32).

'Rhapsody' portrays a subject trying to grasp the inner fundamental self, but in an identical fashion to the 'Preludes III', this intuitive exercise brings to the surface twisted and sordid images. These promise no escape from the squalid city the observer inhabits; nor do they enable any acts of freedom or novelty. This disappointing realization prompts the subject to end his wandering and return home. Aided by 'Memory!' (the sensorimotor memory of habit) he searches automatically for a key to unlock his door (*CP*, 'Rhapsody' 72). Disillusioned, perhaps embittered by his experience, he hopes to find escape in sleep: 'Put your shoes at the door, sleep, prepare for life' (77).

Here lies the irony: 'if almost the whole of our past is hidden from us because it is inhibited by the necessities of present action, it will find strength to cross the threshold of consciousness . . . where we renounce . . . effective action to replace ourselves . . . in the life of dreams. Sleep . . . brings about an indifference of just this kind' (*MM* 154). For Bergson, sleep is a state where the self is free from the need for social action. All the past recollections which the subject is trying to escape through sleep will be realized here, ironically, in fuller detail, for there is in fact no escape. This is 'The last twist of the knife' (*CP*, 'Rhapsody' 78).

In 'Rhapsody', the free acts towards which the self strives through intuition remain finally and bitterly elusive. As in 'Prelude III', the attempt to affiliate with the Bergsonian system only fortifies and reinforces the protagonist's self-imprisonment. The poem remains rooted within the ego of the observing self who merely completes a journey through its own submerged terrain; memory assists this process, and makes available those long forgotten images and events which only allow the self to become more absorbed in the varied contents of its own consciousness. The poem attains an intensely

subjective character through these processes that allow the self to indulge its inner life, while reducing external reality to a stimulus which merely enables a connection with the deeper self, where, for Bergson, all reality ultimately lies.

In both 'Preludes III' and 'Rhapsody', the ironic tone of Eliot's earlier poems is discarded for an impassive, dispassionate narrating voice, intensely absorbed in the experiences of the isolated selves. Both poems are Bergsonian in the ways in which they grant primacy to the life of the mind, and in their attempts to sketch the human consciousness. Although the protagonists of both 'Preludes III' and 'Mandarins I' are solitary figures, the latter is more concerned with perfecting poses, whereas the former offers explorations into the inner life of the selves, giving this poem a dimension absent in Eliot's earlier pieces.

In both 'Preludes III' and 'Rhapsody', Eliot has depicted passive figures, silently observing the contents of their inner selves as they are revealed through acts of intuition. They remain, however, silent spectators in the theatre of their consciousness. With 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', we observe a self whose inner life is portrayed vividly, and who is not merely a spectator, but is also actively engaged in a monologue with himself: 'Let us go then, you and I' (*CP* 1). In contemplating an action, 'Let us go', this poem marks an advancement from the self depicted in 'Preludes III'— 'You lay upon your back, and waited' (*CP* 25), and 'Rhapsody'—'The reminiscence comes / Of sunless dry geraniums' (62-63). In both cases, the selves portrayed are mere observers. The passive selves in the 'Preludes' and 'Rhapsody', and the animated self of 'Prufrock', correspond to Bergson's concept of our psychic states:

Between the plane of action—the plane in which our body has condensed its past into motor habits—and the plane of pure memory, where our mind retains in all its details the picture of our

past life, we believe that we can discover thousands of different planes of consciousness, a thousand integral and yet diverse repetitions of the whole of the experience through which we have lived. (*MM* 241)

In the 'Preludes' as well as 'Rhapsody', the self is passive and operates closer to the plane of pure memory. The divided self of 'Prufrock' is, however, a development in that it depicts a self contemplating an action, but his psychic life aggressively prevents its actualization.

'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' marks a culmination of the skills which Eliot had been perfecting since his earliest poetic experiments. Its ironies are derived from the Laforguean pose of indifference, which Eliot had been practising since the 'Mandarin' poems. The poem announces that it is a 'Love Song', yet a glance at the opening lines soon overturns traditional expectations:

Let us go then, you and I,
 When the evening is spread out against the sky
 Like a patient etherised upon a table;
 Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
 The muttering retreats
 Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels (*CP* 1-6)

The self of Prufrock, divided between a 'you' and 'I', proposes an action: 'Let us go'. The proposition of a journey associated with a 'Love Song' may instigate pleasant thoughts, but this anticipation is soon greeted by images of deserted streets, sordid love affairs, and cheap hotels. This reversal in expectations is mimicked in the metrical order of the rhyming couplet suddenly giving way to a longer, unrhymed line: 'Like a patient etherised upon a table'.

Kenneth Asher suggests a Bergsonian influence in this poem: '[Eliot] does confess that the infatuation lasted long enough for him to have written "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" as a Bergsonian, and a quick glance at this early poem confirms the assessment' (35). 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' shows how Eliot went on to experiment with the Bergsonian concepts, and how in doing so, his poetry attains a deep subjectivity, to an extent where Prufrock's self-absorption tends to perceive outside reality as mirroring his own inner states. The 'Streets that follow like a tedious argument' (*CP*, 'The Love Song' 8) are, in fact, the deliberations of his own mind. This is also evident in Prufrock's preoccupation with himself. He compares the evening spreading out 'against the sky' to a 'patient etherised upon a table' when the patient to be examined, in fact, is Prufrock himself; it the thoughts of his own mind which will be dissected in the course of 'The Love Song'. The poem depicts Prufrock addressing his divided self: a 'you' and 'I'. This self derives from Bergson's division of the self between an outer, social and an inner, true self. It is in the inner world of Prufrock's consciousness that all the action of the poem occurs. Here he contemplates an action, which is so overwhelming that he is too frightened even to put it in words: 'Oh, do not ask, "what is it?"' (*CP* 11). Throughout the poem, we find Prufrock deliberating the action, 'Let us go and make our visit' (12), but unable to perform it. Each time he comes close to the action, his mind is carried away by indecisions, and action is delayed.

It is useful here to consider Bergson's concept of the 'zones of indetermination' (*MM* 39) surrounding our actions: it is the time taken by the sensorimotor apparatus of our bodies to choose an appropriate response to a stimulus, preventing or interrupting an automatic response. 'This indeterminacy delays the automatic response, thereby opening up a horizon of choice', as

Guerlac puts it (108). This allows, in the case of Prufrock, ‘time yet for a hundred indecisions, / And for a hundred visions and revisions’ (*CP*, ‘The Love Song’ 32-33). For Prufrock, the ability to choose an appropriate response does not make voluntary action possible, but serves only to inhibit it. In the vast intractable vista of choice which opens up, there are hundreds of indecisions to navigate, and Prufrock loses his way.

The thought of an action—‘Let us go and make our visit’—immediately invites uncertainty: ‘And indeed there will be time’ (*CP*, ‘The Love Song’ 23). This is followed by ‘There will be time, there will be time / To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet’ (26-27). Unable to choose an appropriate response, Prufrock tries to find solace in the thought that there is time yet ‘for a hundred visions and revisions’ before his meeting, and the ‘taking of a toast and tea’ (33, 34). As Prufrock contemplates an action, and remains indecisive, he is drawn towards the contemplation of his past:

For I have known them all already, known them all –
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons (49-50)

This contemplation, however, does not facilitate an action. Rather, it leaves Prufrock in a deeper state of indecision: ‘So how should I presume?’ (54). According to Bergson, the zones of indeterminacy work together with ‘the survival of past images in memory’ and this is ‘what makes voluntary action possible’ (Guerlac 122). The contemplation of past images occurs in Prufrock, but it does not elicit a voluntary action.

Soon, Prufrock considers climbing the stairs to meet his lady. But, here again, he is trapped in indecision. Past memories serve only to remind him how he will be regarded when he enters the room:

And I have known the eyes already, known them all –

The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase (*CP* 14)

Tormented by his own self-consciousness, Prufrock imagines that when he walks into a room every eye is fixed on him, as if in mockery. Such painful thoughts merely serve to inhibit any positive action; he fails to act yet again. 'This indetermination, as we have shown, will express itself in a reflection upon themselves or, better, in a division, of the images which surround our body' (*MM* 64). In the time taken to formulate a response, there is time for the self to regard itself. So, too, in Prufrock when he regards his outer social self: 'My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin, / My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin' (*CP* 42-43). This is also evident in the manner in which he observes his inner psychic states: 'I should have been a pair of ragged claws' (73).

In those instances when Prufrock regards past recollections and images, he operates closest to the planes of pure memory. As time passes—'And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!'—the burden of making a decision becomes inevitable (*CP*, 'The Love Song' 75). It is here that his self becomes more animated, dwelling on past images, in order to arrive at a certain decision which will rid him also of his unbearable state of irresolution. This is evident when, with the memory of eyes that look at him disapprovingly, still fresh in his mind, Prufrock conjectures, 'And how should I presume?' (61). On this instance, as he probes deeper into the realms of memory, he is served by images of 'Arms that are braceleted and white and bare' (63) which, he confesses, he has known already: 'And I have known the arms already, known them all' (62). He is comforted by the vision of past images in which he submerges himself, perhaps, with the knowledge that memories will always be his refuge from the present, which will remain unable to afford him any such encounters.

In contemplating an action, Prufrock seamlessly flits back and forth between his present and past, resulting in a portrayal of a number of his psychic states which, according to Bergson, lie between the planes of pure memory and action. Moreover, it results in the portrayal of a self which is animated, active and more fully realized than the selves discussed in previous poems. It is in this that Prufrock achieves the depth that Bergson assigned to the self:

as we advance further into the depths of consciousness: the deep-seated self which ponders and decides, which heats and blazes up, is a self whose states and changes permeate one another . . . this deeper self forms one and the same person with the superficial ego. (*TFW* 125)

The deep-seated self which ponders and decides, and which for Bergson usually lies inert, is realized here in Prufrock with forceful energy. It is the self which is confronted with the responsibility of making a decision and is ridden by indecision, so that in the concluding lines of the poem, haunted by failure to act, Prufrock resigns himself to his fate:

I grow old . . . I grow old . . .
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

(*CP*, 'The Love Song' 120-21)

The voluntary action he contemplated never occurs, just like the love song that was meant to be sung but never gets sung. There is no freedom to be seized, no novelty spills forth, just a fantasy of mermaids singing: 'I have seen them riding seaward on the waves' (126). But even here, Prufrock ruminates: 'I do not think that they will sing to me' (125). It is perhaps his fate to resign himself to the mere contemplation of creatures that are free, capable of realizing their selves, singing, 'riding', 'Combing the white hair of the waves blown back' (126,

127), while he stumbles around the jumbled, myriad catalogue of his thoughts, gathering the courage to ask, 'Do I dare to eat a peach?' (122).

For Bergson, we act freely when we act decisively and passionately, because these moments are 'unique' of their kind and not to be repeated again: in 'their dynamic unity . . . they are phases of our real and concrete duration' (*TFW* 239). Ironically, the free action which Bergson implores us to seize from the depths of our innermost selves never occurs in Eliot's early poems. No freedom emerges. What we do observe, however, is a return to the very ideals of subjectivism from which Eliot was eager to extricate himself. 'The Love Song', marks a culmination of this tendency so that Prufrock's inner self almost resembles a prison from which there is no escape. An action perhaps would afford one, but there is no action, only the reality of the self as it is borne timelessly on the eternal flux of duration, its past, present, future coexisting in one undivided whole.

Jewel Spears Brooker has described this poem as being in part about 'the disease of solipsism' (*Mastery and Escape* 132). In how Prufrock perceives the external world as identical with his personal inner states, a world 'where everything finally is an extension of the speaker or thinker', this poem realizes a world where nothing exists but the self. 'Prufrock can believe in nothing. And believing in nothing, radical skepticism, leads inevitably to solipsism' (132). Eliot's epitaph to this poem situates it in Dante's *Inferno*: 'If I thought my answer were to one who ever could return to the world, this flame should shake no more; but since none ever did return alive from this depth, if what I hear be true, without fear of infamy I answer thee' (qtd. in Bergonzi 15). Donoghue expresses his confusion regarding Eliot's choice of these lines: 'It's not clear what bearing

this has on “Prufrock” (4). He continues, ‘Perhaps the epigraph has him saying: I’ll tell the truth about my life, however humiliating it turns out to be. Or it may be. . . . his way of insisting that what follows is a made poem, not what it might seem, a transcript of someone’s confession’. While the poem does read like Prufrock’s confession, the epitaph appears cogent in its suggestion that a self which attains such a degree of independence and self-sufficiency, that it becomes incapable of receiving any vitality from the outside world, can only resemble a prison house or hell, from where ‘none ever did return alive’. The willful ego resists the surrender to any form of external authority, creating an impasse. It is a consciousness of escape being impossible which makes Prufrock’s condition extremely painful.

The very notions that Bergson had posited to counteract determinism, and which had captivated Eliot, were also the basis on which he went on to abandon this affiliation. To Eliot, freedom and dynamism compromised self-control and suggested an absence of authority; and in allowing individuals to act freely, these ideals could only lead to an assertion of will and egoism. The Romantics had similarly placed great value in the ideals of freedom, and the immense potential of the individual, whom they regarded as an ‘infinite reservoir of possibilities’ (Hulme 116). In doing so, they considered the individual to be self-sufficient, requiring no moral or social restraint. During his years at Harvard, under the influence of intellectuals such as George Santayana, Josiah Royce and Irving Babbitt, Eliot had learned to be suspicious of these ideals which were pernicious in their promotion of individualist values in which the only measure for man is man himself. Babbitt, whose course on French literary criticism Eliot had taken at Harvard (1909-10), contended that the movement from ‘Rousseau to Bergson’ was one which had ‘sought to discredit the analytical intellect’ (1).

He was persistent in his efforts to restore to modern thought the importance of reason, to counter the unrestrained emotion he associated with Romanticism.

Bergson offered similar tantalizing offers of freedom, which promised to rescue individuals from mechanism but ended only in their preoccupation with and imprisonment in their selves. Eliot's poetic experiments with Bergsonian concepts resulted in drawing similar conclusions. The self in 'Preludes III' remains passive, unable to perform the act of freedom which Bergson's intuition promises. The self in 'Rhapsody', too, is unable to seize freedom, and intuition only brings to the surface a collection of sordid images from which the self is eager to escape through sleep. Both poems are individualist as they deal with selves preoccupied with the contents of their own consciousness, immersed in subjective realities. This individualism reaches dramatic proportions in Prufrock where the (Bergsonian) deep-seated self aggressively asserts its claims of independence, leaving Prufrock unable to act in the external, social world, thus, as Langbaum puts it, 'withering away in the prisonhouse not only of self but of the skull, where his only remaining life resided' (6).

In its final analysis, the path leading from Bergson was one leading inevitably back to the romanticism of Rousseau, and its excess of emotion, which Eliot continually sought to repudiate and extricate himself from. It is little surprise that the fascination soon began to dwindle. Eliot remarked in 1913, 'By the seduction of his style we come to believe that the Bergsonian world is the only world, and that we have been living among shadows. It is not so. Bergson is the sweet Siren of adventurous . . . philosophers and our world of social values is at least as real as his' (*IMH* 409). This comment reveals Eliot's desire to retreat to the concrete world of reality in which the 'substitutes for religion' continued to assert their claims (Brooker, *Mastery and Escape* 127). This is

evident in the fact that Eliot returned to Harvard at the end of his visit to France in 1911, and resumed his studies with renewed vigour. He also wrote a lengthy paper on Bergson, taking issue with those concepts with which he was unable to be reconciled.

Conrad Aiken wrote that by early 1913 Bergson's appeal for Eliot had begun to diminish, and he had 'shunted [him] down the hill' (29). Eliot's enrolment in Harvard's philosophy department for a PhD marks a new phase in his intellectual development. His studies here allowed him to recognize and challenge what he saw as weaknesses in Bergson's thought, leading him to eventually discard it for the philosophical system of the idealist philosopher F.H. Bradley. As Eliot stated in 1924, Bradley's philosophy is 'a *purer* philosophy than that of either of his most distinguished (but younger) contemporaries: Bergson and Bertrand Russell' (*IMH* 413). One of the main reasons why the end of Eliot's Bergsonian affiliation marks an important phase in his intellectual activity, is that it points towards a growing affinity with ideals such as order, authority and discipline: ideals he would later identify as classical.

This attitude was opposed to the Bergsonian perspective, which relied not on the abilities of the intellect to impose reason and order, but on the emotional faculty of intuition to spontaneously deliver truth and reality. Bergson conceived of intuition as a faculty exclusive and separate from the intellect. F.L. Pogson, in his translator's preface to Bergson's *Time and Free Will*, writes that for Bergson 'reality is not to be reached by any elaborate construction of thought: it is given in immediate experience as a flux . . . to be grasped by intuition' (vi). Thought and intuition are perceived as two separate entities, and primacy is granted to intuition. The role Bergson assigns to the intellect is the lesser one of assisting in practical life, but it is incapable of leading to truth:

'This assimilation of thought to things is useful in practical life and necessary in most of the sciences' (xix). For Eliot, the dichotomy between intuition and intellect effected by Bergson was unacceptable, mainly because it led to an undue devotion to intuition and feeling, and ultimately, to the personality as the source of truth. This flaw in Bergson's philosophical system was key for Eliot.

As early as 1913, Eliot wrote: 'Bergson . . . emphasises [sic] the reality of a fluid psychological world of aspect and nuance, where purposes and intentions are replaced by pure feeling' (*IMH* 409). Here, again, Eliot emphasizes the primacy of feeling in Bergson's thought, and in addition, questions his concept of immediate experience or duration. For Eliot, what is implicit in Bergson's affiliation of duration with 'pure feeling', is fluidity, change and an absence of fixity. By stating that 'pure feeling' replaces intentions and purposes in the Bergsonian system, Eliot suggests that in the absence of fixed standards, truth can only be assigned a relative value susceptible to change. Thus, the very authority of the truth that intuition is entrusted to deliver is put to question. In a paper on Bergson written at Harvard in or around 1913, Eliot comments regarding his notion of duration: 'we cannot rest at the *durée réelle*. It is simply not final' (qtd. in Habib 53).

In 'The Possibility of a Poetic Drama', Eliot writes about the necessity of philosophy to be a work of art characterized by 'clear and beautifully formed thought' (*SW* 66) such as is found in the works of philosophers like Aristotle, Plato and Spinoza. He refrains from adding Bergson to his list, observing that when Bergson's admirers refer to him as an artist, they are mistaken, because his work denotes precisely 'what is not clear' and is, in fact, an 'emotional stimulus' (67). Two inferences can be drawn from this comment. Firstly, in associating emotion with 'what is not clear', Eliot suggests that emotions and

sensations obscure the path of clarity and reason. Secondly, by describing Bergson's thought as emotionally stimulated, Eliot implies that it is unclear, illogical and vague to an extent that 'both clear thinking and clear statement of particular objects . . . disappear' (67). The charges of emotionalism and irrationality which Eliot directed against Bergson would prove to be enduring ones, which he would reiterate.

Eliot also went on to question Bergson's concept of intuition, which is, by definition, an irrational, unconscious, emotional faculty. In reinforcing the inner timeless world of the self, Bergson's intuition emphasized the claims of individual experience, personality, and sensation. Eliot concluded that these could only lead to self-absorption and individualism. In opposition to feeling and intuition, Eliot would later expound the virtues of the intellect, and characterize an artist as one who, in exercising this faculty, creates works of beauty and clarity. In 'Mr. Middleton Murry's Synthesis', Eliot writes regarding Bergson's system of thought: 'intuition must have its place', but 'must always be tested . . . in a whole of experience in which intellect plays a large part' (*Criterion* 342).

An ardent critic of Bergson and mentor to Eliot at Harvard, the philosopher Irving Babbitt also persistently sought to restore to modern thought the importance of reason and intellect, as opposed to unrestrained emotion which he associated with romanticism. In *Rousseau and Romanticism*, he writes of the movement from 'Rousseau to Bergson' as one which has 'sought to discredit the analytical intellect' (1). Perceiving in Bergson the same fallacies of emotion which he identified with romanticism, Babbitt emphasized the need for discipline, and identified the intellect as a rational and discriminating faculty capable of enforcing such a discipline on the demands of emotions. Eliot was certainly familiar with Babbitt's thought as he had taken his course on French

literary criticism at Harvard (1909-10). Under his influence he had become aware of the dichotomy between the romantic and classic ideals, and subsequently of the need for standards, as well as for the revival of classical virtues such as order, precision and authority. Babbitt attributed these virtues to such classical thinkers as Aristotle, from whom the modern times might learn 'how to have standards' (xxii). Throughout his literary career Eliot would retain sympathy for such classical ideals; the distinction between these two orders provided him with an orientation for his literary and political attitude. One of his later criticisms of Bergson's work was from a similar classical viewpoint: in Bergson's 'fluid world everything may be admired, because nothing is permanent' (*Criterion* 346-47) and 'there is no external standard' (346).

Babbitt's criticism of Bergson was corroborated by another influential figure—Charles Maurras, leader of the French reactionary political party, Action Française. Eliot had been introduced to Maurras's thought by Babbitt but it was in Paris (1910-11) that Eliot read his work *L'Avenir de l'intelligence*. The influence of Maurras on Eliot was an enduring one, and this is evident from the fact that even after his return to Harvard, he continued to subscribe to the party's magazine *Nouvelle Revue Française*, and during his career as editor of the *Criterion* he contributed several articles about Maurras to the journal. Maurras waged an ambitious literary and political battle against the evils he associated with the malaise of romanticism in France. He shared an anti-Rousseauist outlook, and perceived liberalism, individualism, democracy and religious liberty as the dangers from which France could only be rescued through a return to the monarchy, and a revival of discipline, authority and order. These ideas attracted Eliot, and they would underpin his sensibility as he worked through different philosophic systems in search of one which could

provide him with some degree of intellectual and spiritual nourishment and satisfaction. As William M. Chace observes, 'It is through Maurras that Eliot was to be introduced to a school of continental thinking that helped to define his entire intellectual life' (*The Political Identities* 129).

It is important to recognize that the various influences of Babbitt, Maurras, Benda, as well as Eliot's Harvard instructors, Josiah Royce and George Santayana, continued to play a significant role during the gradual shaping of Eliot's intellectual position in the years from 1911 to 1914. Through them, Eliot began to understand and gradually affiliate himself with the classical ideals of order, discipline and precision. However, his artistic and creative sensibility was still developing, as yet lacking a coherence and unity that could galvanise it, and into which his emerging affiliation with classical ideals could be integrated.

During the years 1911-1914, while Eliot concentrated on his studies, his poetic output remained very slim. Piers Gray attributes this to the fact that having discarded one set of beliefs which had failed to offer him the reassurance he so desperately sought, Eliot was now engaged in examining another set: it is the 'struggle against one set of pseudo-ideas, and a consequent recognition of a system of ideas to replace it, which dominates Eliot's life between 1911 and 1914' (92). The one poem that stands out in this period is 'La Figlia Che Piange', apart from which Eliot 'wrote only poetic fragments' (Gray 92). These 'fragments' jotted down in Eliot's *Inventions*, however, provide an indication of his extreme emotional and intellectual anxiety, during a transition period when he was trying to reconcile himself to his disillusionment with the Bergsonian system. These poems depict a desperate, feverish mind in search of meaning and significance, and are, consequently,

often characterized by madness, obsession, and psychotic fantasies and behaviour.

More importantly, a reading of these poems of the period from 1911 to 1914 indicates that while the influence of Bergson had indeed waned, Eliot continued to struggle in his attempts to temper the demands of the self. The poems of this period, such as 'Do I know how I feel? Do I know what I think?', 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian', and 'The Burnt Dancer' (among others), are consistently self-obsessed, emotional, and aggressively egotistical. They are also very personal, depicting Eliot's torment and pain during a difficult period in his life. They are symptomatic of a period of continued struggle in which Eliot desperately tried to exercise control on the fantasies of the ego, while simultaneously trying to balance their conflicting demands. It is the purpose of the following chapter to map this very journey.

Chapter 3

The Arduous Quest for Spiritual Discipline

According to Peter Ackroyd, the years from 1911 to 1914 'inaugurated a period in which [Eliot] was beset by worries about his future', and was 'suffering from doubt and indecision about the eventual shape of his life' (47). Following his disillusionment with the promise of the Bergsonian system, Eliot was left once again to confront the feelings of spiritual longing and fragmentation—both personal and as experienced in society—which had initially led to poems such as 'Silence' and 'Interlude in London'. This is also a period in which, with renewed vigour, he began the search for a philosophic ideology which could provide him with some form of intellectual and spiritual discipline and nourishment. In the absence of a system which could organize these feelings, and impart some measure of coherence to his experiences of isolation, he felt exposed and vulnerable.

An early manuscript poem 'Do I know how I feel? Do I know what I think?' written in or around 1913, in Eliot's 'post-Paris hand' (Gordon 63), and first published in *Inventions*, is a poignant evocation of the extremity of Eliot's emotional and spiritual condition. More importantly, it reveals Eliot's continued preoccupation with the subject of the self, and hence, a continuation of his individualist attitude. This poem communicates a continuation of the self-imprisonment which had been Prufrock's fate. In fact, in 'Do I know' this debilitation is more advanced; the isolation of the protagonist becomes so unbearable that he contemplates his own suicide. The poem is written in the form of a monologue, and the narrating voice of the poet explores his personal

thoughts and feelings, evoking a strange, distraught mental state. The opening lines put forward two questions which are central also to the poem's theme:

Do I know how I feel? Do I know what I think?

Let me take ink and paper, let me take pen and ink . . .

Or with my hat and gloves, as if to take the air

Walk softly down the hall, stop at the foot of the stair (*IMH* 1-4)

The narrator enquires whether he understands his own private thoughts and feelings, and the repeated phrase 'Do I know', establishes from the outset his confusion. His intellect and senses are in acute turmoil and flux, suspending him in state of disorientation. This results in his inability to think clearly, and is evident in the dismissal of his intent to write about his condition in order to make sense of it. This action abandoned, the poet's mind rapidly moves to another thought: he considers asking someone, in this case the porter, if he can explain to him the reasons behind his present distraught condition. However, no sooner than this thought has taken shape, does he start imagining his own response to the porter's explanation: 'Yet I dread what a flash of madness might reveal / If he said "Sir we have seen so much beauty spilled on the open street"' (9-10). Submerged in his private reverie, the narrator imagines that the porter will associate his agitation with the consciousness of dreams and hopes that are left unfulfilled breeding despair, of beauty that is wasted in 'stately marriages', or 'stained in railway carriages' (11). His own response to these solemn utterances, affirming the absence of meaning in life, is translated into the 'flash of madness' which leads to the contemplation of his own suicide.

The overtones of madness which take possession of the narrator can also be read in the feverish pace of the poem, which rapidly leaps between desperate thoughts, culminating in the final morbid thought of suicide. The

porter's foreboding utterances are followed by 'There will be a smell of creolin and the sound of something that drips' (*IMH*, 'Do I know' 16) connoting the image of death, in this case a suicide. Without pausing to reflect on this thought, the narrator immediately proceeds to think about the attending physician, with his 'black bag with a pointed beard and tobacco on his breath' (17), and his diagnosis. The narrator wonders whether this physician, in examining his death, will be able to transcend its physical causes:

Would there be a little whisper in the brain

A new assertion of the ancient pain

Or would this other touch the secret which I cannot find? (20-22)

This secret which is eluding him is at the root of his madness, and could perhaps bring some relief to his tired soul. The image of the fevered brain depicted in this poem may be inspired by Eliot's reading of Edgar Allan Poe, whose influence, according to Grover Smith, Eliot tried to suppress. In his study *T.S. Eliot and the Use of Memory*, Smith argues that Poe had a 'significant' and 'transforming' (49) impact on Eliot, and that '[Eliot] found many faults in Poe's work and resisted acknowledging its influence on himself' (50). Smith describes this influence as 'the infusion of a psychology of horror' and continues that this 'occurred in two main waves: the first in 1911 when Eliot wrote "Prufrock" and the second in 1914, the year not only of "So through the evening" and "The Death of St. Narcissus," but also of "Oh little voices" and "The Love Song of St. Sebastian"' (40). While Smith draws attention to the affinity between the 'opening strophe' of 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' and Poe's 'For Annie', there also appear to be similarities between the latter and 'Do I know'. 'For Annie' also foregrounds the 'brain' wrecked with anxiety:

The sickness—the nausea—

The pitiless pain—
 Have ceased, with the fever
 That maddened my brain—
 With the fever called 'Living'
 That burned in my brain. (Poe 25-30)

For the brain afflicted by an 'ancient pain' in 'Do I Know', a relief from the suffering which the protagonist of Poe's poem imagines, has not materialized.

The mental anguish of the narrator in 'Do I Know' is mirrored also in the poem's rough execution, and uneven rhyme. The first stanza begins with some promise of end rhyme: 'think / ink' (*IMH* 1, 2), 'air / stair' (3, 4), and the rhyme scheme 'aabba' is maintained in the first five lines. Soon, however, the 'flash of madness' drives askew all attention to rhyme, and the remaining six lines of the stanza proceed through increasingly long and colloquial sentences, ignoring metrical obligations. This is particularly evident towards the end of the stanza where a thought is expressed literally, and quite informally: 'That if we are restless on winter nights, who can blame us?' (13). The narrator ends his monologue in dejection. As if already possessed with the knowledge that the secret he wishes the physician to discover will remain elusive, he voices his resignation, and imagines his death:

My brain is twisted in a tangled skein
 There will be a blinding light and a little laughter
 And the sinking blackness of ether (23-25)

The protagonist in 'For Annie' is similarly depicted, imagining his death:

Sadly, I know
 I am shorn of my strength,
 And no muscle I move

As I lie at full length—
 But no matter !—I feel
 I am better at length. (Poe 7-12)

Death appears to fulfil different ends in the poems: while in Poe, it marks the beginning of a life filled 'With the thought of the light / Of the eyes of my Annie' (101-2), in 'Do I Know' it only brings the 'blackness of ether' (*IMH* 25). Both protagonists perceive death as a welcome relief from the tortures of living. However, while for Poe's narrator, death brings about a fantastical communion with Annie, in 'Do I know' there is no such association; only a reaffirmation of the languishing desire to escape from the confines of the self. The poem halts at this impasse, as the path to freedom is shrouded in darkness.

Poems such as 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', and 'Preludes III' acquired their individualist character through the Bergsonian influence under which they were written. And while this influence soon dwindled, 'Do I Know' suggests that Eliot's tendency towards individualism persisted. There are, however, notable differences between the subjectivism of the poems written under Bergson's influence, and those written after, such as 'Do I know'. Poems such as 'Rhapsody', and 'Preludes' can be regarded as individualist in how they portrayed selves passively observing the contents of their consciousness, through acts of intuition, for this is where Bergson placed the source of truth and reality. Consequently, the varied contents of consciousness were depicted as a succession of images, imitating the manner in which they would occur psychically. Hence, in 'Rhapsody', the progression of such disparate images as 'sunless dry geraniums / And dust in crevices, / Smells of chestnuts in the streets' (*CP* 63-65) attempts to convey the psychic

unity of the inner life of the mind, and in the manner in which these images would converge there.

'Do I Know' does not depict a self passively observing his thoughts, but one that is engrossed in a reverie, and ruminating; therefore, there is less a rapid succession of images than of thoughts. The thought 'let me take pen and ink' (*IMH* 2) is followed by 'Or with my hat and gloves . . . / Walk softly down the hall' (3-4). These thoughts, the product of however feverish a mind, are consciously joined by the presence of the narrating voice, the 'I', who dreads the 'flash of madness', and whose brain is 'twisted in a tangled skein'. While poems such as 'Rhapsody' derive their force and energy from the images which originate and succeed unconsciously, this poem functions along consciously formed thought, reinforcing the life of the conscious rather than the Bergsonian unconscious. Furthermore, poems such as 'Rhapsody' and 'Preludes' allow centrality to the subjective experience, and circle around the inner life of the fundamental self so important to Bergson. This concept receives a fuller and more forceful articulation in 'The Love Song' which vividly explores the nuances and obscure recesses of the inner life of the self by allowing primacy to the self of 'Prufrock'. A poem such as 'Do I Know', shares with 'The Love Song' the ascendancy of the self, and the subjective experience explored through the form of the monologue. But this is where the similarity ends. Where Prufrock is an intricately constructed persona contrived to express indirectly the emotions of the poet, 'Do I know' proceeds without a dramatic persona. The narrating voice is that of the poet, directly expressing itself.

Also absent is the intensity of the debate within the self, so significant in the development of Prufrock's monologue. In order to decide whether or not to make his visit, Prufrock sways uncertainly between his thoughts. In 'Do I Know'

this debate is replaced with a movement of thoughts which gain in intensity as the madness of the narrating self intensifies, but the self fails to achieve the depth of the Bergsonian 'deep-seated self which ponders and decides' (*Time and Free Will* 125). It is in these respects that 'Do I Know' is different to a Bergsonian poem, and indeed, qualifies as distinctly un-Bergsonian. It is, however, a development in that where Prufrock resigns himself to his fate in despair, amidst fantasies of 'mermaids singing, each to each' (*CP* 124), the fragile and more delicately poised self in 'Do I Know' who dreads 'what a flash of madness might reveal' (*IMH* 9) succumbs to despair in thoughts of self-destruction. The lasting thoughts are not those of the plangent and melancholic notes of the mermaids' song, but of the blinding lights of death and the 'sinking blackness of ether' that would come after.

Virginia Woolf mentions in her diary that Eliot suffered a 'personal upheaval of some kind . . . after Prufrock, & [which] turned him aside from his inclination—to develop in the manner of Henry James' (*Diary* 68). Ackroyd has also quoted this passage from Woolf's diary in his study, and continues that the 'fruit of this "upheaval" is to be found in the poems which he wrote on his return to Harvard' (51). In addition to 'La Figlia Che Piange' and 'Prufrock's Pervigilium', a glance at Eliot's poetry of the period from 1912 to 1914 reveals not only poems such as 'Do I know how I feel', 'The Burnt Dancer', 'Oh little voices of the throats of men' and 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian', but also a group of three intensely religious fragments: 'After the turning of the inspired days', 'So through the evening, through the violet air', and 'I am the Resurrection and the Life' (*Facsimile* 109-115). Gray comments that during this period (1911-14), apart from 'La Figlia', Eliot 'wrote only poetic fragments' (92); he does not mention which 'fragments' he is alluding to. Similarly, Ackroyd

considers the others (51-53), but does not mention the last three fragments, and it is to these three that some attention is required. They are important for their earliest depictions of religious themes, such as a renunciation of the earthly self and spiritual rebirth—subjects which Eliot was to pursue more intently from *The Waste Land* onwards, and in particular, in poems such as *Ash-Wednesday* and *Four Quartets*. The fragments also suggest that even at this early stage Eliot may have been considering religion as a means to escape his spiritual depression.

‘After the turning’, ‘So through the evening’, and ‘I am the Resurrection’ appeared for the first time in 1971 with the publication of Valerie Eliot’s *Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts of The Waste Land*. They had been included, along with ten other poems, with the typescripts and manuscripts of *The Waste Land* which Eliot had gifted his patron John Quinn as a token of his gratitude for all his help. They appeared in the *Facsimile* edition under the title ‘Miscellaneous Poems’, and bear Eliot’s markings and revisions suggesting that they were not finished pieces. Valerie Eliot thought that Eliot had included these with the *Waste Land* manuscripts because he had incorporated some lines from two of these in the final section of *The Waste Land*. The fragment ‘After the turning’ contributes to the opening passage of ‘What the Thunder Said’, while some lines from ‘So through the evening’ are adapted in lines 377- 84 in the same section.

There is ongoing debate about the exact dates for these fragments. As Eliot himself did not provide any dates for them, Valerie Eliot in her editorial notes to the *Facsimile* has suggested that ‘It would seem from the handwriting that [these] poem[s] . . . were written about 1914 or even earlier’ (130). Scholars such as Moody (311) and Gordon (85) agree with these dates for all three

fragments. However, Lawrence Rainey (in *Revisiting The Waste Land*) has undertaken the task of revisiting all the *Waste Land* fragments, and has concluded that on the basis of the type of paper and typewriter used the three pieces date from 2-10 October 1913 (200-201). While this revaluation is important in that it sheds light on the rather obscure year 1913 when both Eliot's (published) letters and the *Inventions*, are strangely silent, it is susceptible to conjecture. Jim McCue has recently objected to Rainey's dating, arguing that his designation of 2-10 October 1913, on the basis that the poems were composed on the same type of paper on which Eliot's student notes appear in 1913, is not sound. Regarding Rainey's confidence in dating the fragments, and compiling the results in the form of 'a series of intimidating tables', McCue comments: 'However accurate [the tables] may be (and one must wonder), the degree of surety [Rainey] derives from them is unwise' (19). Accepting the critical consensus that these fragments date from '1914 or earlier' allows us to view them alongside the four other pieces from this period—'Do I know how I feel', 'The Burnt Dancer', 'Oh little voices of the throats of men' and 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian'—and this in turn can afford some insight into the years 1912 to 1914, and enable some understanding of the 'upheaval' which Eliot experienced after Prufrock.

These fragments are striking in their sustained preoccupation with religious themes, especially visions and 'inspiration'. Valerie Eliot notes that 'I am the Resurrection' appears to be inspired directly by the *Bhagavad Gita*. Eliot had, of course been studying the two great Indic religions of Hinduism and Buddhism, and also learned the languages Sanskrit and Pali during this period. 'After the turning' circles around a wish to renounce the self and the material world, and tread the path of suffering which is necessary to achieve this. The

subject in this fragment is a seeker traversing this path, having ended his past life in hope to be reborn into a new one. The 'praying and the silence and the crying' (*Facsimile 2*) are the purification he must endure on his spiritual journey to enlightenment. The vigil and the wait are difficult, 'frosty' and kept in 'withered gardens' and 'lonely places' (4, 5). It is a torturous path of denial, suffering and renunciation, but one in front of which the ordinary and previously known world pales, diminishes, and almost seems futile 'like a Sunday outing' (14).

The spiritual journey is revisited, this time taking the form of a walk 'out from town' (*Facsimile 34*) in 'So through the evening, through the violet air'. The town left behind is symbolic of the material world and the protagonist's past life. However, this time the path towards surrender is not as seamless—it is accompanied by doubts, and the seeker tries to explain to himself the nature of this divine inspiration 'that delivers and expresses' (8), which has the power to relieve the soul from its anguish. This fragment as it appears in the *Facsimile* is not a fair copy, but bears Eliot's markings and revisions. The line 'Concatenated words', for example, appears with three alternate readings, which depict his struggle to arrive at the right meaning. The line reads: 'Concatenated words from which the sense had gone / seemed gone / was gone' (3). It also indicates Eliot's scepticism (during this period) regarding the sanctity and healing powers associated with religious chants; he thought they were senseless and empty. Similarly, for the seeker in this poem, inspiration, 'The one essential word that frees' (7), appears to be a mere string of words devoid of any meaning. In possession of 'Concatenated words' and 'One tortured meditation' (2), the seeker stumbles and drags himself in a state of 'fixed confusion' (34) on a journey towards revelation and self-surrender.

The sense of confusion and the questions which surface indicate a struggle with religious faith. Though there is a desire to relinquish the hold on this material world, there are also doubts. And these co-exist with a frightening reminder of a reality deprived of any kind of religious belief: the narrator encounters a man dying because he could not realize a religious affirmation. In his pitiful condition, he cries:

It seems that I have been a long time dead:

Do not report me to the established world

(*Facsimile*, 'So through the evening' 25-26)

The tension between surrendering oneself to the uncertainties of faith, or continuing in a perpetual state of spiritual emptiness, emerges as the driving force of this fragment. Gordon's comment in this respect is particularly apt: 'All three fragments are concerned with revelation and its aftermath: the attractions and problems of "turning" or conversion' (147). In 'So through the evening', although there is a wish to discipline the self through religious renunciation, this is strongly contested by the ego for whom religion appears merely as 'A chain of reasoning whereof the thread was gone' (*Facsimile* 11). Although a religious affiliation is considered, the faith necessary to realize this is absent. As Smith states, a strong religious intent had not yet developed for Eliot: 'the religious consciousness (as distinguished from a vague religious *sense*) was foreign to [Eliot's] work before the mid-1920s, the time of his conversion' (*The Use of Memory* 48). Consequently, the overriding emotion which this poem (and others of this period) communicates is that of confusion and uncertainty:

As a deaf mute swimming deep below the surface

Knowing neither up nor down, swims down and down

In the calm deep water where no stir nor surf is
Swims down and down (29-32)

In their sustained attention to religious concerns, these fragments present a sharp break from the preceding poetry in *Inventions*. While poems such as 'Silence' or 'Bacchus and Ariadne: 2nd Debate between the Body and Soul' circle around mystical moments out of time when the outside world is 'suddenly still', and 'There is nothing else beside' (*IMH*, 'Silence' 13, 16), these fragments appear as a step towards a faith which can reveal the path to peace and stillness. Gordon comments:

It is easy to dismiss these earliest fragments as unpromising scraps, but together they announce a persistent mood. . . . Other dreamlike poems of the twenties . . . move so naturally out of the fragments of 1914 that, in retrospect, the satires Eliot wrote between 1917 and 1919 seem like something of a digression from his poetic career. (150)

The preoccupation with religious themes continues in the other poems of this period. The chief importance of these fragments has generally been associated with their adaptation in the final section of *The Waste Land*: Gardner refers to them as 'drafts of other unpublished poems and unfinished fragments on which [Eliot] had drawn for lines and passages' for *The Waste Land* (68), while Moody refers to them as the embryonic forms of *The Waste Land* (311). However, it is important to regard these pieces in their own right, for the early traces they bear of Eliot's struggle with a religious solution to his plight. In these, the Laforguean mask of indifference which Eliot has been painstakingly perfecting in the *Inventions* suddenly drops to reveal an anguished soul 'praying' and 'crying' (*Facsimile*, 'After the Turning' 2) in hope of spiritual release. These fragments

occupy a unique position, for they are unlike either the preceding poems of 1911, or the intensely sadistic and frantic poems which appear around the same time in 1914.

In a letter to Conrad Aiken dated 25 July 1914, Eliot writes about a poem he is planning: 'I enclose some *stuff* – the *thing* I showed you some time ago, and some of the themes for the "Descent from the Cross" or whatever I may call it' (*Letters* 48). He continues: 'I send them, even in their present form, because I am disappointed in them, and wonder whether I had better knock it off for a while'. He then elaborates on the details of the 'Descent from the Cross', which was to comprise 'an Insane Section, and another love song (of a happier sort) and a recurring piece quite in the French style', to be followed by 'a mystical section, -- and a Fool-House section . . . Does it all seem very laboured and conscious?' (48-49). His lack of confidence was compounded by the fact that Eliot had devoted himself entirely to his philosophic studies (from 1912 onwards), and had not been able to write much verse. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the proposed 'Descent from the Cross' was never completed. The enclosed poems which he was planning to use in the composition of this work, and which remained unpublished, include 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian', 'Oh Little Voices of the throats of men' and 'The Burnt Dancer'. All three poems, like 'Do I know', describe intense psychological states, which begin to grow increasingly disturbed and unstable, veering dangerously towards the psychotic.

'Oh little voices of the throats of men' (July 1914), circles around the anguished thoughts of the narrator, as he woefully contemplates his feelings of frustration and despair that arise from an inability to express himself meaningfully. In the first stanza, the narrating voice utters a melancholic lament:

Oh little voices of the throats of men
 That come between the singer and the song;
 Oh twisted little hands of men held up
 To rend the beautiful and curse the strong.
 Impatient tireless undirected feet! (*IMH* 1-5)

The narrator mourns the song that fails to reach fruition, its clear notes marred by the clamour and noise of the jarring ‘little voices of the throats of men’. The repetition of the word ‘Oh’, which changes from ‘Oh little’, to ‘Oh twisted little’, gives the poem a mournful and plaintive note. The following lines convey that it is not just the ruined beauty of a melodious song which the narrator laments, but everything that is beautiful, true and enduring, and which fails to be articulated meaningfully. The poem expresses the frustration and despair that results when an idea fails in its conception, and does not attain articulation. It dwells also on the sense of futility and exhaustion that comes with failure—failure to follow a thought from conception to realization, as depicted by the analogy of the singer and the song. The assonantal chime of ‘twisted’ and ‘little’, and the end rhyme of the words ‘song’ and ‘strong’, rhythmically evoke the melancholy and despair of the poem.

The narrator describes the forces that intervene as the ‘little voices’, which soon become ‘twisted little hands’, capable of violence—as suggested by the verb ‘rend’—callously tearing up the beautiful, and cursing the strong. The ‘little voices’, ‘little hands’, and ‘undirected feet’, dismembered parts of a body, symbolize those divided and unknown forces (or obstacles) that curse and destroy the beauty of timeless things, and intervene between every idea that fails to attain concrete shape through expression. Not knowing what forces were responsible for hindering his creative efforts, the poet depicts them as voices,

hands and feet. He wonders on 'what remote frontiers of heaven and hell' he will encounter these forces and be able to understand their workings (*IMH* 7).

In the following stanza, the despondent narrator of the monologue concedes sorrowfully that his efforts to create works of beauty are in vain, and that people like him merely 'blow against the wind and spit against the rain' (*IMH*, 'Oh little voices' 12). The world of the 'little voices' that sway men and lead them astray is asserted, as they alone stand for all that is real in the world: 'For what could be more real than sweat and dust and sun?' (13). In the third stanza, the narrator makes a direct allusion to the thought of the idealist philosopher, F.H. Bradley:

Appearances appearances he said,
I have searched the world through dialectic ways;
I have questioned restless nights and torpid days,
And followed every by-way where it lead;
And always find the same unvaried
Intolerable interminable maze. (15-20)

'Appearances, appearances' echoes Bradley's concept of appearances which he put forward in his treatise 'Appearances and Reality', which Eliot purchased in 1913, and on which he also went on to write his thesis at the end of 1914. Bradley contended that this world and its contents—the apparatus of space, time, causation, subject, object, and also the self—were all appearances and 'nowise real' (*IMH* 26). They were the concepts through which the brain tried to understand the world. Bradley held that reality is singular, as represented by 'immediate experience', a concept which denotes the unity of reality, 'the original and undivided "whole of feeling" beneath the level of common

awareness' before it is broken up by consciousness into subject and object (Schwartz, *The Matrix of Modernism* 32).

In this section of the poem, the narrator voices his vexation and disappointment at being unable to find the truth which can organize his experiences of fragmentation. The 'dialectic ways' (*IMH* 16) of philosophical systems, here the Bradleyan system, too, had failed to provide him with any comfort; he remains in anguish. The repeated stress on the phrases 'I have searched' and 'I have questioned' depict the fervour with which he has 'followed every by-way' for some intimation of truth; it also evokes the intensity of his emotional and psychological anguish which desperately seeks release, and some degree of 'balance' between 'pleasure and pain' (*IMH* 11). There is, however, no release for the weary narrator as he finds himself caught in a predicament which is 'intolerable, interminable', the agony of this entrapment reinforced by the alliterative effect of these two words. Where the failure to make sense of painful experiences leads the narrator of 'Do I Know' to the contemplation of suicidal thoughts, the narrator of this poem bitterly ruminates on the lessons learned in his attempts at finding solace through philosophy. He remarks resentfully: 'Contradiction is the debt you would collect / And still with contradiction are you paid' (21-22). The truth which he is straining after is lost somewhere in the complex web of dialectics, and still the refrain of Bradley's assertions can be heard, although alluded to here, mockingly: 'Appearances, appearances, he said, / And nowise real; unreal, and yet true; / Untrue, yet real' (25-27). The play on opposites such as 'real / unreal', 'true / untrue', the jumbled use of these words (as well as the stress in 'yet', 'true', and 'untrue'), confuses opposites: what is real, and what is true?

Even towards the closing lines of the poem, the bitterness of the narrator persists; he resigns himself to the conclusion that there is no hope, no way of arriving at truth. He asserts what he has learned:

That if you find no truth among the living
You will not find much truth among the dead. (32-33)

The narrator does not know whether to laugh or weep at these findings. Like 'Do I Know', this poem pursues the single-minded and egotistic contemplation of thoughts that circle in the tormented mind of the narrator, who continues to assert his presence through the 'I' who delivers the monologues. In both poems, the world that is depicted is the subjective world of the narrator's thoughts: in 'Do I Know' he trembles at the dread of 'what a flash of madness might reveal' (*IMH* 9), and in this poem he wearily laments, 'I have searched the world . . . / I have questioned restless nights and torpid days' (16-17). The outpour in high emotion defines the focus of both poems, although 'Oh little voices' lacks the overtones of the madness that characterize its predecessor.

This poem also suggests that while his search for a coherent belief system had led Eliot to pay close attention to Bradley's philosophical thought, he had not yet identified himself with Bradley. The truth he was searching for still eluded him. If anything, this poem expresses Eliot's frustration even with the Bradleyan metaphysics: the almost mocking refrain of 'Appearances appearances he said' serves as one indication. The poem also suggests the despair, weariness, and exhaustion that Eliot continued to experience, particularly with Western philosophy, on his journey to enlightenment. It is, therefore, not surprising to observe that Eliot's search for a belief system took him further afield, on the paths of Eastern religions. At Harvard (1911-1914), alongside the courses on Western philosophy, Eliot had particularly studied the

two great Indic religions of Hinduism and Buddhism, also learning the languages Sanskrit and Pali. In his first year, he enrolled in Charles Lanman's course on Indic philology, and in the second, he studied Indian philosophy with James Haughton Woods, while also attending a series of lectures on Buddhism by Masaharu Anesaki.

Eliot's conversion to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927, and his announcement of this affiliation in 1928, was cause for surprise, anger, and resentment amongst literary circles. Even his closest friends felt betrayed: 'poor dear Tom Eliot . . . may be called dead to us all from this day forward', Virginia Woolf wrote to her sister; 'there's something obscene in a living person sitting by the fire and believing in God' (*A Change of Perspective* 457-58). Pound appeared to be equally baffled, dismissing Eliot's new religious affiliation with the comment: 'His diagnosis is wrong . . . His remedy is an irrelevance' (qtd. in Gordon 102). However, critics have suggested that his conversion when viewed in light of his earlier poems does not appear as a sudden reversal, but a gradual progression. Gordon, for instance, writes that the 'turning-point in Eliot's life came not at the time of his baptism in 1927, but in 1914 when he was circling, in moments of agitation, on the edge of conversion' (85). The *Waste Land* fragments serve as the earliest depictions of a nascent, but fraught, religious awareness in Eliot. The other poems from 1914 first published in *Inventions* show that in addition to religious ideas, such as redemption and salvation, Eliot had also begun exploring the psychologies of religious figures: the poems begin to centre around saints, such as St. Sebastian, St. Narcissus and St. John. Resultantly, the poetry acquires a perceptible religious and Christian colour, indicating that a religious system presented the appeal and promise of the much needed sustenance which his philosophic studies had so far failed to provide.

These poems also reveal that after having studied the Indic religions, Eliot had shifted his attention to Christian saints and martyrs.

'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' shares the individualist tendency of the earlier poems, but is also one of the poems that Eliot had intended to include in his project 'Descent from the Cross'. Eliot had been awarded a Sheldon Travelling Fellowship for the year 1914/15 which he decided to spend in Merton College, Oxford. He began 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' in the spring of 1914, before he left for Europe, and completed it shortly after. The poem refers in its title to the Christian saint and martyr, Saint Sebastian, who was sentenced to be shot to death by arrows by the Roman Emperor Diocletian during his persecution of the Christians. Saint Sebastian's masochistic pleasure is a common motif in artworks, something Eliot would have realized in the famous paintings of the saint's martyrdom, which he viewed, during his travels through Europe. In a letter to Aiken from Marburg, dated July 1914, he comments 'There are *three* great *St Sebastians* (so far as I know)', including in his list the fifteenth-century paintings by Mantegna, Antonello of Messina, and Memling (*Letters* 46).

The protagonist of Eliot's 'Love Song' shares the name of the famous saint Sebastian, but his monologue soon implies that the links with the Christian saint are tenuous. Sebastian is portrayed as a lover who fantasizes about approaching his beloved at night:

I would come in a shirt of hair
 I would come with a lamp in the night
 And sit at the foot of your stair;
 I would flog myself until I bled,
 And after hour on hour of prayer

And torture and delight

Until my blood should ring the lamp (*IMH* 1-7)

The delightful violence which he willingly suffers, 'after hour on hour' until his blood collects in a pool around the lamp, is associated with prayer, and penance which would win him his beloved's affection, and she would be forced to accept him:

You would take me in without shame

Because I should be dead (19-20)

Robert Crawford observes that Eliot's 'reading on Christian mysticism shows him to have been interested particularly in the physical and often sexual violence associated with extreme religious emotion' (79). He also notes that Eliot was 'investigating religio-sexual frenzy' during his anthropological readings of this period. This suggests that the self-inflicted violence of St. Sebastian is a manifestation of an austere religious discipline, suffered willingly to gain beatitude. However, the presence of a beloved presents a confusion; it indicates that Sebastian's flogging is not suffered for spiritual but temporal and sexual ends. Crawford also cites a note which Eliot transcribed on to an index card from Havelock Ellis in *The Psychology of Sex*: 'Love and religion are the two most volcanic emotions to which the human organism is liable' (79). 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' appears to be a curious and obscure mixture of both these emotions.

Sebastian is singularly possessed with the idea of being accepted by his beloved. No other thought interferes with this contemplation, and he follows his reverie to its conclusion, culminating in the final act of self-abasement, which he is certain would secure him this love. His certainty is reflected in the repetition of the phrase 'Then you would take me in', followed by 'You would take me in

without shame' (*IMH* 16, 18). Immersed in the passion of possessing his beloved, Sebastian pays no heed to the violence of his thoughts; in fact, he feels this to be a necessary ritual, a worship which would secure him his object of desire. He contemplates the violence in some detail, conveyed by vivid images of flogging himself till his blood 'should ring the lamp / And glisten in the light' (7-8). The dramatic action of the poem is communicated in short statements, tonally flat, using a minimum of words which are sufficient enough to state the content and sequence of thoughts: 'I should arise your neophyte / And then put out the light' (9-10). The monotonous tone, however, does not adequately express the emotion that the verses carry and convey; the most painful acts are conveyed by words stripped of emotion and sonority. The speaker is nothing if not literal: 'I would flog myself until I bled' (4).

In a manner similar to 'Do I know', Sebastian in 'The Love Song' indulges in thoughts of his own death, but the torment and suffering of the previous poem achieve a greater, more violent and masochistic intensity now. In his obsessive, egotistical struggle to achieve his beloved's favour, Sebastian is willing to endure a bloody and brutal flogging, leading ultimately to his own self-destruction. In an early poem in *Inventions*, 'Opera' (1909), Eliot expresses a deep distaste for violent emotion for its own sake:

And love torturing itself
 To emotion for all there is in it,
 Writhing in and out
 Contorted in paroxysms,
 Flinging itself at the last
 Limits of self-expression. (5-10)

He writes that 'These emotional experiences / Do not hold good at all' (14-15); the contrast with 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' is startling. Saint Sebastian is willing to suffer an excessive amount of physical violence to earn his beloved's favour. The beloved appears inadequate in comparison to the emotion evoked in Sebastian, and his misguided passion appears very much like it is 'Flinging itself at the last / Limits of self-expression'. 'The Love Song' strongly contests Eliot's principles of maintaining discipline and measure in art, and it indicates that Eliot's personae continually struggled to exercise control on the demands of their ego.

'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' centres around Sebastian's egotistic and self-absorbed fantasies, dwelling painfully on his consuming desire to possess his beloved. The only reality is that of Sebastian's mind, the morbid and tumultuous psychological world of his fantasies, obsessive desires and neurotic states. The outside world remains strangely absent, referred to only in passing, first to announce Sebastian approaching his beloved: 'I would come with a lamp in the night' (*IMH* 2). The external world serves only marginally to situate the drama of the poem temporally; we are soon made aware that all the action occurs internally, in Sebastian's mind. The second reference to the outside world is presented towards the close of the poem, after Sebastian's imagined death: 'And when the morning came / Between your breasts should lie my head' (20-21). This is the only sign indicating that the episode of martyrdom has indeed spanned the course of the night. The image describes an almost maternal (rather than sexual) gesture, as if Sebastian were an infant seeking comfort from his mother. This corresponds to the theme of transformation that runs through the poem. Just as Sebastian has transformed from mortal sinner

to saint, his beloved, too, has changed from earthly love to the mother figure, who gives, and nourishes.

In the second part of the poem Sebastian entertains another fantasy about his beloved:

I would come with a towel in my hand
And bend your head beneath my knees;
Your ears curl back in a certain way
Like no one's else in all the world.

(*IMH*, 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' 22-28)

Suspended in this pose, Sebastian observes his beloved's ears, and is fixated by this image. He imagines that he would lovingly trace the curve of the ear with his finger—his final act of love—and feels this would communicate to his beloved his covetous feelings of affection for her, and almost expiate his next act of violence: 'You would love me because I should have strangled you' (34). Sebastian feels no qualms in calmly contemplating the strangulation of his beloved. There is no remorse:

And I should love you the more because I had mangled you
And because you were no longer beautiful
To anyone but me. (36-38)

The egotistical desire to possess his beloved which had driven Sebastian to the desperate act of self-destruction, takes on an even greater and alarming intensity in these lines, with Sebastian fantasizing the strangulation and mangling of his beloved. He is willing to take her life by violence to please his own selfish ends of jealousy and exclusive ownership, for he feels that in death, he should possess her more completely than he would ever hope in life. There are distinct echoes here of Robert Browning's 'Porphyria's Lover', where the

speaker of the monologue, in a wish to freeze forever the moment in which his beloved looks on him with love, resorts to a similar act of violence:

I found
 A thing to do, and all her hair
 In one long yellow string I wound
 Three times her little throat around,
 And strangled her. No pain felt she;

I am quite sure she felt no pain. (Browning 37-42)

Each protagonist strangles his beloved in the egotistical desire for the possession of their absolute love, and in the wish that their beloved should remain 'no longer beautiful / To anyone but me' (*IMH* 37-38). Only death can provide this certainty.

The legend of St. Sebastian plays a central role in Eliot's poem, and it is worth considering how he employs it for his poetic (and, perhaps, personal) expression. There is a distinct homoerotic, and auto-erotic, tradition linked with the portrayals of St. Sebastian. Ricks (in his editorial notes to *Inventions*) cites Ian Fletcher's comments regarding John Gray's poem *St. Sebastian: On a Picture* (1896): 'Homosexuals had a particular cult of Saint Sebastian. The combination of nudity and the phallic arrows was irresistible' (267). Eliot would also have been aware of these associations. In his letter to Aiken, dated July 1914, in which he enclosed 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian', along with the other material for his proposed 'Descent from the Cross', he commented: 'why should anyone paint a beautiful youth and stick him full of pins (or arrows) unless he felt a little as the hero of my verse? Only there's nothing homosexual about this . . . but no one ever painted a female Sebastian, did they? So I give this title *faute de mieux*' (*Letters* 49). Having also studied various paintings of

St. Sebastian, Eliot was clearly aware of the homoerotic tradition linked with this saint, but he denies here an attraction to the figure of St. Sebastian for such reasons. Eliot's urgent need to distance his work from the homoerotic tradition linked to the saint also suggests an anxious self-protection; he was wary of a homoerotic tendency being construed in his work.

What also becomes evident is how Eliot uses the legend of St. Sebastian for the purposes of his own poetic and religious experimentation. Eliot's Sebastian endures the 'hour on hour' (*IMH* 5) of brutal suffering and bleeding that he inflicts on himself, in an attempt to parallel the suffering endured by St. Sebastian while he was pinned to a cross and shot at by archers. However, Eliot's Sebastian endures the suffering and pain voluntarily and willingly, unlike St. Sebastian who was sentenced to his fate by a ruthless emperor. The reasons for St. Sebastian's persecution were linked to his religious belief. His martyrdom was, consequently, directed towards the selfless end of glorifying his faith, and inspiring his followers. He endured his suffering with patience, in the knowledge that his suffering would be rewarded with the favour of God.

Eliot's own spiritual plight would have enabled him to recognize in St. Sebastian another mortal soul in a condition of extreme pain and torment. He remarked (about his own 'Love Song') 'The S. Sebastian title I feel almost sure of; I have studied S. Sebastians' (*Letters* 49). In these studies Eliot would not have failed to notice the courage which enabled this saint to bear his pain, and would also have recognized that it was a courage drawn from religious faith in God. But most importantly, it would have personified for him the spiritual release of a soul in agony, a release which he too yearned for, and which eluded him. John T. Mayer has suggested that in these (saint) poems, 'Eliot seriously explores the possibilities that physical pain may bring spiritual release' (147).

However, it sounds improbable for Eliot to have been drawn to such analogies solely for the examples of physical suffering they depicted. Deeply engrossed in religious study at the time, he is likely to have been aware of the religious significance of the suffering. Schuchard shares this view when he comments that Eliot used the saint's figure as he realized that 'only a metaphor of martyrdom could convey the extremity of emotion, only the semblance of sainthood could bring relief' (9). Kaye, however, argues that for Eliot, 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' was merely an experiment in 'decadent posturing', employed for 'decidedly secular purposes' (112). Behind this impulse was Eliot's discovery 'in the St. Sebastian iconography of Andrea Mantegna and other painters an image that had already been successfully secularized as a homoerotic totem by fin de siècle artists' (112). For Kaye, while Eliot reconfigures St. Sebastian as a symbol of '*heterosexual* perversity', his 'Love Song' is independent of religious import.

The discussion in this chapter takes the view that Eliot's latter-day saint enacts the plight of St. Sebastian in the hope for the spiritual release that the religious saint was blessed with. A brief reading of the poem is sufficient to show that Eliot's Sebastian imitates the outward actions of the martyred saint, that is, the ritual of suffering (here, self-inflicted), experiencing the 'torture and delight' (*IMH* 6) of such a suffering, and finally achieving the transformation from ordinary sinner to a martyred saint, as expressed by 'I should arise your neophyte' (9). The word 'neophyte', with its connotations of 'A new convert', or 'a novice of a religious order', is indicative of Sebastian's newly-gained status of sainthood (*IMH* 271). However, this religious analogy is only followed in its outward import, because the suffering of Eliot's Sebastian is directed towards earthly love, as opposed to the divine love of the religious saint. As the suffering

is self-inflicted, and endured for the purpose of attaining temporal satisfaction, it becomes selfish and grotesque, rather than the selfless and inspiring act of a saint. Gordon rightly comments that 'In the case of Eliot's "saint", the martyrdom is not only self-inflicted, but is an exhibitionistic attempt to gain a woman's attention' (89). Desired purely for the affection of an earthly object, Sebastian's martyrdom is reduced to morbidity. It also translates in a poem that revolves singularly around Sebastian's egotism.

Eliot's 'Love Song of St. Sebastian' was an experiment. The figure of Sebastian enacts the martyrdom of a saint in the hope of discovering the promised healing of spirit, and relief from intense pain. However, not being entirely certain of his religious feelings, and uncertain also about God, Eliot directs Sebastian's 'Love Song' to an earthly beloved. The resulting poem is one which foregrounds the violent fantasies of the wilful ego. Indeed, Eliot himself remarked about this poem to Aiken: 'Do you think that *The Love Song of St Sebastian* part is morbid, or forced?' (*Letters* 48).

Eliot achieved a more meaningful synthesis of pain with religious sentiment in a later poem titled 'The Death of Saint Narcissus' (late 1914-1915), which also inspired the opening section of *The Waste Land*. In this saint poem, St. Narcissus, unlike Sebastian, achieves the desired unity with the divine: 'So he became a dancer to God. / Because his flesh was in love with the burning arrows' (*CP* 33-34). Although Ezra Pound convinced him to publish this poem, Eliot withdrew it at the last minute.

The personae in the poems of the period from 1912 to 1914 appear to be riddled with the same affliction of egotism which plagued their predecessors: the 'Mandarins', the speakers in 'Preludes' and Prufrock. Although the protagonists in 'So through the evening' and 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' tentatively

move in the direction of a rigorous and ascetic spiritual disciplining of the self, their efforts, too, fail to engender a religious association. The ego emerges as a formidable enemy, emphatically contesting every effort to affect an external association. The failure of the protagonists to control their aggressive and violent desires refutes Eliot's claims for a disciplined self. This study aims to draw attention to the surprising irony that although Eliot's early poetry forcefully establishes the frightfulness of negative models of selfhood, the poems which follow in the years from 1911 to 1914 continue to rehearse this plight. The idealized self which Eliot was desperately striving towards—objective, distinctly unromantic and fully in control of its passions—fails to emerge in the experiments so far considered.

Eliot arrived in England in August 1914 to study for his doctoral dissertation at Merton College, Oxford. He was still in the middle of writing his long poem, 'Descent from the Cross'. However, this project was soon abandoned, and the self-absorbed fantasies of saints and religious figures of the 1914 poems are replaced in the Oxford poems of 1915 by a series of satiric sketches of Boston society and manners. There are several factors which contributed to this change in poetic style and content. Foremost is the acquaintance with Pound in September 1914, through whom Eliot was introduced to the current literary milieu, which inspired him to a new phase of poetic activity. Pound's influence on Eliot is widely acknowledged; the close association between the two lasted at least until the publication of *The Waste Land* in 1922, after which Pound moved to Paris. So significant was this influence on Eliot that he was not to repeat such religious experiments, choosing instead to emulate Pound in the writing of social satires. Svarny comments that 'it seems logical that the first fruits of Eliot's renewed poetic

impulse should accord with the practice of the man to whom Eliot was very much in the position of protégé to master' (69). It was also mainly through Pound's efforts that Eliot's poetry had finally begun to be published: 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' in *Poetry* in June 1915, and 'Preludes' and 'Rhapsody' in *Blast* in July 1915. This new-found success, combined with Pound's encouragement, compelled Eliot to consider poetry (instead of philosophy) as his permanent vocation as he continued his attempts to break away from the subjectivism of his earlier verse, towards what he considered to be a more objective and measured artistic and intellectual sensibility.

In the years which followed (1915-1918), Eliot's continuing struggle for a disciplined self led him towards the idea of the 'historical sense' (*SE* 14): an awareness of the past, which Eliot felt, could connect the isolated individual with its roots, and enable that self-transcendence which has eluded his personae observed so far. This nascent 'historical sense' later evolved into the concept of 'tradition' which Eliot formulated more fully in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), and which constitutes a significant milestone in Eliot's intellectual development. Eliot's time at Harvard from 1911 to 1914, when he paid close attention to the study of anthropological scholarship, myth, and the history of religion and primitive rituals through the work of writers such as F.B. Jevons, Emile Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl, E.B. Tylor, Jane Harrison, James Frazer, contributed significantly towards his consciousness of the historical past by emphasizing the link between civilized and primitive man. He writes in 1919, 'it is certain that primitive art and poetry help our understanding of civilized art and poetry', and continues, 'the poet should know everything that has been accomplished in poetry . . . since its beginnings—in order to know what he is doing himself. He should be aware of all the metamorphoses of poetry that

illustrate the stratifications of history that cover savagery' (qtd. in Crawford 98).

This attention to history first appears in the poems written in 1917 in the form of Théophile Gautier's quatrains, such as 'Sweeney Erect' and 'A Cooking Egg', but gains fuller depiction in 'Gerontion' (1920). The next and final chapter considers whether the 'historical sense' enables 'Gerontion' to realize an association with his past and with the lives of other individuals.

Chapter 4:

'Gerontion' and the Historical Consciousness

For Eliot, the awareness of a literary 'tradition' could enable an artist to write 'not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence' (*SE* 14). This suggests a continuity amongst literary works, but also that human beings are connected to each other and their race through history. For the artist and the individual alike, this connection with a 'larger coherence gives it access to associations . . . that reach down, therefore, to the deepest elements in the individual psyche' (Craig 130). This chapter argues that such an identification could impart a sense of unity, harmony and wholeness to the fractured self, which would otherwise wither in its confinement within the ego. A contact with other selves, and the lives of other individuals, could restore its vitality, and prove life-affirming.

Eliot had not yet fashioned a religious solution to the dilemma of the egotistical self which plagues his numerous poetic experiments to that date, so history, an authority higher than an individual, presented to him a likely option. The discussion in this chapter concentrates on 'Gerontion' (1920), considering whether the historical consciousness affords the suffering individual a release from its own preoccupations, and whether it makes possible the self-discipline which translates into an association with a community of fellow human beings, which his predecessors, Prufrock and St Sebastian, had found impossible.

In 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' Eliot formulated his concept of 'tradition', closely bound with the idea of the 'historical sense' which, he

maintained, 'involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence', and 'is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together' (*SE* 14). This historical consciousness is first glimpsed in the poems written from 1917 to 1918, including, among others, 'A Cooking Egg', 'Sweeney Erect' and 'The Hippopotamus'. 'Gerontion', written in 1920, marks an important stage in the development towards *The Waste Land*; Eliot initially wanted to include it as a prelude to the longer poem, but was dissuaded from doing so by Pound who thought that *The Waste Land* was already over length. As 'Gerontion' anticipates *The Waste Land*, the discussion in this chapter alludes to the latter, and attempts to observe how *The Waste Land* presents a development and culmination of the ideas contained in 'Gerontion'.

From the outset, the richness of historical allusion in 'Gerontion' becomes evident; the mask of Gerontion itself is fashioned from historical persons. Gerontion is Greek for 'little old man'. The name may also have been derived from Gerontius, the Roman general remembered for his inability to stop the attack of the Goths at Thermopylae in A.D. 396, allowing them to invade Greece, plundering and pillaging it during their passage. Smith has suggested that Eliot was familiar with Gibbon's version of this battle (*The Use of Memory* 102). In the third line of the poem Gerontion declares: 'I was neither at the hot gates / Nor fought in the warm rain' (G 3-4); Thermopylae literally translates as 'hot gates', which is another allusion to the aforementioned battle. Accepting the view that Gerontion shares his name with Gerontius may provide a clue as to why his first thoughts are of heroic battles, when he himself seems very remote from such acts of courage and valour. Further elements contributing to

Gerontion's mask might be suggested by the poem's epigraph from *Measure for Measure*:

*Thou hast nor youth nor age
But as it were an after dinner sleep
Dreaming of both.*

In the play, the Duke visits Claudio in prison, and advises him to embrace his death sentence as life is ridden with anxieties, and only transitory. The opening lines of 'Gerontion' are taken from A.C. Benson's life of Edward Fitzgerald: 'Here he sits, in a dry month, old and blind, being read to by a country boy, longing for rain' (qtd. in Moody 66). Benson views Fitzgerald as a figure plagued by spiritual torpor: '[His] defect . . . was moral debility to the degree of disgrace: he wouldn't rouse himself to an interest in anything' (Donoghue 82). Gerontion begins to emerge as a compound of Gerontius and Fitzgerald: of failure and apathy. His description of himself is accomplished through a series of negations: he did not fight at Thermopylae, he did not struggle through salty marshes 'heaving a cutlass', he was not 'Bitten by flies' (G 5, 6), and by implication he was not present at the frontiers of his own century's Great War. Recalling the bravery of heroic battles is a curious means through which Gerontion chooses to contrast and express the passivity of his own pitiful existence.

What Gerontion does affirm is the desolation of his present world: 'The goat coughs at night in the field overhead; / Rocks, moss, stonecrop, iron, merds' (G 11-12). He is surrounded by an arid landscape, rocky and unfruitful. The bareness of land portrayed here will re-emerge later in the opening passage of *The Waste Land*: 'What are the roots that clutch, what branches

grow / Out of this stony rubbish?' (19-20). Gerontion is waiting for rain in a dry month:

And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,

And the dry stone no sound of water. (*TWL* 23-24)

This barrenness mirrors Gerontion's own physical decay, and anticipates the spiritual sterility which accompanies such a condition. Daiches has pointed out that 'Dryness has always been for Eliot the basic symbol of life without faith and hope' (117). In 'Gerontion', the 'old man in a dry month waiting for rain is therefore a perfect symbol of modern life as Eliot saw it'. Gerontion recalls how the Pharisees had neglected the miracle of Christ's birth as a sign from God, and demanded instead: 'We would see a sign!' (G 17). They insisted on something tangible, not 'The word within a word, unable to speak a word' (18). This line is a reference to the opening words of St. John's Gospel which Lancelot Andrewes adapted in his sermon for Christmas Day 1618.

The Pharisees' blindness to the Word has persisted through the ages, and in present times is symbolized by the debased religious practices of a host of foreign persons whose names Gerontion recalls vividly. These persons are obscure and appear to have no connection with the poem. They are only characterized by their gestures, and Drew suggests that in these figures Gerontion sees the 'deprivation of both spiritual and physical vitality' (76) which is his own fate. He refers to the practices of Mr. Silvero, a china merchant, stroking his goods with 'caressing hands', Hakagawa 'bowing' (G 24, 26) among his collection of Titians, and Madame de Tornquist conducting séances. These figures are involved in various acts of worship, but because the message of Christ has been lost, their prayer is merely reduced to a series of meaningless

acts, devoid of any spiritual significance. They are, in fact, all worshipping ghosts. Gerontion's condition is even more severe, for he confesses:

I have no ghosts,
An old man in a draughty house
Under a windy knob. (30-32)

Gerontion has not even a semblance of a God to worship. Unable to believe, and having abandoned the Word of Christ, he is spiritually bereft. 'My house is a decayed house' (7) is not only a confession of the plight of Europe after the First World War, but also that of Gerontion's mind and body. The burden of guilt from betraying the message of Christ weighs on him heavily, and in this extremity he evokes not only the Pharisees who had committed a similar grievance, but also (in lines 29-30) Job's 'My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope. O remember that my life is wind: mine eye shall no more see good' (qtd. in Southam 53).

These historical allusions, through which the past and present can be connected and afforded a 'simultaneous existence' (SE 14), allow Gerontion to seek consolation in the knowledge that others before him had perpetrated a similar transgression. The historical consciousness which is, in Eliot's words, 'a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together', sees a connection between all the events occurring in human history, so that the battles from Thermopylae to the First World War, and the neglect of Christ's message from the Pharisees to the present day by Hakagawa, are not disparate and isolated events, but coincident in the human consciousness. This interconnectedness was vital for Eliot, because for him the 'past, the present, and the future viewed separately give no meaning which can satisfy; only seen together have they any real significance' (Lucy 14). However,

in 'Gerontion' the historical consciousness only serves to intensify the protagonist's isolation: the battles which he recalls mock him with the knowledge of his own absence from them, and the valour which they symbolize scorn his cowardliness, just as the tradition of spiritual aridity in which he seeks solace only intensifies his guilt, so that he bears not just his own, but the burden of humankind's betrayal of Christ. His attempt to connect with human history only furnishes figures whose lives were similarly unredeemed, and who also were 'waiting for rain' (G 2). The rain which might promise some reprieve, or bring a sign, does not arrive. In fact, the 'juvescence' (19) of the year which signifies the coming of Christ, is not a season of renewal and hope, but is 'depraved' for Gerontion as it brings forth the 'flowering judas' (21) whose purple blossoms are a painful reminder of the bloodstained cross and Christ's passion. The word 'juvescence' is an incorrect contraction of the Latin word 'juvenescence'. Ransom comments that the Romans would have contracted the word to 'junescence' ('Gerontion' 146), but Eliot decided to change this to 'juvescence' because 'juvenescence' would 'have given two stresses instead of the one he wanted'. Unable to connect with something life-affirming through his forays into history or the natural world, and recognising his arrival at an impasse, Gerontion resigns himself to an acceptance of his guilt:

After such knowledge, what forgiveness? (G 33)

The admission of this burden throws Gerontion backwards into his own self, where he resumes his arduous imprisonment. His next thoughts begin with 'Think now':

History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
Guides us by vanities. Think now

She gives when our attention is distracted (G 34-37)

The emphasis on 'Think now' signals a journey inwards to the inner realms of the 'dull head among windy spaces' (16), in contrast to the previously outward journey into a historical tradition. History, whispering stories of past glory, and promising immortality through heroic victories, is personified as a treacherous female. She whispers, colludes, and deceives. She preys on the human weaknesses of ambition, vanity and conceit, ensnaring man by her guile. She bestows her gifts when least expected so that the reward is confusing and undesirable; or 'Gives too late / What's not believed in, or if still believed, / In memory only' (39-41). This is Gerontion's defence for betraying Christ; the realization of his wrongdoing came when the belief itself had become a dim memory, so that it was impossible for him to resume his worship, or recover his convictions. 'What's not believed in' suggests an incontrovertible position, jeopardized momentarily by the hesitation of 'or if still believed', hinting that Gerontion may be vacillating between these two positions. However, the possibility that some desire for a religious affirmation may still linger and offer a reprieve proves illusory, as in the next line belief is firmly relegated to the hazy, outermost realms of memory.

Gerontion's declaration, 'After such knowledge, what forgiveness?' (G 33), implies an acknowledgement of guilt on his part, and a tacit but sorrowful recognition that the possibility of redemption is perhaps remote. The expectations raised by this acceptance are subverted when, surprisingly, he proceeds to construct an elaborate maze of arguments to defend his past actions, and through which history is found grossly culpable, yet he himself escapes unscathed. These justifications begin to emerge as the edifice behind which Gerontion attempts to hide his own cowardice and defer blame for his

spiritual failure. He has never possessed the courage to submit himself to the religious tradition he evokes; this makes his declaration ring hollow. This might also explain the absence of remorse or penitence after an acceptance of his guilt. Contrition may point the way to redemption, a sentiment which materializes in *Ash-Wednesday*:

Let these words answer

For what is done, not to be done again

May the judgement not be too heavy upon us (31-33)

No such emotions surface for Gerontion; in fact, there is no plea for help, or an attempt to make amends, only the importunate need of his ego to justify his past, which in turn could exonerate his present. These explanations do not yield any resolution, or a way out of his exile, they only lead to further elucidations:

‘Think at last / We have not reached conclusion, when I / Stiffen in a rented house’ (G 48-50). The desire to convince himself and his audience merely takes him on a circuitous path, which points no way out, and only makes his self-confinement irrevocable. Leavis’s observation may be interpreted as an illumination of Gerontion’s self-consciousness: ‘There are ways in which it is possible to be too conscious’, a condition marked in modern literature by an ‘accompanying sense of futility’ (73). Donoghue reinforces this observation when he comments that: ‘Prufrock, Gerontion, and the several figures of the early poems are conscious far beyond any use to which they could put their consciousness. No wonder they turn aside from themselves in disgust’ (35).

Craig observes that for Eliot an ‘isolation from some central tradition of culture leads to an overvaluation of the personal and an inflation of the . . . ego at the expense of a true awareness of the world’ (112), something Eliot severely reproached in Yeats. Gerontion presents such a case; cut off from the ‘central

tradition' of Christianity, he is reduced to an existence within the boundaries of his mind, symbolized by the 'dull head' (G 16), tireless in its preoccupation with itself. This self-imprisonment privileges the untempered claims of the egotistical self, at the expense of a disorientation with outside reality. Correspondingly, Gerontion has lost all awareness of the external world. The only reality which exists for him is that of his own mind, obsessively preoccupied with its deliberations. It relentlessly pursues obsolete arguments, dwelling on them, providing new explanations for old transgressions. The egotistical self majestically assumes responsibility for assigning blame and offering forgiveness, making the need for any external institution redundant. It is only too fitting that even towards the close of the poem, Gerontion should still be preoccupied with presenting his case; his self-aggrandisement dictates that it matters immensely that the world does not judge him too harshly. In his skewed version of reality, he fantasizes an audience to whom his plight is equally significant, which is why he implores their attention, and pleads with them as that they may yet discover his innocence: 'I would meet you upon this honestly' (54). In a last-ditch attempt to redeem himself, and account for his spiritual failure, Gerontion makes a desperate confession:

I that was near your heart was removed therefrom

To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition. (55-56)

These lines are adapted from Middleton's *The Changeling*: 'I that am of your blood was taken from you / For your better health' (qtd. in Moody 68). The so far impersonal tone of the poem suddenly becomes emotional with this personal statement. Eliot scholars have provided various indications regarding the identity of the person to whom these lines may have been addressed: Eliot's wife Vivien, Fitzgerald, Christ and God are among some of the suggestions.

This passage is surprising and obscure also because it appears to have no connection with the preceding lines of the poem which do not provide a context for the 'inquisition' which Eliot mentions. Schneider comments that 'Under whatever interpretation one chooses, "terror" and "inquisition" are outside the scope of the poem' (53). Gerontion argues that his devotions were shunned, and the strength of his prayers gradually began to become diluted from the arduous waiting. This sounds like a rephrasing of an earlier excuse that his ability to believe was compromised when the reward was bestowed once the passion faded: 'Gives too late / What's not believed in, or if still believed, / In memory only' (G 39-41). Here, however, the 'reconsidered passion' undergoes a transformation into terror, resulting from Gerontion's fear that divine blessing had been withdrawn on account of some transgression on his part, and that his prayers would be to no avail. The consciousness that salvation may be inaccessible was so immense, Gerontion states, that he completely lost his passion: 'I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch: / How should I use them for your closer contact?' (59-60).

It is tempting to imagine an alternate conclusion to Gerontion's agonizing condition by comparing the closing lines of an earlier poem, 'Entretien dans un parc', in which the protagonist fails to express his feelings to his beloved.

Similarly frustrated with the futility of the situation, he ponders:

But if we could have given ourselves the slip
 What explanations might have been escaped –
 No stumbling over ends unshaped.
 We are helpless. (*IMH* 28-31)

This invites corresponding thoughts about Gerontion's plight: had he continued to believe during a time of adversity, and had the courage to surrender his ego

to a religious order, his life may have been different, and he may have been spared the agony of his circumventions. Instead, his existence, devoid of a centre towards which it could gravitate, is steadily propelled into chaos: 'whirled / Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear / In fractured atoms' (G 67-69). Smith's comments in this context are quite apt: Gerontion represents those figures 'who in their twisted course have never found their center'. He continues, that "Gerontion" points no way inward; it shows the outward, the *eccentric* propulsion of the damned, who . . . "Shul whirle aboute th'erthe alwey in peyne" (*Poetry and Plays* 61). This centre corresponds to the 'still point', which Eliot urgently sought, and was able to realize more fully in *Four Quartets*:

At the still point of the tuning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. (*Burnt Norton* 64-67)

For Gerontion, the 'still point' is a wild fantasy. His past and future do not converge to impart a coherence to the present, but to reaffirm the stagnation and absolute fixity of a broken spirit. He possesses the 'turning world', spinning chaotically, because the self-sufficient ego had collapsed: severed from all external sources of vitality, till even its senses failed, and it was unable to sustain itself. Gerontion's world is a spinning vortex in which the self is violently smashed into 'fractured atoms'—an extreme stage of brokenness, surely one which is beyond any hope of repair. *The Waste Land* similarly describes individuals whose lives are futile and paralysed. They are devoured by their desires, and are depicted, as in Buddha's 'Fire Sermon', as 'burning' in the fire of 'passion . . . with the fire of hatred, with the fire of infatuation; with birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief, and despair' (qtd. in North 54).

However, after the 'agony in stony places' (*TWL* 324), the exiled self in *The Waste Land* utters a desperate cry for salvation (in the words of St. Augustine), which recognizes that relief can only be granted by an authority higher and more supreme than the suffering self:

Burning burning burning burning

O Lord Thou pluckest me out

O Lord Thou pluckest (*TWL* 308-10)

The messages of Buddha and Augustine are combined here; both perceive fire as the element which destroys, and both yearn for a release from their suffering, which they realize can only come from a renunciation of their unruly selves.

Buddha preached that this was possible through an austere regimen of self-discipline, an aversion from the earthly:

And in conceiving this aversion, he becomes divested of passion, and by the absence of passion he becomes free, and when he is free he becomes aware that he is free; and he knows that re-birth is exhausted, that he has lived the holy life, that he has done what it behoved him to do, and that he is no more for this world.' (qtd. in North 55)

In his 'Notes on the Waste Land' Eliot mentioned: 'The collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism, as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident' (*CP* 79). *The Waste Land* recognizes the urgent need for self-renunciation, and identifies it with an affiliation to an ascetic religious order, even though this ambition is not made possible in the poem itself. The plight of Gerontion is exacerbated, because he is remorseless, which removes him from any sort of positive affirmation.

Both Prufrock and Gerontion represent personae engaged in a dramatic monologue, which functions separately for both protagonists; it actively constructs the former's present, while recreating the past for the latter. This is evident from Prufrock's mournful observation in the present tense—'I grow old . . . I grow old' (*CP* 120)—and Gerontion's assertions that he is already old, and was 'neither at the hot gates / Nor fought in the warm rain' (*G* 3-4). Prufrock is depicted as nervously contemplating a proposal to his lady, his monologue wrecked with his self-conscious anxieties, and he is certain that his intentions will be misconstrued. The heated debate with himself imparts his monologue with intensity, which is replaced in Gerontion with a weariness of one who has relinquished his desire to make any decisions. For Prufrock, the present has yet to determine his fate, and he ponders: 'Should I, after tea and cakes and ices, / Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?' (*CP* 79-80). There are no such moments for Gerontion, who has resigned himself to his spiritual torpor, and has no wish to alter this condition; he is now merely 'an old man driven by the Trades / To a sleepy corner' (*G* 72-73). In this desolation, he indulges in a reverie of his unredeemed past, and then provides a rehearsed rhetoric, a 'show', designed for self-vindication. This is devoid of enthusiasm, conviction or any force: after meandering through various explanations, unlike Prufrock—who contemplates whether to eat a peach, or part his hair a certain way— Gerontion merely resumes his slumber. In fact, Gerontion does not deliberate any action throughout the poem; this indicates a psychological acceptance of his failure, which makes his self-imprisonment more advanced than that of Prufrock. His is the plight of the insipid crowd of people which tramples over London Bridge, undone by death—'And each man fixed his eyes before his feet' (*TWL* 65)—and

later, of *The Hollow Men*—‘lost / Violent souls’ (CP 15-16)—emblematic of ‘Paralysed force, gesture without motion’ (12).

In ‘The Function Of Criticism’ Eliot reproached Middleton Murry’s observation that: “‘The English writer, the English divine, the English statesmen, inherit no rules from their forbears; they inherit only . . . a sense that in the last resort they must depend upon the inner voice” (SE 27). Eliot was severe in his denigration of this ‘voice’ which, he believed, perpetuated an ‘eternal message of vanity, fear, and lust’. This pronouncement appears ironic in the light of Gerontion’s persona, who is ravaged by aggressive desires, and is guided solely by the ‘inner voice’. He does not recognize or affirm an association with other selves, a religious tradition, or the natural order. A historical awareness, which was absent in the protagonists of *Inventions*—such as Prufrock, Saint Sebastian, or the speakers of the ‘Preludes’—and which Eliot attempts to impart to Gerontion, only emphasizes his connection with a legacy of failure. The poem depicts the nightmare which results when the self gains ascendancy, and becomes pre-eminent: goaded by his vanity, Gerontion is lured into fantastical and misguided delusions of his self-sufficiency, which his ego tries to make credible through restless intellectual activity. Gerontion is unable to realize the discipline which Eliot urged, and which was the cornerstone of his classical sensibility. He remains trapped in the prison of his ego in a state of paralysis: incapable of accepting his failure, feeling remorse, asserting anything positive, and ultimately, of realizing a spiritual rebirth, through self-renunciation.

After the depiction of an immense panorama of failure and decay, the closing lines of *The Waste Land* articulate a message for human salvation derived from the *Upanishads*:

Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata. (TWL 433)

They translate into 'Give, sympathise, control' (CP 80), recognizing the need for sympathy and compassion among human beings, and also the self-control without which, Eliot felt, the individual is incapable of acknowledging the existence and suffering of fellow individuals, and by implication incapable of giving. In *The Waste Land*, the principle of 'control' is also linked with self-renunciation, a purification of the self through the refining fire of an ascetic religious discipline. Spender's observation also recognizes this association: 'Christianity – St Augustine – and the Buddha are brought together only as the teaching of asceticism in a civilization which is reduced to a flurry of quotations' (114). The individual who strives for self-discipline, and desires to surrender his pride, vanity, and ambition to a religious entity only tentatively begins to emerge in *Ash-Wednesday*:

Teach us to care and not to care

Teach us to sit still

Even among these rocks,

Our peace in His will (211-14)

'Gerontion' does not embody the messages of either *The Waste Land* or *Ash-Wednesday*. Its spiritual plight does, however, look forward to these two poems, and makes possible the earnest appeal for the necessity of salvation and healing of these and subsequent works.

Conclusion

Eliot once stated that 'Only those have the right to talk of discipline who have looked into the Abyss' (qtd. in Moody 12). This indicates his wariness of the self's passionate and aggressive desires, and also illuminates his urgency for some form of self-control. In his own life, Eliot had constructed many disguises to conceal himself: among others, he was very fond of the "aged eagle" persona' (Richards 7). Robert Crawford comments that Eliot 'feared the pain of self-revelation, of being exposed' (8); his aloof demeanour and various disguises constitute a facet of that regimen of self-discipline which he so emphatically propounded during his literary career.

The individuals depicted in Eliot's poetry similarly emphasize this need for self-discipline. In the poems discussed in this study from 1907 to 1920, Eliot's various protagonists aspire to his classical ideals, but remain incapable of realizing this association; the disciplined self does not emerge. This failure contests and refutes Eliot's exhortations for self-control, and represents a discrepancy between his literary programme, which sought to reinforce the exigency for classical ideals, and his poetics. Equally, however, my study considers the ensuing horror of solipsism and self-imprisonment which emerges in the absence of an affirmation with external authority, as depicted in the cases of the 'Mandarins', the speaker of 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', 'Prufrock', and later, 'Gerontion'. This, in turn, powerfully asserts, and foregrounds Eliot's earnest appeal for just such a classical discipline, which was the cornerstone of his sensibility. The negative models of selfhood emerging from the poems impart an understanding of the need for the self-discipline which Eliot implored, and which remains elusive in the poems so far considered.

The aspiration for self-surrender which these poems delineate also succeeds in foregrounding the wilfulness of the ego, which contests the self-transcendence, and in doing so, emphatically asserts its claims. The violent fantasies of 'St. Sebastian', the 'Madness' of 'Prufrock' (*IMH*, 'Prufrock's Pervigilium' 29) personified as a chattering drunkard, and the suicidal thoughts of the speaker in 'Do I know how I feel?' represent an extreme aspect of the forceful ego. In subsequent years, Eliot's fervent efforts towards self-control moved him closer to Christianity. In an essay on Lancelot Andrewes (1926), Eliot makes an observation about Donne, which may be interpreted as an allusion to himself: 'he belonged to that class of persons, of which there are always one or two examples in the modern world, who seek refuge in religion from the tumults of a strong emotional temperament which can find no complete satisfaction elsewhere' (*SE* 342). In fact, William Chace cites a remark which Eliot makes two years later in 1928, in which he expresses similar concerns for himself: 'I feel that I need the most severe . . . the most Latin, kind of discipline, Ignatian or other [. . .] I feel that nothing could be too ascetic, too violent, for my own needs' (Review 146). These comments indicate that in the years which followed the publication of *The Waste Land*, the exigency for self-discipline intensified and became more urgent for Eliot.

It is, therefore, unsurprising that Eliot was baptized into the Anglo-Catholic denomination of Christianity in 1927. He once wrote that:

Humanism has much to say of Discipline and Order and Control; and I have parroted these terms myself. I found no discipline in humanism. . . . But the difficult discipline is the discipline and training of emotion; this the modern world has great need of . . .

and this I have found is only attainable through dogmatic religion
(qtd. in Moody 12)

Even after his conversion, the arduous contest between the 'emotional temperament' and the religious discipline persisted, and translates into an enduring preoccupation of Eliot's poetry. He continued to experience doubts about his religious conversion, and was 'Wavering between the profit and the loss' (AW 188), an uncertainty which is articulated in *Ash-Wednesday* (1930):

And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices
In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices
And the weak spirit quickens to rebel
For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell (195-98)

The emphasis on 'lost' brings into focus the intense nostalgia and wistful longing for those earthly pleasures which the self struggles to relinquish, even after the avowal of their renunciation. Although the violent desires of the earlier poems appear to subside after Eliot's religious affirmation, the wilful ego manifests itself in these moments of rebellion. While the resolve to 'turn' (AW 1) from the temporal world is strong, it falters before the appeal and lure of the 'lilac' and the 'sea'. *Ash-Wednesday* also voices Eliot's fears of being classed amongst those who 'affirm before the world and deny between the rocks' (180). As Ronald Bush aptly observes, Eliot tests the 'validity of his religious calling' (131) in this poem, and after repeated struggles to explain to himself the reasons for his turning, the poem culminates in an affirmation of faith, which functions simultaneously as a plea for help: 'And let me cry and come unto Thee' (AW 219).

In his review of the most recent publication of Eliot's letters (volumes three and four), William Chace comments that Eliot claimed in 'Tradition and the

Individual Talent' that the poet experiences a 'continual surrender of himself', but 'the troubled Eliot of these letters could no more surrender himself than he could jettison his perfectly correct manners' (Review 146). He continues, that struggling in his quest for self-surrender, Eliot tries a different approach: 'By 1928, he was seeking not a surrender of himself, but a form of religious discipline that would hold that self in the tightest of bonds'. His subsequent poetry reflects this ambition for self-discipline through an adoption of Christian ideals, which was not only a defining element of Eliot's literary efforts, but also constituted for him a lifelong pursuit. Even a decade after his conversion, the quest for self-restraint continued to assert its claims: the self in *Little Gidding* (*Four Quartets*) articulates a desire for the 'refining fire' which could mould the demands of the forceful ego:

From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit

Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire

Where you must move in measure, like a dancer. (146-48)

The 'refining fire' alludes to that religious discipline which, by holding the 'self in the tightest of bonds' (Chace, Review 146) makes possible the transformation of its uncontrolled and 'Contorted' 'paroxysms' (*IMH*, 'Opera' 8), into that precision and measure which is the beauty and grace of the dancer's dance.

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