Cultivating Eliot's Historical Sense: Eliotic Time and The Waste Land's Response to Alienation

Thomas Ball

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CULTIVATING ELIOT’S HISTORICAL SENSE:
ELIOTIC TIME AND THE WASTE LAND’S RESPONSE TO ALIENATION

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty College & Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Thomas Ball

May 2021
CULTIVATING ELIOT’S HISTORICAL SENSE:
ELIOTIC TIME AND THE WASTE LAND’S RESPONSE TO ALIENATION

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ABSTRACT

CULTIVATING ELIOT’S HISTORICAL SENSE:
ELIOTIC TIME AND THE WASTE LAND’S RESPONSE TO ALIENATION

By
Thomas Ball
May 2021

Dissertation supervised by Tom Eyers

In this dissertation, I argue that T.S. Eliot’s The Waste Land marshals his account of historical sense as a response to the problem of alienation in modernity. Eliot’s historical sense depends upon an awareness of the endurance of the past, demanding a reorientation to the structure of temporality. I interrogate the temporal ramifications of Eliot’s account, arguing that it resonates with Henri Bergson’s durational theory of time. I ultimately investigate Eliot’s relationship to Bergson, suggesting that Eliot intervenes in the Bergsonian framework by establishing duration as a cultural, rather than individual or ontological, reality.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I consider myself lucky to have the family that I do. Their influence on this project has been immeasurable, and it extends well beyond the support they have offered in person or from afar. They have cultivated my best qualities, and I carry them with me always. Among this family I count Kelly Dale, who saw that I had something important to say even when I could not.

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I owe a debt of gratitude to my dissertation committee, Tom Eyers, Jay Lampert, and Martin Hägglund, for their guidance and their willingness to be part of this project. I am tremendously thankful for the wealth of suggestions Tom has provided, which have never failed to enrich this material, as well as for his support through both successes and failures. Jay’s incisive challenges and critiques have bolstered this project’s argumentative rigor, making the final product significantly clearer and stronger. For this I am truly grateful.

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I. The Problem of Historical Sense

Historical sense is the concept at the heart of this project. In fact, this project developed as a response to a cultural moment that strikes me as characterized by a lack of historical sense. But this notion refers to many things. The historical sense with which I am concerned is not merely knowledge about historical events. Nor is it exclusively, or even primarily, an attention to the chronology of occurrences. If historical sense is reduced to an encyclopedic knowledge of historical material or a facility with chronology, then my suggestion that we suffer from a loss of it may appear patently ridiculous. We have an overwhelming supply of historical data at our disposal. Indeed, the prominent methodological approaches of the digital humanities have developed in response to this breadth of material, employing the techniques of data science to illuminate temporally distant cultural moments. However, the historical sense of this project does not lie in the availability of information about the past, nor does it treat the past as a distant object of scholarly investigation. Rather, it concerns our relation to the past, taken both as a whole and in the specificity of discrete moments. Thus the lack of historical sense I am circling has to do with the relevance of the past, our past, to us. And so insofar as this project develops a notion of historical sense that is tied to our own relations, it articulates a loss that is much closer to us, much more present.

The notion of historical sense central to this project is derived from T.S. Eliot’s seminal essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” In that essay, Eliot describes historical sense as involving “a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence” and as being “a
sense of the timeless as well as the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together.”¹ This historical sense is “what makes a writer traditional,” but at the same time is “what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity.”² Eliot’s account of historical sense animates this project’s investigation of his long poem *The Waste Land*. And indeed, the latter half of this project is devoted to tracing the philosophical and literary implications of the notion of historical sense and to arguing for its applicability beyond the more limited literary context in which Eliot introduces it. When I claim then, speaking particularly though not exclusively about the American context, that our cultural moment is characterized by a loss of historical sense, I mean to highlight a failure of recognition, not a failure of knowledge. I am responding to what strikes me as a failure to acknowledge the enduring effects of the past, a failure to recognize the ways in which the past remains present.

I see this failing of historical sense manifest most viscerally in every attempt to compartmentalize a recent tragedy as an isolated incident and an unforeseeable aberration. This method of response is trotted out by talking heads to delineate the conditions according to which a tragic event can be discussed, thereby circumscribing the appropriate response. Thus, mass shootings in America are systematically framed as the lamentable acting-out of unhinged individuals. The network of social conditions that make such events a common occurrence is occluded, and instead the character of the perpetrator is endlessly litigated. Similarly, each time a police officer murders a person of color, focus is diverted from the historical role of the police force as a safeguard of white supremacy. We are instead distracted with endless inquiries into the particularities of the deadly encounter and, inevitably, the demonization of the victim. We are told to consider whether an entire institution should be judged according to the actions of one obviously

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deviant individual. The department representatives and public relations professionals who deploy this tactic seem to recognize no irony in the frequency with which they make use of it. Each instantiation of the pattern demands to be treated according to its own particularity, divorced from the structural conditions that place it within an enduring network of historical causes. An analogous impulse manifests in reactions to geopolitical antagonism that reify contemporary states of conflict into eternal and inescapable conditions. Thus, the rhetoric of a clash of civilizations enshrines particular cultural configurations, themselves historically determined, as manifestations of an ahistorical explanatory framework.

These tragic events are, of course, disparate in their origins. They are implicated in myriad causal structures, both competing and overlapping. They are overdetermined, as are the responses to them that I have highlighted as problematic. My quarry here is not ultimately an analysis of the causes of American violence or the shortcomings of our political discourse. I raise these examples only to note the temporal logic that underwrites them. This logic divorces the present from the past. When we limit our engagement with current events to an interrogation of the decisions or characters of the specific actors involved, we sever the present from its historical relations. We treat the present moment as hermetically sealed, divorced from a past that no longer exists. And when we do this, we deafen ourselves to the ways in which history continues to echo through our present experience. We deprive ourselves of the ability to reckon with the forces that shape us, structures of power and experience that, though amorphous, can nevertheless exert profound and enduring effects. We restrict our capacity to understand ourselves, each other, and the world around us.

Though this project developed as a response to conditions that I maintain are characterized by a failing of historical sense, it is not primarily an investigation of our contemporary situation.
Rather, in this project, I undertake to explicate Eliot’s own deployment of the notion of historical sense in *The Waste Land*. For *The Waste Land*, I argue, instantiates the synthetic capacity of historical sense. It develops a poetic vision according to which an attunement to the enduring past may safeguard meaningful human interaction. It does so by appealing to the past as the ground of intersubjective relations. The poem, further, deploys this unifying power of historical sense as an intervention into a social reality that it depicts as marked by a totalizing sense of fragmentation. The individuals presented in the poem are cut off from each other, seemingly trapped in disconnected worlds of private experience. Through its juxtaposition of these competing visions, one of fragmentary and alienated social experience and one of a synthetic possibility grounded in our relation to the past, the poem interrogates the epistemological and existential consequences of the absence of historical sense. In doing so, it diagnoses our contemporary situation and speaks to a condition that seems, to me, to be particularly relevant to our current historical moment.

The opening chapters of this project explicate the condition into which, I argue, the poem intervenes. In the first chapter I frame this condition as a universalized state of alienation. I define alienation as the subjective experience of the disintegration of the relations between individuals, which results in a sense of being isolated within an enclosed and private perspective. I suggest that many investigations of *The Waste Land* take this isolated condition to be the ultimate meaning of the poem. Because the poem represents a universalized state of alienation, these interpretations read it as endorsing that alienated condition as a fundamental truth of human existence. I argue, however, that the poem represents this condition not to endorse it, but rather in order to announce it as a problem. I develop this claim through an investigation first of the debates between Georg Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, and Theodor Adorno regarding the productive possibilities of modernist literary forms and then through an explication of the methodological intervention of *The Waste*
Land itself. I take up Eliot’s appeal in a review of Joyce’s Ulysses to a mythical method that, he claims, must adopted as a productive response to historical conditions strikingly similar to those depicted in The Waste Land. I argue, further, that the poem employs this mythical method by incorporating elements of the Arthurian Grail Legend. In doing so, the poem draws upon the Grail Legend as a source that invests it with a structure, and this structure disrupts the totalizing sense of fragmentation. I argue that The Waste Land does not incorporate the Grail Legend’s narrative structure but rather inherits a mythical logic. According to this logic, the vitality of the land is inextricably bound to the behavior and condition of the people who live on it. This logic reveals a connection between the poem’s descriptions of desolate, arid landscapes and its representation of human relationships characterized by detachment and isolation. Acknowledging the problematic deployment of similar mythical frameworks in the twentieth century, I argue that Eliot does not retreat into myth. Rather, he marshals this mythical logic to illuminate a more fundamental epistemological framework. According to this framework, itself derived from Eliot’s philosophical engagement with F.H. Bradley, the notion of a shared world depends upon the commensurability of different perspectives. When individuals become increasingly trapped within their own private perspectives, a condition The Waste Land appeals to through an allusion to Bradley, their shared world disintegrates. This, ultimately, is the problem in which I claim The Waste Land intervenes.

In the latter half of this project, I develop the response I claim The Waste Land offers to the problem of fragmented experience and disintegrating worlds. This response manifests formally in the poem through the use of repetition and allusion. I argue that the poem employs these devices as an engagement with Eliot’s notion of historical sense. The poem’s allusions to myriad texts reveal continuities between the poem’s fragmented vignettes and a wider historical context. Further, the repetition of these allusions fosters connections between those disparate vignettes,
disrupting the sense of fragmentation that so strikingly characterizes the poem. Characters are drawn into relations with each other through their mutual connections to a textual history embedded in the poem. The poem, I argue, appeals to a past that endures in the present as a synthetic ground. In doing so, it articulates a vision of historical sense, and presents this historical sense as a response to the social disintegration that it diagnoses.

_The Waste Land_ articulates a vision of experience animated by historical sense and presents this vision as a response to the problem of alienation. To the extent that Eliot presents historical sense as capable of synthesizing perspectives, I maintain it serves as a ground for the recovery of a shared world in _The Waste Land_. This account of historical sense, however, depends upon a model of temporality that treats the past as, in some sense, coexistent with the present. The coexistence of the past with the present is suggested by Eliot both in the positive definition of historical sense that he develops in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” and through Eliot’s juxtaposition of his approach to history with various deficient accounts. He excoriates these accounts precisely for their temptation to treat the past either as a vestigial moment to be surpassed or as a relic to be preserved. Eliot derides them for treating the past as divorced from the present and irrelevant to it. _The Waste Land_ reinforces this sense that the past coexists with the present by incorporating voices from the past into the poem. Rather than merely depicting contemporary personages quoting or alluding to historical material, _The Waste Land_ has Philomel sing directly into the text and appeals to the Greek prophet Tiresias as a figure who sees the substance of the poem itself. _The Waste Land_ thus seems to suggest that the past can serve as a synthetic force precisely because it continues to endure in the present, providing the ground of relations.

I argue that _The Waste Land_ depends upon an appeal to the past’s endurance in the present, but I also acknowledge that the poem does not articulate an account of temporality that justifies
this appeal. Indeed, when Eliot introduces the notion of historical sense in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” he promises to “halt at the frontier of metaphysics or mysticism,” leaving aside the question of the structure of time as beyond his purview.\(^3\) Drawing again upon the critiques leveled by Lukács against modernist literary forms, I argue that without a coherent account of temporality, *The Waste Land* risks reinforcing the precise mode of alienation that it seems to confront. For if the past cannot and does not actually endure in the present, then the cultivation of historical sense as a response to alienation amounts to a retreat into a fantasy. *The Waste Land*, then, would seem actually to be an artifact of the alienated condition that the traditional account of the poem takes it to endorse. In response to this challenge, I explicate the temporal conditions necessitated by Eliot’s appeal to historical sense. I further argue that the account of duration developed by Henri Bergson satisfies the conditions of Eliot’s temporal framework, thereby offering a potential ground for historical sense. I finally argue that Eliot does not uncritically endorse Bergson’s account of duration. Nor, I claim, does he reject Bergson entirely, as some scholars suggest.\(^4\) Rather, I argue that Eliot critiques, both in poetry and in prose, various psychological and ontological ramifications of Bergson’s account. This critical engagement, I conclude, leads Eliot to relocate the ground of duration. For Eliot, duration manifests neither as the purely psychological experience of memory nor as a basic ontological principle. Instead, I suggest Eliot enshrines duration as a temporal mode of social experience, thereby resolving his disputes with the Bergsonian ontological framework while preserving duration’s capacity to underwrite historical sense.

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4 Jewel Spears Brooker, for example, develops this claim in “Eliot’s Philosophical Studies: Bergson, Frazer, Bradley.”
II. Methodology

In this dissertation, I develop a method of reading literary texts that emphasizes the reciprocally beneficial relationship between philosophical and literary modes of interpretation. In doing so, I argue for the capacity of works of literature to engage with philosophical problems, while also emphasizing the need for philosophy’s resources to bring literature’s inherent richness to light. As such, I see this project not only as an interdisciplinary exercise but furthermore as an argument for the clarity that interdisciplinary methodologies afford. The method I develop investigates literary texts not merely as cultural artifacts or vessels of ideology, but rather as responses to specific cultural problems. This emphasis on the problems to which works respond in fact establishes the capacity of literary works to speak beyond their specific historical contexts. If contemporary society experiences problems analogous to those addressed in a work, then investigation of that text may illuminate avenues of response. My method departs from dominant historicist methodologies in literary studies that treat texts simply as artifacts which facilitate the investigation of historical conditions. By emphasizing problems, I also position this methodology against dominant philosophical methods of investigation which straightforwardly interrogate the theoretical positions articulated in a text. Though I articulate an approach to literature that departs from these dominant methods, I do not abandon them entirely. For sensitivity to context, akin to the historicist model, enables one to identify the problems that a text addresses, while a commitment to the coherence and rigor of response, as emphasized in philosophical discourse, preserves the relevance of that response to contexts beyond its immediate historical situation.

The methodology of this project is grounded in a reading of literary form as responsive to social conditions, and particularly problems, rather than simply as representational or straightforwardly ideological. Reading literary texts as responsive in this way entails a host of
subsequent questions. For, once the problem with which a text engages is identified, we may proceed to ask what interventions the text makes into the problem and consider the resources it marshals to do so. Pursuing these lines of inquiry, I highlight tensions between the elements of form and content in *The Waste Land*, while remaining sensitive to the capacity of this tension both to address the problems of the text and identify new avenues for investigation. In order to articulate *The Waste Land’s* appeal to historical sense as a response to the particular condition of alienation in modernity, I coordinate the poem with Eliot’s critical work and philosophical corpus. In doing so, I illuminate the theoretical framework underwriting the response to alienation suggested in the poem. Thus, while the dialectical tension between form and content raises alienation as a problem and suggests historical sense as a response, the resonances between *The Waste Land* and Eliot’s criticism allow me to argue for this response’s coherence. This final step is crucial because reading the poem as an intervention into the problem of alienation brings it into conversation with the alienated dimensions of our contemporary situation. If *The Waste Land* responds to a particular problem, and if we share in that problem, then reckoning with the coherence and ramifications of that response is crucial for appraising its relevance to us.

This project is, first and foremost, an investigation into the theoretical interventions of *The Waste Land*. As such, my arguments in every chapter develop from and are grounded in close readings of the poem itself. By close reading, I intend both a precise attention to the descriptions presented in the text and an attunement to the formal elements of the poem that variously reinforce those descriptions or call them into question. Thus, I highlight, along with many insightful readers of *The Waste Land*, that the poem seems to universalize the condition of social disintegration that it represents by reinscribing this condition at the level of the poem’s fragmentary form. Further, with my argument that the poem uses allusion and repetition to develop a response to the
fragmented experience that it depicts, I emphasize a poetic capacity to disrupt and interrogate the representation of the world that it articulates. An attunement to a poem’s capacity to dialectically engage with the conditions of its own production offers a corrective, I think, to dominant historicist approaches to works of literature that treat them as representational artifacts that merely convey information about their cultural contexts. The apogee of this tradition is, of course, the “distant reading” approach to texts employed in the digital humanities. By reducing works of literature to the content they contain that can be accommodated to the tools of data analysis, this methodology proves incapable of fully reckoning with the formal features of a work that can generate productive internal tensions. Further, by analyzing works of literature in order to glean information about their historical contexts, these historicist methodologies risk unnecessarily establishing an unbridgeable chasm between the historical text and our contemporary context. Works of literature become incapable of illuminating our contemporary circumstances because they are restricted to an extremely narrow and historically situated function.

Though the arguments of this project are grounded in an attention to the poem at the level of the line, an attention championed most famously perhaps by proponents of New Criticism, which counts Eliot among its forerunners, I do not adopt wholesale the methodological commitments associated with that tradition. By focusing on the capacity of poems to raise and intervene in problems, I highlight a crucial permeability between text and context. I argue, for instance, that poems should be understood both as conditioned by the historical context in which they appear and as forces that inform that context. With this approach I resist the New Critical method of treating the text as a circumscribed whole, which Cleanth Brooks defends in “The New Criticism” as a “preference for emphasizing the text rather than the writer’s motives or reader’s
reaction.”

Brooks offers a rebuttal to hyperbolic accounts of the New Critical method, helpfully contextualizing the occasions in which he considered literary texts in isolation from their historical contexts, but even in his defense he acknowledges the endurance of this perception. My aim here is not to wade into old debates about the precise contours of the New Critical program. Rather, I mean only to position my own method against a familiar, if caricatured, model of close reading. With my own appeal to close reading, I maintain that we must appeal to the operation of a text itself to discern the problems with which it is engaged. But I also acknowledge that those defining concerns necessarily open on to a wider determining horizon. The assumptions and theoretical orientation expressed in the poem, as well as the language that presents itself as adequate to the poem’s project, are all features that speak to a world beyond the universe created by the work of art. Framing this investigation around the poetic response to extratextual problems methodologically inscribes a concern for the dialectical relationship between the literary work and the conditions in which it intervenes while nevertheless deriving the interpretive frame from the text itself.

This sensitivity to the permeability between text and context grounds, further, the philosophical approach I employ in my explication of The Waste Land. I maintain that philosophical methods can illuminate the complexities of aesthetic works because I take a necessary facet of philosophical investigation to be the identification of the conceptual backdrop against which a philosophical intervention appears. It seems to me that a basic methodological commitment in the study of the history of philosophy is the recognition that philosophical arguments and positions do not appear in isolation. Rather, arguments develop in relation to a network of preexisting commitments and concerns, and they develop in response to discrete

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5 Brooks, “The New Criticism,” 600.
problems that are felt to be pressing enough to warrant engagement. Reckoning with a philosophical intervention, then, requires excavating the theoretical framework that it assumes and investigating the broader scope of philosophical conversations in which it is engaged. Applying this approach to *The Waste Land* entails illuminating the conditions to which the poem responds as well as the conceptual assumptions underwriting its deployment of the notion of historical sense. For, though Eliot claims in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” to stop short of the boundary of metaphysics, his appeal to historical sense is necessarily embroiled in a host of commitments regarding the nature of time and the conditioning relationships that coordinate the identities of individuals, cultures, and works of art. Explicating these commitments illuminates the contours of Eliot’s intervention in *The Waste Land* and enables us to reckon with the poem’s radical theoretical implications.

The philosophical approach I adopt in my investigation of *The Waste Land* therefore cannot involve simply subjecting the poem to the conceptual analysis appropriate to philosophical arguments. Though I do argue that some of Eliot’s poems, specifically “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” and “Gerontion,” engage critically with Bergson’s account of temporality, even suggesting that the poems together participate in a kind of destructive dilemma, I do not treat the poems as if they should conform to the specific standards of deductive proofs. I hesitate to treat the poems I explicate in this project as if they make straightforward truth claims that can be evaluated sequentially and then collated into a series of inferences. They are poems, after all. Instead, I more frequently treat the poems as developing holistic visions of reality. The visions of reality cultivated in the poems I engage with here explore the ramifications of certain foundational commitments and allow the reader to inhabit the perspective shaped by those commitments. Thus, when I note that my investigations in this project all begin with and return to close readings of *The Waste Land*,

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I do not mean to suggest that I consider the truth of the poem’s statements line by line, as if such a pursuit were productive or even possible. Rather, by attending to the descriptive and formal nuances of the poem, I articulate the competing visions that it cultivates—one animated by historical sense and one characterized by its absence. I further explore the theoretical ramifications of these visions and of the productive tension through which *The Waste Land* develops them. In doing so, I ultimately hope to provide insight into our own experience by attending to the contemporary relevance of this appeal to a past that endures.

The method I adopt in this project is, then, primarily historical in orientation. My main concern is to articulate accurately the theoretical intervention of *The Waste Land* and to explicate the ramifications of its appeal to historical sense. Thus, when I discuss Eliot’s formative engagements with other philosophers, I am ultimately less concerned with whether he represents their positions correctly than I am concerned with how his analyses, accurate or not, inform his poetic practice. Further, as a general methodological principle rooted in this historical orientation, I ground my investigation in a consideration of the thinkers and problems that Eliot addresses explicitly in his work or that are involved in the critical debates surrounding it. I avoid appealing to philosophical accounts external to the context suggested by these texts, as I maintain that doing so risks obscuring the concerns inherent to the work itself. Similarly, when I argue that the poem addresses a problem and endeavor to explicate the contours of that problem, I do so in order to illuminate the operation of the poem rather than to explore alternative ways to address the issue in question. I am thus, for example, more interested in articulating the intellectual influences that condition Eliot’s engagement with the problem of solipsism in *The Waste Land* than considering whether Eliot’s formulation of the problem is preferable to other philosophical treatments of it.
III. A Spectral Chorus

It is, perhaps, only fitting that a project that enjoins a sensitivity to the endurance of the past should itself be haunted in some capacity. Various specters loom over this investigation, exerting effects upon its arguments without always appearing explicitly. Hegel, in particular, echoes throughout this dissertation, for the conflict that frames it, the conflict between Eliot’s literary modernism and Lukács’ ideologically inflected critique of modernist forms, contains a latent tension regarding Hegel’s reception. I briefly suggest that Lukács never fully abandons his roots in Hegelian idealism, most evident in his early Theory of the Novel, even as that idealism is transmuted through his extensive engagement with Marx and Marxism, a tradition itself indebted to the Hegelian project. Lukács articulates a framework that foregrounds the notion of the social totality, both as a regulative ideal, on the one hand, and as an immanently developing ground of social experience on the other. In this, he seems to exhibit an enduring fealty to the Hegelian narrative of the dialectical self-actualization of consciousness from the Phenomenology of Spirit. Eliot, at times, seems also to endorse a regulative ideal of an integrated social totality, and he too presents this ideal in language reminiscent of Hegel. Indeed, though I position Lukács and Eliot against each other in the service of a productive antagonism, their analogous commitments to visions of a vaguely Hegelian integrated totality suggest a significant point of reconciliation.

Hegel, then, appears as a background influence in this project, providing a framework that illuminates the commensurability between its two primary interlocutors. This does not mean, however, that Hegel’s specific conceptual apparatus is particularly useful for clarifying the positions articulated throughout my investigation. The Hegelian aspects of Lukács’ and Eliot’s
thought are filtered through their respective engagements with post-Hegelian traditions. Lukács, for example, develops his Hegelian leanings in the service of a Marxist orthodoxy, imbuing Hegel’s dialectical account of the development of spirit with a discrete historical content. His analysis consistently returns to the material conditions of the proletariat’s coming to self-consciousness. More importantly for this project, Eliot’s Hegelian lineage can be traced through the work of F.H. Bradley, a scion of British Idealism. Eliot’s dissertation, Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley, offers an extended treatment of Bradley’s epistemology, and he appeals to the substance of that work in his notes to The Waste Land. Central to Bradley’s philosophical framework is his notion of the Absolute, a comprehensive perspective that contains all limited perspectives. Sometimes in his criticism, Eliot aligns Bradley’s Absolute with immediate experience, while at others he consigns it to the status of a transcendent regulative ideal. Though Eliot resists developing an extended treatment of Bradley’s Absolute in his dissertation, this concept motivates a number of the epistemological stances Eliot adopts in the work I treat in this project. I engage with Bradley’s Absolute most extensively in my attempt to identify the temporal foundations of Eliot’s historical sense, as I argue Bradley’s account entails commitments that draw it into tension with the conditions Eliot identifies as necessary for underwriting his engagement with history. Eliot’s Hegelian debt is, on this point, both particularly pronounced and potentially a distraction. For though Eliot wrestles with a concept that can clearly be traced to Hegel, appealing to Hegel’s own account of the Absolute does not prove fruitful for illuminating Eliot’s critical engagement with Bradley. The paucity of Hegel’s direct contribution to Eliot’s thought is suggested, for example, by the fact that, in his dissertation devoted to a

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6 J. Hillis Miller, in Poets of Reality, emphasizes the former formulation, while Jewel Spears Brooker, in Mastery and Escape, typically appeals to the latter. The two formulations are, of course, ultimately unified in Bradley’s work, but that argument is beyond the purview of this project.
philosopher in the Idealist tradition, Eliot mentions Hegel by name only once. Insofar as Eliot is not particularly interested in articulating the historical provenance of Bradley’s account or judging Bradley’s faithfulness to Hegel, this influence does not appear to be particularly fecund resource for explicating Eliot’s own thought. Further, though appealing to a more orthodox Hegelian idealism could, perhaps, resolve some of the critiques Eliot raises against Bradley, such an appeal would not necessarily promote a more nuanced understanding of the ways Eliot’s critiques inform the interventions he makes in *The Waste Land*. I propose, then, that Hegel proves an interesting and useful touchstone in this project insofar as his work resonates with a number of the positions that receive extensive treatment throughout it. This resonance illuminates points of commensurability between the primary interlocutors in the project, suggesting fronts on which a seemingly irreconcilable dispute might be resolved. I nevertheless maintain that the work of Hegel himself lies beyond the purview of my work here.

Another figure may be noticeable for his relative absence from this investigation rather than his presence. As one of the twentieth century’s most distinguished thinkers of both time and alienation, Heidegger may seem particularly relevant to this project. For the most part, however, I do not draw upon his work. While I do consider Heidegger in the opening chapter, I primarily present him as a foil for developing Lukács’ critique of the ideological framework that he takes to serve as the theoretical foundation of modernist literature. I ultimately dispute Lukács’ conclusions about modernism, developing my own methodology in opposition to his ideological approach. Nevertheless, with his concern for the social totality, Lukács proves a more helpful interlocutor than Heidegger when considering the contours of alienation as it is depicted in *The Waste Land*. As I argue in the second chapter of this project, *The Waste Land* exhibits an epistemological

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7 Eliot, *Knowledge and Experience*, 259.
concern for the possibility of inhabiting a shared world, a concern for the unification of perspectives. It presents a vision of reality in which this possibility is foreclosed and the shared world seems to disintegrate. The conceptual apparatus Heidegger develops in *Being and Time* is surely capable of illuminating the conditions elaborated in *The Waste Land*, but his approach does not, it seems to me, speak organically to the social framework within which the poem operates. Heidegger frames his investigations through a consideration of the phenomenological experience of *Dasein*. This experience necessarily opens onto a social totality, but the investigations themselves tend to resolve into treatments of the individual. Thus, for example, Heidegger describes alienation as a state in which *Dasein’s* “ownmost potentiality for being-in-the-world is concealed.”

Alienation, in this case, refers back to the individual’s relation to their own potential rather than referring to the individual’s relation to a wider social totality. Heidegger’s account can, of course, speak to the relation between the individual and the social, and his accounts of thrownness, historicity, and being-in-the-world all speak to this relation. But I maintain that the internal pressure to ground the investigations in the individual experience of *Dasein* renders Heidegger’s account less immediately applicable to the mode of alienation to which *The Waste Land* appeals. Similarly, insofar as the model of temporality that Heidegger develops is primarily oriented around a concern for the future, as evidenced most evocatively in his account of Being-toward-Death, it is not immediately useful for illuminating the structure of historical sense.

The shadow that looms largest over the project, however, is that cast by Eliot himself. The legacy of Eliot is particularly vexed because tensions exhibited throughout his corpus result in a temptation to treat Eliot as a fragmentary figure. Thus, it is not uncommon to see a modernist concern for fracture reflected in engagements with Eliot. Robert Lehman in *Impossible* 

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Modernism: T.S. Eliot, Walter Benjamin, and the Critique of Historical Reason, for example, reads The Waste Land as a poem that speaks to a radical discontinuity, even heralding the end of history. Eliot’s modernism, on this reading, depends upon a feeling that time is fundamentally out of joint and appeals to a sense of novelty. To read the poem this way, however, Lehman must maintain a rigid distinction between Eliot the critic and Eliot the poet. While he sees one side of Eliot as “on the side of continuity” with his “valorizing of the tradition in his critical writings,” Lehman claims The Waste Land is “on the side of rupture.” Stefan Collini complicates Lehman’s account in interesting ways, highlighting in Eliot’s criticism an emphasis on degeneration akin to what Lehman locates in Eliot’s poetry while simultaneously contextualizing this concern for degeneration within an appeal to historical continuity. I argue, however, that he too readily ascribes to Eliot a logic of degeneration that results in an apocalyptic appeal to the sterility of modern sensibility, ultimately suggesting an emphasis on disintegration analogous to Lehman’s.

The appeal to modernist literature as signaling a radical historical break is not, I think, unique or surprising. An emphasis on the discontinuity of modernist forms and on the historical conditions to which they respond constitutes, after all, part of the self-mythologization of modernist authors, captured most famously perhaps by Ezra Pound’s injunction to “make it new.” I maintain, though, that accepting this account of modern rupture too readily as an explanatory frame for The Waste Land risks obscuring the ways in which the poem appeals to and depends upon a radical account of historical continuity. These appeals to continuity are further obscured

9 Lehman claims, for example, that “the image of history exhibited in The Waste Land is of something closes, concluded,” and that “from within the poem, from within the experience of The Waste Land and the convictions of its that this experience inspires, one cannot imagine a (historical) moment beyond The Waste Land” (Lehman, Impossible Modernism, 106). I engage extensively with Lehman’s account in the second chapter of this project.

10 Lehman, Impossible Modernism, 109.

11 Collini, The Nostalgic Imagination.
when the modern sense of fragmentation is extrapolated to the figure of Eliot himself and it is taken for granted that the project of the critic is distinct from the sensibility of the poet.

The polyvocality that results from the temptation to treat Eliot the critic and Eliot the poet as separate entities is amplified by a complementary impulse to treat the intellectual development of Eliot as a discontinuous process. Jewel Spears Brooker distills this developmental narrative in “Substitutes for Religion in the Early Poetry of T.S. Eliot.”\textsuperscript{12} There Brooker frames Eliot’s early work as an attempt to find a framework capable of satisfying the theoretical demands that ultimately precipitate his conversion to the Anglican church in 1927. A relatively stable narrative develops in Brooker’s treatments of Eliot. According to this narrative, Eliot converts to Bergsonism early in his poetic career but becomes disenchanted with Bergson’s idealism and abandons it for an commitment to Bradley.\textsuperscript{13} Eliot’s disappointments with Bradley lead him to adopt the stance of a skeptical relativist, a stance taken to dominate the landscape of \textit{The Waste Land} and \textit{The Hollow Men}. Then, with his second conversion in 1927, Eliot settles for the religious solution he had actually been longing for all along.\textsuperscript{14} There is, of course, merit to recognizing the shifts in Eliot’s ideological commitments and reckoning with the ways his shifting theoretical frameworks manifest in both his critical work and his poetry. Many extremely insightful readings of Eliot’s poems engage extensively with Eliot’s intellectual concerns and sympathies at the time of their composition. The temptation to treat these phases of Eliot’s career as discrete and incommensurable, a temptation evidenced by the appeal to conversions, results however in a further multiplication of Eliot’s voices. Then, amidst this cacophony of voices, Brooker’s

\textsuperscript{12} Spears Brooker, \textit{Mastery and Escape}, 123–139.
\textsuperscript{13} Spears Brooker, \textit{T.S. Eliot’s Dialectical Imagination}, 28–43.
\textsuperscript{14} In a letter from 1934, Eliot himself offers support for this teleological account of his own development, which treats the Christian conversion of 1927 as the end for which Eliot was striving all along (Spears Brooker, “Enlarging Immediate Experience,” 5). I argue in the first chapter against taking this revisionist account of his own development too seriously and more extensively against treating Eliot’s intellectual development as teleological.
teleological frame allows the chorus to be subsumed under the unifying figure of the Eliot the Christian, insofar as each of those previous phases is taken to have been striving for a Christian conversion all along. On one hand, then, I maintain that appeals to irreconcilable rupture, either with respect to Eliot’s poetic and critical output or with respect to the historical situation of modernity, obscure the productive intervention of *The Waste Land*. On the other, I hold that this analogous dissociation of moments in Eliot’s development, along with their teleological subsumption under the person of Eliot the Christian, elides the theoretical fecundity of Eliot’s work on history by assuming answers to the problems he takes up and deriving those answers from circumstances external to the text.

Finally, the figure of Eliot casts another, significantly more troubling, shadow over this project. Eliot’s politics and beliefs, particularly concerning issues of race, were often problematic, to say the least. His status in the twentieth century as a champion of tradition, a term I hope to complicate in this project, and an arbiter of taste becomes increasingly uncomfortable insofar as the terms in which he expresses those tastes and appeals to tradition are consistently Eurocentric and occasionally tinged with racial prejudice. While Eliot’s dogmatic conservativism becomes more pronounced in his later criticism, his entire corpus is shot through with Eurocentrism and racism. This racism appears most pronouncedly in the cringeworthy caricatures of his immature “King Bolo” series of poems, but it haunts his more mature poems as well. “Gerontion,” which will receive extensive treatment in the final chapter of this project, exploits antisemitic tropes, while *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats* leans upon racist descriptions in the service of dramatic conflict in “Growltiger’s Last Stand.” The criticism I engage with most extensively in this project does not, on the whole, contain anything so explicitly repugnant. This may in part be due to the culturally myopic perspective Eliot adopts in much of his prose. Most notably, the historical sense
to which Eliot appeals involves an awareness of increasingly capacious historical categories, like “the mind of [the poet’s] own country” and “the mind of Europe,” but this expansion of awareness stops at the border of the continent. The tradition that Eliot appeals to is definitively and restrictively western, even as the logic Eliot develops entails an internal pressure to include broader and more comprehensive perspectives. By explicating this logic, I develop a framework for interrogating Eliot’s racist and xenophobic commitments from within his own theoretical edifice. For, insofar as his response to the problem of alienation depends upon the expansion of one’s perspective, xenophobia functions within this framework as both a symptom of and catalyst for alienation.

The account of The Waste Land that I develop intervenes in each of these debates, productively complicating some ossified narratives about the delineation of Eliot’s modernism while also acknowledging the shortsightedness of some of Eliot’s opinions and pronouncements. I argue that Eliot’s notion of historical sense suggests a corrective to what I find to be an overemphasis on discontinuity in treatments of Eliot’s work. By highlighting the importance of an awareness of the past’s contemporaneity with the present, Eliot frustrates the impulse to treat history, either that of literary traditions or of individuals, as operating by discontinuous leaps. Further, by illuminating the operation of this critical framework in Eliot’s poetry, I disrupt the impulse to compartmentalize the different modes of Eliot’s creative production. I argue that The Waste Land and the criticism contemporaneous with it actually cohere into a more unified theoretical project that emphasizes historical continuity and the dialectical interaction of text and context. In doing so, I dispute accounts that read The Waste Land as an appeal to an ineluctable and ahistorical condition, while I simultaneously challenge the impulse to divorce Eliot’s poetry

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15 Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 42.
from his criticism. By focusing primarily on *The Waste Land* and criticism prior to or roughly contemporaneous with it, I aim to bracket the question of Eliot’s conversion, thereby foreclosing the possibility of reading the solutions Eliot comes to later in his life back into the problems he takes up in his earlier work. Limiting my own critical scope allows me to consider the productive possibilities of *The Waste Land* and its radical implications for our orientation to history according to their own merits, rather than adjudicating the success of *The Waste Land*’s response to the problem of alienation by referring to Eliot’s own satisfaction with the result. With my argument that Eliot adopts a roughly Bergsonian account of temporality, I disrupt the narrative that would treat Eliot’s intellectual development as a series of conversions. Indeed, if we take Eliot’s temporal intervention seriously, we may consider the possibility that it would be appropriate to treat his own development as durational. In the final analysis, the operation of Eliot’s intellect seems to me to resemble uncannily his description of the mind of Europe with which he introduces the notion of historical sense. This mind of Europe “is a mind which changes, and . . . this change is a development which abandons nothing *en route*, does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsmen.”¹⁶ Even when Eliot seems to transition from an engagement with one theoretical framework to another, he does not expunge the previous position from his mind entirely. Rather, the embrace of a new framework reorganizes his prior commitments, allowing him to use their resources productively to new ends.

Furthermore, by emphasizing the philosophical contribution of the poem and explicating the theoretical foundations of that contribution, I work to untether somewhat the action of the poem from the opinions of the poet. If, as I argue, Eliot employs historical sense to address a particular problem, and if this engagement rests upon a coherent theoretical foundation, we may consider

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whether Eliot’s more problematic pronouncements are in fact commensurable with the conceptual apparatus he develops. Thus, though Eliot introduces his account of historical sense in terms that are unabashedly Eurocentric, the synthetic pressure of that concept, its function of unifying perspectives into increasingly comprehensive wholes, implicitly condemns the limitations of the terms in which it is first introduced. Explicating this more culturally capacious notion derived from Eliot’s corpus provides a framework for developing an immanent critique of the problematic aspects of Eliot’s writings and, indeed, of the conservative literary tradition that Eliot canonizes. Further, by articulating the conceptual apparatus that *The Waste Land* develops to address a particular historical problem, I am to illuminate the ways in which the poem may speak to our own historical situation regardless of whether we subscribe to Eliot’s narrower aesthetic and political pronouncements.

**IV. Summary of the Argument**

This project consists of five chapters, each of which presents a relatively self-contained investigation of an aspect of *The Waste Land* while simultaneously serving as a step in a more comprehensive argument. The first chapter frames the poem as an engagement with the problem of alienation and in doing so establishes the methodological approach of the project as a whole. The second chapter appeals to a pair of explorations of myth, cited by Eliot in his notes to *The Waste Land*, in order to explicate a sympathetic logic that I claim structures the poem. This logic further illuminates the problem of alienation that the poem addresses. In the third chapter, I offer an extended treatment of Eliot’s notion of historical sense, which I argue motivates the poem’s response to alienation. In the fourth chapter, I interrogate the theoretical ramifications of Eliot’s appeal to historical sense and suggest that Henri Bergson’s account of memory offers a temporal framework capable of underwriting this appeal. Finally, in the fifth chapter, I articulate the
contours of Eliot’s intellectual debt to Bergson, arguing that he rejects Bergson’s ontological framework without abandoning his account of memory. Ultimately, I suggest that Eliot resituates Bergson’s account of memory by grounding duration in the operation of culture rather than treating it as an ontological or merely psychological principle.

In the first chapter, I establish my interpretive methodology, framing my analysis of *The Waste Land* as an investigation of the problem of alienation. Drawing on the work of Georg Lukács, I define alienation as the individual experience of a felt disintegration of the social totality. I suggest that the poem depicts this condition as not only common but ubiquitous. I further suggest that a dominant interpretive approach to the poem takes it to endorse the inescapability of this condition. Thus, the poem seems committed to a vision of failure according to which individuals are ineluctably disconnected from each other and from a greater social world. This widely accepted reading of the poem aligns with the model of modernist literature that Lukács critiques in his “The Ideology of Modernism.” Next, I explicate this critique, which holds that the appeal to a universal state of alienation obscures the historical causes of that condition and ultimately reinforces it, and I contextualize this argument within the framework of Lukács’ more extended salvo against what he identifies as irrationalist ideology. In doing so, I at once signal a challenge to *The Waste Land* that will resurface throughout this project and identify a shortcoming that manifests both in Lukács’ approach to modernism and in the traditional account of *The Waste Land*. On the one hand, Lukács ultimately claims that, by representing isolation as a universal human condition, works of modernist literature elide the conditions of their own alienation, which in turn leads them to endorse a retreat into fantasy as a necessary response.

The claim that *The Waste Land* proposes a retreat into fantasy will motivate the later chapters’ philosophical investigation of the theoretical framework underwriting the poem’s
intervention. More immediately, however, I argue that this critique exhibits a shortcoming shared by both Lukács and the standard interpretation of the poem. These approaches to *The Waste Land* take it simply to endorse the vision of reality that it represents. Finally, I appeal to the responses that Bertolt Brecht and Theodor Adorno offer to Lukács’ account of modernist art. I argue that these responses signal an approach to literary forms that emphasizes a dialectical engagement between texts and their contexts. According to this approach, works of art cannot necessarily be reduced to their representational content. Rather, they can be more fruitfully interrogated as interventions into specific problems. Thus, while *The Waste Land* may represent a ubiquitous experience of alienation, it need not necessarily be understood as endorsing the inescapability of that condition. Rather, we may consider how formal elements in the poem complicate or problematize this representation, even offering a response to it. The subsequent chapters of this dissertation will be concerned with explicating the substance of this response.

In the second chapter, I illuminate more precisely the terms *The Waste Land* uses to develop the problem around which it is organized. I do so through an interrogation of Eliot’s claim that the structure of the poem can best be clarified by considering it in light of Jesse Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance* and James George Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, which both investigate the structures of fertility rituals in various contexts. In order to reckoning with Eliot’s use of these investigations of myth to organize his poem, I consider Eliot’s own critical appeals to myth in his review of Joyce’s *Ulysses*. For, in that review, Eliot claims that Joyce pursues a mythical method that marks a “step toward making the modern world possible for art.”17 I consider Eliot’s justification for this fairly radical claim in order to illuminate his own appeals to the Grail Legend in *The Waste Land*. I conclude that, with his appeal to Weston and Fraser, Eliot signals that *The Waste Land* employs

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17 Eliot, “*Ulysses, Order, and Myth*,” 479.
a mythical framework adopted from their investigations, and further that this mythical framework serves to provide unity to the poem’s fragmented form. The use of a mythical method allows the poem at once to engage with an felt experience of disintegration while simultaneously preserving the unity of the work of art.

I argue that the disparate myths that Weston and Frazer investigate exhibit a shared sympathetic logic. According to this logic, the health of the land is dependent upon the health and behavior of its inhabitants. Thus, in the fertility rituals catalogued by Frazer and Weston, the actions of those performing the rituals are meant to safeguard the health of the land because the land will reflect those behaviors. For example, “in Thüringen, the man who sows flax carries the seed in a long bag which reaches from his shoulders to his knees, and he walks with long strides, so that the bag sways to and fro on his back.”\textsuperscript{18} In turn, the flax crop is meant to sway to and fro in the breeze. The substance of the Grail Legend, which is the object of Weston’s investigation and which \textit{The Waste Land} incorporates explicitly, exhibits precisely this logic, for the quest for the Grail is motivated by a desire to cure an ailing king and \textit{in so doing} restore the vitality of a wasted land. By incorporating the symbols of the Grail Legend, I argue, \textit{The Waste Land} locates itself within the tradition of this sympathetic logic and integrates that logic into the poem. By incorporating this tradition, the poem suggests a connection between the alienated condition of its personages, the arid landscapes it represents, and the fragmentary structure of the poem itself. The alienation of the characters, it seems to say, manifests in the disintegration of the world.

Finally, though I argue that the poem is organized around this mythical logic, I maintain that it does not suggest a retreat into myth. Indeed, I acknowledge that the sympathetic logic exhibited by \textit{The Waste Land} has a particularly troubling history, and if the poem embraced this

\textsuperscript{18} Frazer, \textit{The Golden Bough}, 16.
myth straightforwardly as a unifying principle, we would have cause to be extremely suspicious of the result. I argue, however, that the poem uses this logic to illuminate a more fundamental epistemological framework. Drawing on Eliot’s engagement with Bradley in his dissertation, and The Waste Land’s appeal to Bradley’s epistemological framework in its final section, I argue that Eliot’s account of the problem of solipsism establishes a link between individuals and the world. According to the framework Eliot articulates, a shared world exists because it is intended by multiple people. Once individuals cease to intend the same world, that world disappears. The alienation of individuals, a condition that manifests in their inability to unify share their perspectives, thus results in a wasted world. I argue, then, that the poem incorporates the mythical logic of fertility rituals as an organizing principle that diagnoses the epistemological foundation of the problem of the disintegration of the shared world.

Having suggested that The Waste Land engages with a condition of alienation grounded in an inability to unify perspectives, I argue in the third chapter that Eliot identifies a synthetic faculty capable of addressing this problem. In The Sacred Wood, Eliot identifies this capacity as “historical sense,” which he defines as an “awareness not only of the pastness of the past but of its presence.”19 It is an awareness of the ideal order formed by the totality of existing works of art, and a sensitivity to the changes that the appearance of new works of art effect in that pre-existing order. Crucially, Eliot appeals to this historical sense as a capacity for synthesis. It facilitates the recognition of structural relations between the discrete work of art and more expansive literary and historical contexts, facilitating a vision of increasingly comprehensive and unified wholes.

After explicating Eliot’s account of historical sense and defending my suggestion that he appeals to it as a synthetic faculty, I turn my attention back to The Waste Land. I argue that The

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Waste Land employs this notion of historic sense as a force that unites disparate perspectives within the poem. I ground this claim in close readings of the depiction of Philomel in the second section of the poem and her reappearance in the third section. I argue that the appearance of Philomel, a character from Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* who transforms into a nightingale after being raped and silenced by her brother-in-law, coordinates scenes of sexual violence in the poem. Though the characters depicted in these scenes are presented as radically isolated, their shared connection to Philomel suggests a nascent relation between them. Generalizing this account, I argue that *The Waste Land* uses the formal techniques of allusion and repetition throughout the poem to reveal structural relations that undermine the sense of fragmentation and disintegration that it cultivates representationally. Thus, I claim, attending to the poem’s appeals to a textual tradition suggests a response to the condition that it depicts, and further, this response depends upon our awareness of our shared relations to a past that continues to exist.

Having defended the synthetic function of historical sense in *The Waste Land*, I turn in the fourth chapter to the conceptual challenges that this concept poses. I argue that Eliot’s conception of historical sense makes fairly radical demands on our understanding of temporality, even if Eliot does not explicitly delineate these demands himself. I maintain that this line of inquiry is necessary because if the synthetic faculty Eliot appeals to as a response to alienation depends upon an incoherent account of temporality, the intervention offered by *The Waste Land* falls prey to the critique voiced by Lukács in the opening chapters of the project, which holds that modernist literature retreats into fantasy. To articulate the temporal conditions of Eliot’s historical sense, I explicate the comparison Eliot draws between the approach to the past exhibited by his notion of historical sense and the attitudes exhibited in two alternative approaches to tradition that he deems deficient. This juxtaposition yields three conditions that the temporal framework underwriting
Eliot’s account must accommodate. This framework must be able to account for the independent existence of the past as an ideal order. It must further accommodate the intervention of novelty into this ideal order such that the present intervenes in reconfigures the relations constituting it. Finally, the framework must accommodate the past’s preservation in and immanence to the present, insofar as the present is the continuing development of the past.

With these conditions established, I devote the rest of the chapter to identifying an account of temporality that can satisfy the demands of historical sense. I argue first that linear models of temporality are incapable of satisfying the criteria. I consider two alternative linear accounts of temporality. The first identifies the endurance of the past with the endurance of its effects, resulting in the ideal order constituted by the literary tradition being preserved by the continued existence of literary artifacts. I argue that the operation of the past in *The Waste Land* provides evidence against such a linear framework, for the poem represents the continued activity of the past in multiple different ways. Most importantly, the poem does not merely represent the traditional voices that it incorporates, as when Philomel is introduced as a figure in a painting adorning the background of a scene, but it also allows the voices of that tradition to speak directly into the poem. For example, Tiresias narrates a section of “The Fire Sermon” while Philomel sings directly into the poem itself. I argue that linear accounts of temporality based on the endurance of artifacts struggle to accommodate the operation of the past in this way. I turn then to the account of temporality advocated by F.H. Bradley, one of Eliot’s most significant intellectual influences. I argue that Bradley’s account of temporality fails to meet the second criterion of historical sense, as his ideal temporal order contains all of time. New artistic interventions cannot reconfigure the enduring order of tradition because, fundamentally, novelty is meaningless. Ultimately, I argue that a more promising temporal framework can be found in the work of Henri Bergson. Bergson’s
account of duration establishes the past’s continued existence, while his appeal to the cone of memory clarifies the sense in which the present intervenes in and reconfigures the past. Finally, his ontological turn at the end of *Matter and Memory* offers a suggestion of the ramifications of Eliot’s appeal to a past that is immanent to the present. Not only, then, does Bergson’s account of duration satisfy the conditions of historical sense, but it also illuminates the theoretical consequences of Eliot’s deployment of that concept.

In the final chapter, I consider Eliot’s own engagement with Bergson. Though he profoundly affected Eliot’s intellectual development, Eliot’s relation to Bergson is not marked by straightforward acceptance. In proposing that Bergsonian duration can serve as a temporal ground for Eliot’s historical sense, I must consider the critiques of duration that Eliot raises in his essay “Some Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism.” I argue that Eliot’s challenge to Bergson does not amount to a straightforward rejection of Bergsonian temporality. Rather, Eliot engages more extensively with Bergson’s ontological commitments, taking issue with the priority Bergson affords to qualitative difference. This results in Eliot rejecting Bergsonism while leaving the psychological account of a durational experience of memory intact.

I subsequently argue that Eliot’s “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” and “Gerontion” offer complementary investigations of duration in light of the structure of Eliot’s critique. Indeed, I argue that the poems together articulate a destructive dilemma. On the one hand, “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” provides a phenomenological exploration of durational memory. The poem seems to suggest that, when the treatment of duration is limited to its psychological manifestation, memory throws up a wall between the individual and objective reality. The past in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” seems to function as a force that isolates the individual, rather than serving the synthetic function it does in *The Waste Land*. “Gerontion” similarly provides a poetic exploration
of a set of philosophical assumptions, though this time the framework aligns more with the position of a “Bergson Resartus” outlined by Eliot at the end of his critique. The investigation yields similar results, however, as the speaker of the poem becomes lost in an abstract perspective that elides all identity. I argue that these poems amount to a destructive dilemma because each investigates the phenomenological effects of untethering Bergson’s account of psychological duration from its ontological framework and each results in an inescapable sense of alienation. Finally, I claim that *The Waste Land* intervenes in this dilemma by resituating the ground of duration. By locating duration in culture rather than in an abstract idealist Absolute or in the experience of the individual, Eliot resolves the issues identified in the earlier poems that result in solipsism. The contribution of *The Waste Land* marks, then, an attempt to marshal the past to safeguard the possibility of meaningful human interaction by reinscribing duration at a communal level. Doing so establishes the past as a force that conditions individual identity through relations to a shared past.
Introduction

T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* presents a vision of modern society marked by an inescapable sense of disintegration. The mosaic form suggests a state of fragmentation, and the poem resists any attempt to fashion a coherent narrative from its disparate pieces. This sense of fragmentation manifests further in the interactions between characters within the poem. These interactions are dominated by misunderstanding and violence, foreclosing the possibility of genuine connection. The poem even seems to attribute this condition to the reader, as the speaker of the poem asserts “Son of man / You cannot say, or guess, for you know only / A heap of broken images.”¹ A dominant tradition in Eliot scholarship reads the poem as an endorsement of the fundamental and inescapable truth of its vision of disintegration. This tradition holds that *The Waste Land* commits to a pessimistic view of social and epistemological reality. The terms in which this position is reconstructed vary, with some identifying religious categories, such as acedia, as the operative framework, others employing the language of alienation, and still others the epistemological language of solipsism. Despite the differences in diagnosis, members of this interpretive tradition tend to agree that *The Waste Land* itself does not suggest a response to the condition that it diagnoses. If Eliot identifies an alternative at all, he does so only in his later work, after his Christian conversion. The message of *The Waste Land*, then, is taken to be that individuals are all alienated from each other, isolated in their own fragmentary experiences of reality. As I will ultimately dispute this ubiquitous account of *The Waste Land*, my first task in this chapter is to reconstruct it.

Georg Lukács, in “The Ideology of Modernism,” critiques modernist literature in general, and Eliot in particular, for what he takes to be a shared commitment to the universality of alienation. In doing so, he suggests that Eliot is not unique in treating social reality as irrevocably fragmented. Rather, according to Lukács, Eliot participates in a literary movement committed to the inescapability of alienation. This literary tradition, he claims, finds philosophical expression in the work of Martin Heidegger. Thus, he grounds his critical investigation of literary appeals to a state of alienation in a philosophical account of the structure of experience itself. Lukács does not stop at identifying alienation as a dominant motif in modernist works, however. He argues that the literary commitment to an ineluctable condition of solitude is not an adequate depiction of reality but is instead an expression of the alienation of the authors themselves. This alienation expresses itself in a pathological inwardness that further divorces them from objective reality. Insofar as modernist literary works seem compelling in their depictions of inescapable solitude, they are, in fact, alienating. They misrepresent the relation between the individual and the objective world by effacing the historical forces that condition their own sense of disintegration, thereby effecting the fragmentation that they purport to diagnose. Lukács develops this critique further in *The Destruction of Reason*, where he articulates a genealogy of the philosophical framework that he takes to serve as the theoretical ground of modernist literature. Lukács identifies this philosophical tradition as “Irrationalism,” and argues that it leads to a schism between subjective and objective reality. This schism results first in the elision of the historical developments that condition our experience in the social sphere and, ultimately, in a retreat into self-serving ideologies grounded in myth. If, then, the prevailing account of *The Waste Land* is correct in treating the poem as the articulation of a vision of inescapable and ahistorical social fragmentation, then Lukács’ critique suggests the poem should be treated with skepticism as, at best, the symptom of a decadent,
reactionary culture and, at worst, a force that reinscribes the mythical sense of alienation that it seems to diagnose.

Ultimately, I will argue that both Lukács and the scholarly tradition are wrong in their assessments of *The Waste Land*’s engagement with alienation. Drawing on Bertolt Brecht’s responses to Lukács’ critiques of his own work, as well as the *Aesthetic Theory* of Theodor Adorno, I argue that Lukács and the traditional account of *The Waste Land* too readily identify conditions presented within the poem as the ideology of the poem itself. The impulse to extract the ideology of the poem blinds them to the ways in which formal elements of the poem oppose its depiction of alienation. Brecht argues convincingly that literary form can be used to identify and address problems rather than merely express an ideology. Crucially, formal techniques can also be used to intervene in the problem identified, thus facilitating a transformation in the audience. Disputing the terms of Lukács’ contrast between realist and modernist literary forms, Brecht ultimately suggests that realist art has an imperative to intervene in society through artistic form. Adorno, too, shifts interpretive emphasis from ideological content to art’s engagement with the conditions of its own production. He argues that engagement with emerging social problems is essential to art and is the vehicle for artistic development. An attempt to give an account of a work of art, then, without considering its engagement with, and intervention in, the social context from which it arises, fails to adequately respect the dialectical exchange between artistic production and social forces.

This is precisely the failure that I maintain undermines the dominant interpretations of *The Waste Land*. The poem does not endorse an account of the human condition as fundamentally alienated. Rather, it identifies alienation as an overwhelming social problem. Brecht’s account of the productive possibilities of literary form, however, necessitates an investigation of formal
elements of *The Waste Land* to consider how it responds to the alienated condition it identifies. Indeed, I will argue through the rest of this project that the formal structure of *The Waste Land* presents the cultivation of a particular awareness of history as a response to alienation and, indeed, works to develop precisely this orientation to history.

**I. The Dissolution of Social Totalities**

**I.1. Disintegrated Civilization**

*The Waste Land* articulates an overwhelming vision of disintegration. The poem invokes this process of disintegration in myriad, seemingly disparate ways. But each of these deployments participates in a consistent structure. Disintegration is marked by the fragmentation a relatively unified or coherent whole into increasingly particular elements. This process further results in the elimination of the relations between those fragmented elements and, ultimately, in the unrecognizability of the whole and the figures that constitute it. The sense of unity at stake in this account of disintegration is necessarily capacious, as *The Waste Land* appeals to forces of fragmentation at a variety of distinct registers. In the poem, this sense of disintegration characterizes social relations, individual personalities, the natural environment, temporal processes, and the poetic form itself. Often, however, the once-unified structure becomes more legible through the absence effected by its fragmentation.² Most immediately, for example, the mosaic and fragmentary form of *The Waste Land* itself inspires a longing for the traditional narrative and lyric forms it disrupts.³ The poem does not follow a protagonist, nor does it focus on a single poetic object or event. Rather, it juxtaposes disparate vignettes, often introducing them

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² Lukács appeals to precisely this dynamic as a feature of the epic world in *Theory of the Novel*. For, according to his account, though the epic provides an answer to the question of how life can “become essential,” this answer “ripened into a question only when the substance had retreated to the far horizon” (Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, 35)

³ I engage extensively in the second chapter of this project with various attempts, grounded in Eliot’s appeals to the Grail Legend, to excavate a crypto-narrative from the fragments and vignettes of *The Waste Land*. I argue there that this impulse is misguided, as the poem derives a logic from the Grail Legend rather than a specific story.
without context. Similarly, passages are cut off before the scenes they depict come to a resolution. In the first stanza, for example, a character identified as Marie offers an extremely specific series of recollections. She describes taking coffee in Munich’s Hofgarten and summer “coming over the Starnbergersee,” before shifting her attention to sledding with her cousin, the arch-duke, when she was a child. These memories, themselves only loosely connected by their seasonal focus, are interrupted by an abstract voice that describes a desolate but general landscape. The sudden transition from particular to general and from personal to impersonal frustrates any nascent attempt to construct a unified narrative from the disparate recollections of the first stanza. This disruptive effect manifests throughout the poem, though it does not characterize every passage. Long scenes occupy multiple stanzas in “A Game of Chess,” for example, while the opening stanzas of “The Fire Sermon” exhibit tonal and allusive continuity. The formal disintegration of the poem is not even, it seems, consistent enough to function as a truly unifying feature.

Disintegration, expressed formally in the poem’s juxtaposition of fragmented stanzas as well as its appeals to decontextualized lines borrowed from works that remain unidentified, also characterizes The Waste Land’s representation of contemporary social reality. The personages in the poem exhibit a nearly universal inability to connect with each other. The vignettes depict attempts at communication that are marked by misunderstanding and negation. The interlocutors of the first part of “A Game of Chess,” for example, respond to each other’s utterances with non

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5 Robert Lehman provides a compelling reading that focuses on the seasonal disruption of this opening stanza in Impossible Modernism: T.S. Eliot, Walter Benjamin, and the Critique of Historical Reason. His account amplifies the sense of disintegration to which I am appealing, for he highlights that this first stanza, by transitioning from April to winter to summer to winter again, breaks the natural seasonal cycle. The poem seems to appeal to a disintegration of the natural order. I will engage more extensively with Lehman’s account, and particularly its focus on disruption, in the second chapter of this project.
6 In “Improper Desire: Reading The Waste Land,” Harriet Davidson reads this transition in the first stanzas as announcing a tension between propriety and impropriety that persists through the poem. Though her account helpfully illuminates a tension that certainly functions in the poem, its focus on unresolvable dichotomies results in a one-sidedness that I will argue is endemic to readings of The Waste Land.
sequiturs and condemnation. One speaker accuses the other of knowing nothing, seeing nothing, and remembering nothing, while in response the other just cryptically responds with lines of Shakespeare, on the one hand, and “that Shakespeherian Rag” on the other. The subsequent discussion depicted in “A Game of Chess” removes the voice of the interlocutor entirely, as only the repeated background call of “HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME” proves capable of interrupting the gossiping narration of the speaker. Similarly, the description of a date in “The Fire Sermon” cannot accommodate the presence of multiple perspectives, resulting in the removal of the woman’s voice from the scene entirely. The poem seems to provide a formal articulation of the account of individual experience to which it subscribes in its final section, when the abstract speaker describes hearing “the key / Turn in the door once and turn once only / We think of the key, each in his prison / Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison.” The poem, then, seems to present an atomistic account of experience, according to which individuals are radically disconnected from each other. Yet the fraying of the social fabric exhibits its own further disintegrating effects upon the individuals presented in The Waste Land. The poem depicts these personages, locked inside their own perspectives, as evacuated of character. Some can only “connect / Nothing with nothing,” describing themselves as “neither living / Nor dead.” Others

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7 Eliot, The Waste Land, 115–138. I offer an extensive reading of this section in the third chapter of this project, focusing on how its depiction of interpersonal negation develops the representation of the myth of Philomel that introduces the scene. This scene, I argue, engages the notion of historical sense that, I posit, Eliot appeals to as a response to the condition of disintegration that the poem articulates.


10 Eliot, The Waste Land, 411–416. This passage proves central to investigations of The Waste Land oriented around the concept of solipsism. One such account will receive extensive treatment in this chapter, and I will raise the problem of solipsism again in the second chapter of this project.

11 Eliot, The Waste Land, 301–302, 39–40. Those these lines are spoken by different characters and appear in different contexts in the poem, their speakers are nevertheless connected through their engagement with “nothing.” One speaker connects “nothing with nothing,” while the other “knew nothing.” This use of “nothing” to invoke the evacuation of character also appears in “A Game of Chess.” The state of living death, too, recurs throughout the poem: it is announced as early as the opening lines of the poem and most forcefully highlighted in the description of “Unreal City” from the final stanza of “Burial of the Dead,” in which the speaker marvels as a “crowd flowed over London Bridge,” unable to comprehend that “death had undone so many” (1–7, 60–65).
reify themselves, adopting mechanical movements, as when the woman whose date constitutes the content of Tiresias’ vision in “The Fire Sermon,” “smoothes her hair with automatic hand / And puts a record on the gramophone.” The poem depicts the personages in it as divorced not only from the world and each other, but also from themselves.

I take this condition, in which the bonds between individuals are severed and the possibility of communication is foreclosed, to be a state of alienation. More precisely, I take alienation to identify the individual experience of the disintegration of the social totality, such that individuals feel trapped within their own perspectives, foreclosing the possibility of communication. This experience of alienation, further, effects an analogous disintegration of individuals themselves. Unable to connect to a world outside of themselves, those trapped within an alienated perspective exhibit a disintegration and evacuation of character, ultimately resulting in their succumbing to a state of reification. This account of alienation depends upon the notion of a social totality susceptible to disintegration, yet the concept of a social totality itself so far remains a cypher. My use of the framework of the social totality is indebted to Georg Lukács, whose deployment of the term both resonates with Eliot’s appeal to the chaotic experience of modernity and motivates the methodological intervention in the third part of this chapter.

12 Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 204–205. Michael Gillum explicates this passage as evidence for his appeal to the relevance of the concept of alienation to *The Waste Land*. I will engage with his account extensively in the third chapter of this project. Briefly, however, I will note that while I agree with his assessment that alienation proves to be a useful conceptual framework for understanding the poem, I reject his conclusion that the poem endorses an account of alienation as an inevitable and inescapable feature of human existence.

13 In the second section of this chapter, I will appeal to Georg Lukács’ critique of modernist literature to explicate the logic that explains how the disintegration of the bond between individuals and their social reality results in the evacuation of those individuals themselves.

14 In the second chapter of this project, I will investigate the conceptual contours of Eliot’s appeal to an experience of anarchy. Particularly, I will address the way Eliot marshals the Grail Legend in *The Waste Land* to frame what I refer to here as the disintegration of the social totality as the loss of a shared world. In doing so, I will illuminate a point of contact between the epistemological framework employed by Eliot and the notion of totality developed Lukács, who will reappear throughout this project as an argumentative foil.
In “Integrated Civilizations”, the first chapter of his *Theory of the Novel*, Lukács develops an evocative appeal to the ideal of a closed totality in order to distinguish the novel form from the epic. He describes the age of the epic as precisely such a totality. It is an age in which “the world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars.”\(^{15}\) This homogeneity of the soul and the world is such that, though the individual and the world are distinct, “they never become permanent strangers to one another.”\(^{16}\) Because the individual and the world are homogeneous, the world is legible to the individual. For this individual, “the mind’s attitude within such a home is a passively visionary acceptance of ready-made, ever-present meaning.”\(^{17}\) The closed totality of *Theory of the Novel* appears then as a horizon that circumscribes the world of experience, delimiting the realm of possible relations while, at the same time, imbuing them with a sense of meaning. Insofar as this horizon conditions the possible networks of relations, it simultaneously coordinates the identity of each term through its relations to the others. Identity, then, becomes dependent on the relation of the individual to this totalizing system. In *Theory of the Novel*, Lukács claims that because “our world has become infinitely large” under the conditions of modernity, the possibility of a closed totality has been foreclosed.\(^{18}\) A conditioning horizon can no longer neatly be drawn around reality, and thus the “circle whose closed nature was the transcendental essence of [epic Greek] life has, for us, been broken; we cannot breathe in a closed world.”\(^{19}\) Taking this rupture as his point of departure, Lukács argues that the novel form can be understood as an attempt to “uncover and construct the concealed totality of life.”\(^{20}\)

\(^{15}\) Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, 29.  
\(^{18}\) Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, 34.  
\(^{19}\) Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, 33.  
Lukács presents the closed totality of the epic in starkly utopian and, as David Cunningham frames them, “mythical” terms. Indeed, as Cunningham notes in “Capitalist and Bourgeois Epics: Lukács, Abstraction and the Novel,” the account of the ancient world that Lukács develops in *Theory of the Novel* is “apparently bereft of any specific historical detail in either social, technological or economic terms,” while the modernity juxtaposed against it “would seem no less mythical in its form than in its projection of a lost ancient ‘happy age’ of perfect and unthinkable completion.” Though Lukács will come to disavow the more romantic and idealist formulations of *Theory of the Novel*, this mythical formulation of the closed totality nevertheless enjoys something of a latent afterlife in Lukács’ later corpus. The persistence of this romantic conception of the closed totality contributes to a productive ambiguity with respect to his deployment of the notion of the social totality in general. On the one hand, Lukács continues to appeal to the structuring and meaning-granting power of the totality. And further, in his more polemical or ideological moments, he seems to suggest that the conditions of a closed totality can be recovered through the development of the proletarian consciousness as a historical subject. On the other hand, however, Lukács develops a more capacious account of the social totality in *History and Class Consciousness*. This account does not deal in the absolute terms of *Theory of a Novel*, according to which the closed circle can simply be broken as the world exceeds its limits. Rather, Lukács casts the social totality as an enduring but dynamic epistemological principle. The

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21 Cunningham, “Capitalist and Bourgeois Epics,” 51.
22 Cunningham, “Capitalist and Bourgeois Epics,” 51. Tom Eyers, in “Form and Formalization in/against *Theory of the Novel,*” rightly describes this dimension of *Theory of the Novel* as developing an account in which “history and form alike seem thinned out, made awkwardly to conform to ultimately ahistorical and atexual metaphysical priorities only implicitly announced in the body of the book” (Eyers, “Form and Formalization in/against *Theory of the Novel,*” 90).
23 In his preface to *Theory of the Novel*, written in 1962, Lukács claims that the work is “founded on a naïve and totally unfounded utopianism” about which “we have every right to smile” (Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, 20).
24 Cunningham, “Capitalist and Bourgeois Epics,” 56.
notion of totality no longer operates as a fixed condition that is simply present or absent. Lukács presents it instead as the historically developing ground of experience. Thus, because it is no longer presented as subject to radical fracture, the concept of the social totality preserves its capacity to condition meaning and identity. This transformation of the account of social totality necessarily reframes the modern feeling of homelessness described in Theory of the Novel as a description of subjective experience rather than objective conditions.26

In History and Class Consciousness, Lukács displaces the complete totality of History of the Novel with the notion of a concrete totality. In contrast to his ahistorical account of the epic situation, Lukács grounds his appeal to the concrete totality in social conditions that are historically located and perpetually shifting. “Every object of cognition,” according to Lukács, is determined “in relation to the whole,” with the result that “every substantial change that is of concern to knowledge manifests itself as a change in relation to the whole and through this as a change in the form of objectivity itself.”27 Lukács here appeals to a social totality that is no longer mythical or utopian, but that nevertheless preserves its conditioning and meaning granting functions. Lukács claims that “this dialectic conception of totality can enable us to understand reality as a social process.”28 The conditions of fracture articulated in Theory of the Novel become meaningless according to this revised totalizing framework. For the social totality unceasingly shifts but, as a condition of experience, cannot be destroyed.29 Nevertheless, the individual conditioned by the

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26 Ben Parker articulates this transition particularly effectively as part of his argument that the aesthetic category of recognition plays a fundamental role in History and Class Consciousness and his subsequent contextualization of Lukács’ appeals to class consciousness as a subject. Parker, “History and Class Consciousness as a Theory of the Novel,” 70.
27 Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, 13.
28 Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, 13. Lukács’ tenet that reality is a social process operates as an assumption that grounds his critiques of modernist literature and what Lukács sees as its philosophical foundations, critiques that I will address in the second and third sections of this chapter.
29 Lukács associates the social totality with objective reality so strongly that Lucien Goldmann argues this category is analogous enough to Heidegger’s category of Being that the two can be productively juxtaposed (Goldmann, Lukács and Heidegger, 15–16).
social totality can still, according to Lukács, experience reality as fragmented or reified. This is precisely the claim that Lukács articulates in the essay “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat.” There he argues that the relations governing the social totality under capitalism obscure their historical origins and establish themselves as formal laws. Thus, the commodity relation transforms into “a thing of ‘ghostly objectivity’” and, further, “stamps its imprint upon the whole consciousness of man.” Through this process of reification, individuals experience themselves as detached from the historically developing totality, committed instead to what they take to be the natural laws of reified commodity relations. Though the social totality persists, and continues to condition the identity and experience of the individual, the experience of individuals within that totality is marked by a sense of disintegration.

When I appeal to alienation as the condition articulated in The Waste Land, I mean to identify a breakdown of the sort articulated by Lukács in the reification essay. The Waste Land, I maintain, articulates a vision of the disintegration of the relation between the experience of the individual and a shared social reality. I take this shared social reality to be a totality of mutually determining forces that condition the identities of particular entities, as well as the limits of possible experience, within a comprehensive whole. For the moment, I will set aside the question of whether this totality is itself subject to disintegration, as Lukács presents it in Theory of Novel, or whether the sense of disintegration is a matter of subjective experience, as in History and Class Consciousness. Here I raise the issue of disintegration of the totality in order to unify the experience of alienation as it appears in The Waste Land. To the extent that the poem presents a

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30 Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, 100.
31 This distinction between the totality itself and the individual experience of the totality leads Elvira Godek-Kiryluk to claim that “fragmentation can only ever be accurate as a description of a subjective experience and not as knowledge about the world” (Godek-Kiryluk, “Modernism in the Balance: Lukács with Dos Passos,” 138).
32 I will return to this problem when I engage with Eliot’s own articulation of it in the second chapter of this project, and my investigations in the latter half of the project into Eliot’s deployment of the notion of history will further illuminate his response.
radically atomistic account of experience, according to which “we think of the key, each in his prison / thinking of the key each confirms a prison,” it seems to divorce individuals from a shared social totality.\textsuperscript{33} Because this shared totality conditions the identity of the individual, as under the logic of the totality all things become legible through their relations to the whole, the disintegration of this bond effects an evacuation of the individual’s identity. Finally, because \textit{The Waste Land} seems to suggest that this alienation form the social totality is universal, it forecloses the possibility of productive or genuine relationships. Lacking identity and divorced from a shared reality, the characters in the poem are incapable of meaningfully relating to each other. Thus, the various modes of disintegration depicted in the poem resolve into an account of the comprehensive sense of alienation that results from the experience of a dissolution of a shared social reality.

\textbf{1.2. Visions of Failure}

Though the vocabularies employed in discussions of the social landscape depicted in \textit{The Waste Land} vary extensively, there is general and longstanding agreement that the sense of alienation developed in the poem represents an account of reality that Eliot, or at least the poem, endorses.\textsuperscript{34} Interpretations that promote this position consistently seem to align with the methodological claim of J. Hillis Miller that “Eliot’s early poetry is a dramatization of the situation in which there is a ‘circle described about each point of view.’”\textsuperscript{35} By describing Eliot’s early poems as dramatizing a


\textsuperscript{34} Or, more precisely, this is the reality endorsed by the author of the early poems. As I will note, there is widespread agreement that, after his conversion, Eliot presents a remedy for the condition he presents. This remedy is, unsurprisingly, grounded in a religious perspective. Further, while the approach to \textit{The Waste Land} that I outline here, and ultimately dispute, is common, it is by no means ubiquitous. Indeed, a breadth of literature exists which approaches the poem through alternative frameworks, such as a geographical focus on landscape, a political or biographical concern for colonialism, or a psychoanalytic engagement with trauma (for example, Badenhausen, “Totalizing the City;” Ramazani, “Modernist Bricolage, Postcolonial Hybridity;” McCombe, “Cleopatra and Her Problems;” Brennan, \textit{Trauma, Transcendence, and Trust}).

\textsuperscript{35} Miller, \textit{Poets of Reality}, 137. The issue of the circumscribed perspective will reappear throughout this project, receiving its most extensive treatment in the second chapter. Here I mean to frame what I take to be a dominant reading of \textit{The Waste Land} as unified by a methodological principle captured by Miller’s appeal to the dramatization of a condition.
situation, Miller suggests that their descriptions of individuals should be understood as articulating a more general problematic. In one sense, this framing of Eliot’s poetic practice productively captures the poems’ relationship to the philosophical and cultural material with which they engage. The poems do not present an argument for the situations they describe. They do not provide premises and lead the reader to draw conclusions. Rather, by providing what Miller calls a dramatization, these poems articulate a vision of the ramifications of that philosophical situation as it pertains to lived experience.36

Miller’s appeal to dramatization offers a helpful corrective to the possible temptation, on the one hand, to read Eliot’s early poetry as a collection of mere character descriptions without wider significance or, on the other, to use its engagement with philosophical material as an occasion to approach the poem with the tools of philosophical argumentation that are not entirely appropriate to it. Framing *The Waste Land* as a dramatization nevertheless, however, commits Miller to a methodological dead end that, I maintain, is endemic to interpretations of *The Waste Land*, and against which I will argue in the third section of this chapter. Though the language of dramatization suggests a capacity to accommodate change within the poetic form, the account of the poem that Miller develops is ultimately representational. According to accounts like the one Miller presents, Eliot’s early poems provide a representation of reality conditioned by the philosophical problem underwriting the poetic vision. Further, these accounts take the poems to endorse the conditions they describe and, implicitly, the theoretical framework that underwrites their representations. So, if *The Waste Land* depicts a solipsistic or alienated reality, then the poem is taken as an endorsement of the truth of alienation as a fundamental human experience. Finally,

36 By endorsing this account of Eliot’s early poetry, I do not mean to say all poems *must* engage with philosophical problems or material. I am speaking here about Eliot’s early poems in general and *The Waste Land* in particular. Nor do I mean to say that philosophically rich poems must dramatize the material they engage with. Indeed, I will shortly identify what I take to be the limits of this account of dramatization.
and most crucially, because these interpretations treat the poem’s conceptual intervention as belonging exclusively to its representations, then if the poem contests the alienated or solipsistic condition that it dramatizes, it will have to do so by representing that rejection.\textsuperscript{37} I will ultimately argue that these interpretations fail to provide compelling accounts of \textit{The Waste Land}, and they all suffer from analogous shortcomings. As a result of their inattentiveness to the ways in which formal elements of engage with the conditions those poems represent, these accounts of \textit{The Waste Land} are incapable of adequately reckoning with its response to alienation.

While I have interrogated the ramifications of a methodological commitment that Miller gives voice to, the treatment of Eliot’s poetic development that Miller provides warrants its own discussion. Miller’s engagement with Eliot’s poetic development, and particularly the function of his conversion to Christianity, is paradigmatic of the general developmental narrative underwriting what I take to be a broad consensus concerning the vision of reality endorsed by \textit{The Waste Land}. Miller reads Eliot’s poetic corpus as an evolving response to a problem that Eliot introduces most explicitly in his dissertation, \textit{Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley}. Miller identifies this problem motivating Eliot’s early poetry as “man’s inescapable exclusion from absolute experience,” and Miller situates this absolute experience as both the fundamental reality and as pure immediacy.\textsuperscript{38} Thus he claims that, for Eliot, the reality that underwrites all appearance is an experience that “is incompatible with consciousness, and, paradoxically, is not experience at

\textsuperscript{37} In this respect, we will see Devin Jane Buckley appealing to the abstract speaker’s commands to compassion voiced in the final section of the poem as the poem’s most promising, though ultimately still unsuccessful, response to the problem of solipsism. Just as the problem is represented in the poem in the prison passage, the response must also be presented as the utterance of one of the poem’s voices.

\textsuperscript{38} Miller, \textit{Poets of Reality}, 136. While I will rehearse here Miller’s deployment of \textit{Knowledge and Experience}, it is not within the purview of this chapter to analyze Eliot’s own explication of Bradley’s brand of Hegelianism. My concern is to outline an approach to \textit{The Waste Land} that, I will argue, forecloses productive interpretive avenues. My concern is not, at this point, with Eliot’s specific development of philosophical problems or the content of his response. I will return to the problem of solipsism in the second chapter of this project, there offering a more extensive investigation of Eliot’s debt to Bradley.
all.”

Because immediate experience “is prior to any thinking or sensing,” then “if there is an ‘I’
to think at all, that ‘I’ may be sure that its existence proves its alienation from fundamental
reality.” For a subject to appear at all, it must within a limited perspective that is divorced from
immediacy. Yet, according to this account, insofar as each subject is trapped within its own limited
perspective, it is incapable of entering into relations with other subjects. It can only relate to the
appearance of other subjects within its own circumscribed perspective. It can incorporate the
appearance of these perspectives, but this does not guarantee a real relation. Each subject remains
confined to its own prison, as the final section of *The Waste Land* proclaims.

This condition of alienation from others and alienation from fundamental reality, the
fundamental disintegration of unified experience into discrete and unreconcilable perspectives,
characterizes the personages of Eliot’s early poetry, according to Miller. In “The Love Song of
J. Alfred Prufrock,” for example, “no other mind is present to violate the integrity of Prufrock’s
isolation,” with the result that “everything in the poem expresses the texture of Prufrock’s mind.”

*The Waste Land* seems to merely rearticulate Prufrock’s imprisonment as a universal condition.

Miller claims that, with his notion of the mind of Europe, Eliot attempts in his early poems and
criticism to develop an account of history capable of providing the resources to overcome this
condition of alienation. Yet, Miller claims, this appeal to history fails because “the life of the
mind of Europe is exactly the same as the experience of the solitary ego.” Ultimately, according

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40 Miller, *Poets of Reality*, 132.
41 Though I will contest some of Miller’s ultimate conclusions, this claim, at least, seems uncontroversial to me.
42 Miller, *Poets of Reality*, 138–139.
43 On this point I am aligned with Miller, though I am more optimistic about the results of Eliot’s attempt to marshal
the forces of history. My investigation of this gambit will be the subject of the latter half of this dissertation.
44 Here Miller’s representationalism obscures the possibilities of Eliot’s appeal to history, insofar as it fails to fully
account for the mutual permeability of the work of art and the culture that produces it, treating the work of art and the
culture in which it appears as static, circumscribed perspectives. Piers Gray offers a similar, though more compelling,
account of *The Waste Land*’s “triumph in defeat.” I engage with this account at the end of this section.
to Miller, Eliot only satisfactorily resolves the problem of the circumscribed perspective when, with his conversion, he embraces “the presence of God in history, of the timeless in time.” According to this account, then, *The Waste Land* engages with a philosophical problem, represented as alienation from reality, or solipsism. It endorses this problem as an epistemological reality and dramatizes the experience of that reality by representing a world populated by individuals who cannot escape their own perspectives. Though the poem attempts to recover a unifying perspective in the historical activity of the poet, this attempt ultimately relocates the epistemological problem to the level of culture. Only after he converts is Eliot able to resolve his problem. The answer is, like the problem, represented in the content of Eliot’s poetry, as *Four Quartets* dramatizes the logic of incarnation, the “presence of God in history, of the timeless in time,” with its attempt to capture the “still point of the turning world.”

In contrast to Miller’s epistemological framing of *The Waste Land*, in “This Twittering World: T.S. Eliot and Acedia,” Susan Colón argues that the dominant feature of *The Waste Land* is acedia, a spiritual condition that amounts to a “lack of care for God and others.” More specifically, acedia is “a boredom with, or distaste for, the vigilance and receptivity to grace required by the love of God and neighbor.” Colón locates this condition most concretely in the

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45 Miller, *Poets of Reality*, 189.
46 Miller, *Poets of Reality*, 188. Miller only turns to *Four Quartets* and the logic of incarnation at the end of his essay, appealing to it as a solution to the problem motivating Eliot’s development. G. Douglas Atkins offers a much more comprehensive treatment of Eliot’s incarnational thinking in *Reading T.S. Eliot: Four Quartets and the Journey towards Understanding*.
47 Colón, “This Twittering World,” 69. In doing so, she presents the religious turn, which Miller appeals to as the ultimate response to Eliot’s problem of circumscribed perspectives, as already latent in Eliot’s early poetry, even if he was incapable of recognizing its potential. I will argue momentarily that this frame is unsatisfying insofar as it surreptitiously imports an unjustified teleology with respect to Eliot’s intellectual development.
48 Ibid. 70. Colón’s analysis of acedia is not my quarry here, nor are the details of her specific application of this theory to *The Waste Land*. As such, I will not engage with the theological concepts she deploys in the service of her account of the poem. Rather, I appeal to Colón as paradigmatic of a basic interpretive impulse that I take to be widespread among accounts of *The Waste Land*. This interpretive framework assumes the poem’s depiction of a disintegrating social reality is an endorsement of the inevitability of that disintegration. The final section of this chapter will be devoted to articulating an alternative to this method of textual interpretation.
image of a horde of commuters traversing London Bridge to in “The Burial of the Dead.” The members of the crowd are described as simultaneously living and dead, as the speaker of the poem remarks “I had not thought death had undone so many.” This line, further, evokes Dante’s depiction of the “‘neutrals,’ unworthy even of Hell because of their aimless, uncommitted lives.” The commuters are zombified. They do not recognize each other, much less connect to each other. Colón argues that this appeal to Dante identifies the specifically religious condition of acedia, rather than the secular ennui, “so central to the fin-de-siècle and early twentieth-century literary developments of aestheticism, symbolism, and modernism.” Acedia does not appear merely in this opening vignette, Colón clarifies. Indeed, the condition also dominates the second section of the poem. Colón notes that “another offspring vice of acedia is loquacity,” and suggests that the wife in “A Game of Chess” “babbles incessantly to distract herself from the emptiness of her relationship with her husband.”

The prevalence of this inability to establish connection is, in fact, more pronounced in the second section than Colón proposes. The husband in the opening scene, though laconic, exhibits the same state of living death that Colón explicated above. Further, the sense of loquaciousness established in the opening dialogue is amplified in the subsequent pub scene. Through its use of

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50 Colón, “This Twittering World,” 69.
51 Colón, “This Twittering World,” 72. Michael Gillum highlights the relevance of ennui to Eliot’s early poetry in “Ennui and Alienation in Eliot’s Poetry.” Though targeted by Colón for his purely secular treatment, Gillum presents a remarkably similar account of Eliot’s early work. Indeed, in some respects his analysis is more specific. He notes, for example, that one method Eliot employs to convey his characters’ emotional detachment is the reduction of characters to single body parts. In this way, the speaker in “A Game of Chess” is reified by being identified with her hair, which “spread into fiery points / glowed into words, then would be savagely still” (Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 109–110). He further emphasizes the irony of the third section of *The Waste Land*. “The actual content of the section,” he argues, “is tonally at variance with the title, the fragmentary quotations at the end, and with Eliot’s note about the collocation of asceticisms” (Gillum, “Ennui and Alienation in Eliot’s Poetry,” 390). The sexual encounters in the section are all devoid of desire. Rather the participants appear to be “volitionless” automatons who “do not choose or act because they do not feel or care” (Gillum, “Ennui and Alienation in Eliot’s Poetry,” 392–393). Even sex, which promises a transcendence of individuality, is rendered ineffectual by universal apathy. Like Colón, Gillum only identifies a resolution to this condition in Eliot’s post-conversion poetry.
52 Colón, “This Twittering World,” 74.
reported speech, this scene effects a doubling of the eliding capacity of loquaciousness. In this scene, the speaker reports a conversation that she had with Lil, and in both her report and the conversation itself, her interlocutor is effaced. Lil speaks in only 4 lines of the 31-line scene. The interlocutor ostensibly participating in the scene never speaks at all. Though Colón argues that Eliot does present a remedy for the condition that his early works thematize, like Miller she claims that he only develops this remedy in his post-conversion works. She notes that “What the Thunder Said” possibly suggests “that relief from the soul-oppressive conditions of modernity might be found in stopping, thinking, and silence.” However, she maintains that it does so only negatively through its descriptions of conditions that are foreclosed in the waste land. Thus, Colón concludes, “the waste land is precisely the place where even thought, silence, and stillness cannot be had.” According to this account, the condition of acedia is, to the author of The Waste Land, universal and irreversible, resulting in a reading which takes the poem to claim that human connection is impossible.

Like Colón, Devin Jane Buckley, in “T.S. Eliot’s Aesthetics of Solipsism,” sees Eliot’s later work as offering the key to revealing the structure of his early work. And, like Colón, Buckley suggests that the condition raised in the early poetry is only ever resolved in the post-conversion work. Rather than investigate Eliot’s texts through the theological concept of acedia, however, Buckley identifies the epistemological problem of solipsism as the central concern unifying Eliot’s corpus. Buckley argues that “the early poems give us a phenomenology of solipsism from which we can infer two things: (1) the origin of the solipsistic predicament, one that is existential and spiritual, not merely psychological; and (2) what would be required to escape solipsism.”

53 Colón, “This Twittering World,” 74.
54 Colón, “This Twittering World,” 74
Buckley locates both of these elements in the prisoner passage of *The Waste Land*. The “prison” of this passage is “the condition in which human experiences are self-contained and unknowable to one another.” This definition of solipsism, and its relevance to the passage in question, are both suggested by Eliot’s note to line 417. The note itself is a quotation from Bradley’s *Appearance and Reality*, and concludes “in brief, regarded as an existence which appears in a soul, the whole world for each is peculiar and private to that soul.” Further, the shift from the singular “I” to plural “We” universalizes the condition in which “each confirms a prison.” The universality of this situation suggests that it is an ontological condition, rather than the merely psychological disturbance of a single speaker. Buckley argues, against J. Hillis Miller, that while this passage raises solipsism as a problem, it also identifies the framework through which solipsism is overcome. In the poem, the passage appears after an injunction to compassion which is, “if the allusion to the *Upanishads* is to be taken seriously, a command from God.” True compassion is impossible in the self-enclosed world of solipsism. Thus, Buckley argues, the passage both presents a command that is impossible to adhere to unless there is a transcendent, unifying entity and appeals to a transcendent God, precisely the type of being that is capable of unifying

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56 Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 411 – 416. “Dayadhvam: I have heard the key / Turn in the door once and turn once only / We think of the key, each in his prison / Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison / Only at nightfall, aethereal rumours / Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus.”


60 Buckley explicates the phenomenology of solipsism through a reading of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” and, like both Colón and Gillum, reads *The Waste Land* as an extrapolation of Prufrock’s consciousness to a societal level.

61 Buckley, “T.S. Eliot’s Aesthetics of Solipsism,” 6. To some extent, Buckley engages with a straw man of Miller’s account on this point, though the weakness of her presentation does not necessarily undermine her own analysis. Miller does, in fact, present Eliot’s engagement with solipsism as navigation of a problem, rather than endorsement of a position. Miller argues that Eliot attempts to cultivate an expansion of the ego through literary tradition. As such, his account will be relevant to my argument of the second chapter. However, like Gray, Miller concludes that, in *The Waste Land*, the triumph of historical sense is “really a defeat” and “the quest in ‘The Waste Land’ is a failure” (Miller, *Poets of Reality*, 178). With or without historical sense, the poetic voice is left “within the same prison, the prison of the absence of God” (Miller, *Poets of Reality*, 178). Ultimately, like Buckley, Miller sees resolution to the problem of solipsism coming in Eliot’s work only after his conversion.
perspectives, as the figure delivering this injunction. Buckley, is Eliot’s solution to the problem of solipsism. And while this solution is only obliquely suggested in *The Waste Land*, it appears more explicitly in his later poetry.

These scholars all present similar accounts of Eliot’s early work. They all suggest the early poetry is concerned with a condition which leaves individuals incapable of connecting with each other. Though the cause of this condition differs between the accounts, they all identify the same progression in Eliot’s response to this condition over the course of his career. They agree that the early works gesture towards the possibility of human connection, but they claim that this possibility remains undeveloped because it requires a transcendent reality that Eliot, at this stage in his poetic career, is unable to realize. Only in the later works is this connective force found in the church. These scholars see Eliot struggling in his early poetic work to become a Christian. They take his solution to the problem of solipsism to be consistent throughout his corpus, maintaining that Eliot was simply incapable of either fully recognizing or fully embracing it before 1927. Thus, the early poems remain thoroughly pessimistic.

The methodology behind such an interpretation is, I maintain, rather dubious. In defense of the attempt to read Eliot’s conversion back into his early work, Buckley, drawing on the work of Jewel Spears Brooker, appeals to Eliot’s own account of his intellectual development from a

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62 Buckley, “T.S. Eliot’s Aesthetics of Solipsism,” 6. Buckley bolsters this argument by noting that the voice of God is dislocated and, as such, can serve a unifying function among the fragments of the poem. I maintain, however, that Buckley still overstates her case. She too easily identifies the Hindu God of the *Upanishads* with the Christian God that Eliot appeals to in his later work. I will shortly examine Eliot’s relativist leanings, derived from his engagement with Emile Durkheim, in my consideration of Piers Gray’s interpretation of the poem. These sympathies frustrate an attempt to read a single transcendent God into *The Waste Land* when the poem appeals to multiple religious traditions.

63 Buckley provides an extended treatment of “The Hollow Men” as a “transitional poem” which continues the development of a phenomenology of solipsism, but also, in the figure of the “Multifoliate rose” signals the embrace of a Christian perspective as the solution to the problem of solipsism (Buckley, “T.S. Eliot’s Aesthetics of Solipsism,” 13). I will argue in the second chapter of this project that *The Waste Land* actually thematizes the problem of solipsism through its deployment of the Grail Legend, and I will further argue in the third chapter that the poem marshals Eliot’s notion of historical sense as a response to this condition.
There, Eliot interprets his graduate studies, including his engagement with Bradley, as a “religious preoccupation.” Eliot himself, then, seems to endorse the attempt to read his early work teleologically. According to these accounts, he was developing a religious perspective all along.

In *T.S. Eliot’s Intellectual and Poetic Development 1909–1922*, Piers Gray, one of the most incisive readers of *The Waste Land*, articulates an account of Eliot’s approach to religion during his graduate studies that frustrates this teleological interpretation of Eliot’s early work. In the chapter “The Incoherence of the Aesthetics of Coherence,” Gray illuminates Eliot’s approach to religion by investigating his review of Clement C.J. Webb’s *Group Theories of Religion and The Religion of the Individual*. This review articulates two competing accounts of religion: “on the one hand…the French sociologists (and with them Bergson) against, on the other, the ‘Oxford tradition’ represented by Webb himself.” Webb presents religion as a “satisfaction of intellectual demands,” particularly the need for, in Webb’s words, “the aspiration after a knowledge of a single ground of all things or of an all-inclusive unity.”

The French sociological tradition that Eliot associates with Levy-Bruhl and Durkheim, by contrast, treats religion as an irrational development which addresses the social need for communion and “drives us to act in harmony, and express in rituals our ‘common sentiments’” In this case, religion is interesting not because it provides truth, but rather because of the social function that it fulfills. Religion provides a stable framework

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65 Buckley, “T.S. Eliot’s Aesthetics of Solipsism,” 3. Spears Brooker, “Enlarging Immediate Experience,” 5. Elsewhere, Spears Brooker is less inclined to read Eliot’s post-conversion account of his religiosity back into his early work. In “Substitutes for Religion” she suggests his understanding of religion was primarily functional and describes his adoption of several religious substitutes in his pre-conversion years. As such, she acknowledges his “religious preoccupation” without ascribing to him a nascent religious perspective.
through which individuals understand their relationships to each other. Importantly, however, because the sociological perspective takes religion to be an explicitly irrational satisfaction of social needs, questions of truth are not at all appropriate to an investigation of religion. Gods are born and gods die according to the needs of a group. This birth and death of gods signals the transformation of the social order and admits the “radical disintegration of the continuity of human experience.”

Gray argues that Eliot rejected both of these accounts. The purely pragmatic interpretation of religion that Eliot attributes to Durkheim results in a relativistic account and, as such, culminates in precisely the solipsistic predicament that Eliot seeks to combat. The Oxford tradition, which maintains “that the Christian religion actually realizes here and now this harmony of the individual and the group,” equally fails. Because the Christian tradition demands that we “accept a miracle, and accept it as fact,” and particularly because it privileges this fact above the “whole course of history,” it is incapable achieving complete coherence. It cannot “achieve the all-embracing whole which will unify our modes of ordering the world.” Like the positions Eliot assembles into his category of the French sociological tradition, the orthodox Christianity represented by the Oxford tradition fails to provide a coherent perspective capable of unifying disparate points of view. If this is the case, then Eliot’s “preoccupation with religion” was not necessarily in the service of developing a religious sensibility. Rather, Eliot’s investigation of religion, like his interrogation of Bradley’s idealism, reveals the intellectual demand that Eliot attempts to satisfy in his work. This demand is revealed only negatively, however, through the failures of both religion

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and idealism. Thus, the inclination to read Eliot’s post-conversion religious conclusions back into his pre-conversion work is dubious.

Gray offers compelling evidence against blindly accepting Eliot’s own teleological reading of his poetic trajectory. Yet despite this methodological dispute regarding how to engage with the Christian trajectory of Eliot’s development, Gray endorses much of the account of the early poetry developed thus far. Like Buckley, Gray understands the early poetry to engage extensively with the problem of solipsism. And though he adroitly attempts to derive a response to this condition from The Waste Land, I maintain that he ultimately is forced to endorse a pessimistic account of the poem that takes this response to be unsuccessful. The problem of solipsism is amplified by Eliot’s frustrations with Bradley’s account of an Absolute perspective. The Absolute, for Bradley, is a perspective capable of transcending “differences and distinctions,” in which the multitudinous perspectives are “brought into a harmonious and all-embracing whole.” Yet, this Absolute perspective fails to satisfy Eliot because it “is an imagined state, a logical necessity which we can (and must) admit in principle,” but that eludes us in practice. Gray presents Bradley’s commitment to an Absolute perspective as the result of the following argument: In order for knowledge to be possible, one perspective must unify all disparate points of view. Without this perspective, “we would not order our world.” Since Bradley is committed to the project of ordering the world, he must consequently accept the existence of a transcendent, complete perspective. The Absolute, then, serves as the theoretical ground for the possibility of knowledge. Yet this argument for the existence of an Absolute perspective fails to explain whether such a

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74 Gray, T.S. Eliot’s Intellectual and Poetic Development 1909–1922, 176. As he treats it in these more critical moments, Eliot presents Bradley’s Absolute as incommensurable with the immanent Hegelian Absolute. A full exploration of Eliot’s fidelity to Bradley on this point is not my quarry, as here I mean to merely articulate how even one of the most nuanced approaches to the productive response offered by The Waste Land nevertheless commits to an account of the poem as articulating a vision of failure.


perspective can be attained and what it would be. Indeed, in the account provided thus far, the adoption of such a perspective seems to be a logical impossibility. Further, as Gray notes, “if the isolated worlds of finite selves cohere ultimately in theory, then equally, in theory, in so far as they all fall short of the ultimate they are separate.” 77 Bradley, then, offers a formal solution to the problem of solipsism. But this solution does not practically resolve the ethical problem of the lived solipsistic experience. Responding to this problem, Eliot attempts to “satisfy the demand for the Absolute, here and now.” 78 He does this, Gray argues, by attempting to “create a language capable of realizing coherence, of ordering the fragments of experience within the whole.” 79 While Buckley argues that Eliot’s resolution to the problem of solipsism is suggested through appeals within the poem to a transcendent deity, Gray, by contrast, argues that Eliot attempts to cultivate this transcendent perspective through formal techniques structuring the poem.

Ultimately, Gray concludes that Eliot’s attempt to develop a complete and coherent perspective fails. The poetic language of *The Waste Land* and “Gerontion” only manages to “acknowledge such an end.” 80 Gray arrives at this conclusion through a labyrinthine analysis that amounts to a destructive dilemma. Either, Gray claims, the attempt of the poetic voice to synthesize a coherent perspective fails productively by directing the reader to this perspective, or the poem works ironically by calling attention to the futility of its own project. The latter horn of the dilemma is suggested by the antepenultimate lines of the poem: “these are the fragments I have shored against my ruins / Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo’s mad again.” 81 Gray argues that the apparent confession of purpose of the first line, the attempt to construct unity out of fragments, is undercut.

77 Gray, 177.
78 Gray, 183.
79 Gray, 183.
80 Gray, 226.
twice in the second. The future tense of “Why then Ile fit you,” Gray claims, suggests an intentionality that “is immediately questioned by the very nature of its tense, given the past” tense of the previous line. The identification of madness further problematizes the statement of purpose, casting the whole project into doubt. Gray suggests that the double “dislocation” in these antepenultimate lines renders the final lines ironic. Thus, according to Gray, “we can infer that the demands of speculation…the demands for a comprehension of the universe which is not piecemeal, or by fragments, is a form of intellectual madness.” The poem ends with a declaration of its own futility.

Gray develops the alternative horn of his dilemma through an analysis of the poetic form of The Waste Land. Considering the problematic appearance of bad passages of demotic text in early drafts of The Waste Land, as well as a similarly bad “pastiche of Augustan satire” in early versions of “The Fire Sermon,” Gray suggests that the form proper to the text is “metaphysical tragical satire.” Because satire is precisely “a hotchpotch which is nonetheless unified,” it suggests the possibility of a poetic capacity to develop coherence from incoherent perspectives. The poetic form promises to accomplish what poetic language seems incapable of. Yet Gray identifies a mythical journey to nowhere as the theme around which this tragical satire is constructed. Thus the promise of the poetic form to provide a unifying perspective resolves into a situation in which the characters of The Waste Land are “ironically bound together by the one sure

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83 These final lines, the repetition of “Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata” from earlier in “What the Thunder Said” are precisely the lines that Buckley tries to read sincerely as offering the suggestion of a religious resolution to the problem of solipsism.
86 I will, in later portions of this dissertation, make similar claims about the capacity of poetic form to achieve ends which resist actualization through discursive language alone. I will not, however, draw such a rigid distinction between form and content, instead treating them as unified rather than oppositional.
fact of history;” death.\textsuperscript{87} If the poem offers an alternative to this unity in “a handful of dust,” it comes in the final lines which “would have the soul content itself and others” through the commands to give, sympathize, and control.\textsuperscript{88} Yet, Gray argues, “the irony of the last line rests in the fact that neither within the poem…nor within the notes, can it achieve the clarity of definition needed.”\textsuperscript{89} Rather than end with the commands to give, sympathize, and control, the poem concludes with the untranslatable “Shantih, shantih, shantih,” which Eliot glosses in his notes as “The peace which passeth understanding.”\textsuperscript{90} The attempted unity of perspective is, Gray argues, removed beyond the discursive language of the poem itself. It is located, instead, in a realm beyond the understanding. The partial coherence of perspectives in the satire form along with the poem’s gesture towards a truly coherent perspective beyond the understanding may seem like a productive failure. The poem does not accomplish the goal of developing a language capable of satisfying “the demand for the Absolute, here and now.”\textsuperscript{91} Rather, it suggests a program for the development of such a perspective, and ultimately asserts that such a perspective exists. Gray takes this account of the poem to be preferable to the conclusion that the pursuit of coherence is a form of intellectual madness.

Yet this account of the poem commits Eliot to precisely the position that, if we follow Gray, his poetic project was motivated against. For the inability of the poem, expressed in the untranslatable final lines, to “achieve the clarity of definition needed” amounts to an assertion of the existence of a theoretical principle capable of overcoming solipsism that is yet “unimaginable.”\textsuperscript{92} And the assertion of an unimaginable theoretical principle is, effectively, a

\textsuperscript{87} Gray, \textit{T.S. Eliot’s Intellectual and Poetic Development 1909–1922}, 244.
\textsuperscript{89} Gray, \textit{T.S. Eliot’s Intellectual and Poetic Development 1909–1922}, 244.
\textsuperscript{90} Eliot, \textit{The Waste Land}, 233.
\textsuperscript{92} Gray, \textit{T.S. Eliot’s Intellectual and Poetic Development 1909–1922}, 244.
commitment to Bradley’s Absolute. Ultimately, the dilemma set up by Gray is entirely destructive. The poem ostensibly attempts to develop a coherent perspective capable of overcoming the threat of solipsism. Either it adopts a straightforwardly ironic voice that ridicules such a goal as folly, or the satire form intimates this coherent perspective, but the poem removes it to the realm of the unimaginable. In both cases, the practical result is a collapse back into solipsism. The poem fails, leaving the reader isolated, with commands to compassion which cannot be obeyed and a promise of unification only in the inevitable fact of death.

II. Georg Lukács and Modernist Alienation

II.1. The Aesthetics of Solitude

Despite differences in terminology and emphasis, particularly upon Eliot’s relationship to Christianity, the interpretations of *The Waste Land* provided by Miller, Colón, Buckley, and Gray cohere into a consistent account.93 *The Waste Land* presents a vision of complete disintegration. Modern individuals are incapable of forging genuine connections. They are incapable even of escaping their own limited perspectives. Their detachment leaves them capable only of connecting “Nothing with nothing.”94 Compassion disappears and is replaced by loveless and violent sex. The inhabitants of *The Waste Land* are automata, neither living nor dead. Trapped in discrete fragments of consciousness, they become isolated from the objective world. And in their isolation, they are empty. If *The Waste Land* endorses this account of reality, as has been suggested by proponents of the account developed thus far, then it is a paradigmatic example of the modernist ideology that Georg Lukács critiques in “The Ideology of Modernism.” In this essay, Lukács argues that modernist literature is committed to an ideology of solitariness. Modernist literature does not

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93 While I have focused on the accounts offered by these scholars, the interpretation of *The Waste Land* as offering a pessimistic worldview is by no means restricted to them. Harriet Davidson, to cite just one more example, takes it as an assumption that needs no defense in “Improper Desire: Reading *The Waste Land*.”
merely describe the conditions of alienation in society. Rather, it asserts the inescapability of these conditions, positing them as universal and ahistorical. Lukács develops his critique of modernist literary forms by drawing a distinction between two modes in which the condition of “solitariness” might appear in literary texts. Doing so allows him to distinguish between realist engagements with a condition of alienation and a modernist ideology of alienation. This distinction results in a dual nature in Lukács’ use of the term “solitariness,” and this duality is crucial for properly developing an account of *The Waste Land*’s engagement with alienation and its standing in relation to Lukács’ critique.

Drawing on Thomas Wolfe’s use of the term, Lukács identifies solitariness as a condition in which one “may establish contact with other individuals, but only in a superficial, accidental manner.” This solitariness, however, may be attributed to the individual in multiple ways. Further, the mode of attribution is crucial to identifying the ideology grounding a text, and hence, for Lukács, its legitimacy. The “individual solitariness” of realism appears in the “particular situation in which a human being may be placed, due either to his character or the circumstances of his life.” In these cases, the individual mode of solitariness manifests as a chasm between the character and the social context, preventing the character from meaningfully engaging with the community. This chasm, however, does not merely emphasize the solitariness of the individual. It also reinforces the existence of an objective reality. For, while the individual is unable to interact with members of the community, “the common life, the strife and togetherness of other human beings, goes on as before.”

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96 Lukács, “Ideology of Modernism,” 20. Lukács addresses a condition akin to this individual solitariness as early as *Theory of the Novel*. Despite the fact that Lukács ultimately rejects both the methodology and the conclusions of this work, a number of the organizing concepts remain operative even in his critique of modernism.
“a specific social fate, not a *condition humaine.*”

Because the realist account of solitariness presents the condition as particular to the individual, or, perhaps, to certain types of individuals, it does not deny the possibility of meaningful interaction entirely. Further, because this condition appears within specific social organizations, even if an entire community experiences this condition of solitariness, such communal experience would not entail the impossibility of communication. The condition is neither universal nor eternal. The conditions might change, and reintegration might occur. Indeed, the appropriate response to such a condition may be the active attempt to reorganize social relations. This account of the solitariness expressed in the realist tradition is the primary sense of alienation in “The Ideology of Modernism.”

The competing account of solitariness, which Lukács ascribes to the ideology of modernism, is also captured in his appeal to Thomas Wolfe. According to Wolfe, solitariness “is by no means a rare condition, something peculiar to myself or to a few specially solitary human beings, but the inescapable, central fact of human existence.” This account of solitariness shares with realist accounts the feature of an inability to engage with others. Yet, rather than recognize this condition as historically determined, the modernist ideology establishes solitariness as universal. In so doing, it forecloses any possibility of meaningful social interaction. Further, when solitariness is established as a universal condition, each individual is “confined within the limits of his own experience.” As individuals is trapped within the limits of their experience, a fissure

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99 The reintegration of the individual fractured from the community was, indeed, the defining trajectory of the novel form outlined in *Theory of the Novel.*
100 Lukács, in fact, only uses the term “alienation” at the end of the essay when he claims that “allegory is that aesthetic genre which lends itself par excellence to a description of man’s alienation from objective reality” (40). As I will show, the alienation from objective reality follows from the conviction that the solitariness of man is the human condition. Thus, Lukács aligns his account of modernist solitariness with his description of allegory as particularly accommodating to alienation.
102 Lukács, “Ideology of Modernism,” 21. Lukács traces this conclusion to Heidegger, one of the philosophers Lukács claims bolsters the ideology of modernism. In light of Lukács’ multiple references to Heidegger and the existentialist
forms between subjective and objective reality. This fissure renders the discussion of objective reality useless and ultimately amounts to a rejection of it.\textsuperscript{103} Lukács argues that this commitment to the isolation of individuals actually renders them devoid of character. They become empty shells. In order to draw this conclusion, Lukács appeals to a distinction between abstract and concrete potentiality. Abstract potentiality is the subjective potential of an individual. It comprises the limitless possibilities that appear to that individual, regardless of the plausibility of their actualization. Concrete potentiality, conversely, consists of the possibilities that are actualized in objective reality. As an individual acts in the world, possibilities that previously were simply abstract become concrete. The concretization of abstract potentiality allows for the development of individuals. As individuals actualize their potential, the facts of their existence change. Indeed, external reality changes with them, through their effects upon it. The distinction between abstract and concrete potentiality preserves a dialectical relationship between the individual and the world.\textsuperscript{104} An account of the human condition in which each individual is “confined within the limits of his own experience,” however, elides the distinction between abstract and concrete potentiality.\textsuperscript{105} Further, because “individual character manifests itself in moments of decision,” if individuality is aligned purely with subjectivity and these “moments of decision” are rendered suspect, human character itself disintegrates.\textsuperscript{106} Abstract potentiality is infinite. As such, the abstract potentiality of every individual is equivalent.\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{103} Lukács, “Ideology of Modernism,” 25.
\textsuperscript{104} Lukács, “Ideology of Modernism,” 24.
\textsuperscript{105} Lukács, “Ideology of Modernism,” 21
\textsuperscript{106} Lukács, “Ideology of Modernism,” 24–25
\textsuperscript{107} Lukács develops a similar argument later in the text to defend his conclusion that the removal “of time from the outer world of objective reality” transforms the subjective experience of an individual into a “sinister, inexplicable flux and acquires – paradoxically as it may seem – a static character” (Lukács, “Ideology of Modernism,” 39).
Lukács, in fact, appeals to Eliot to describe the situation in which the possibility of actualizing abstract potential has been denied. He claims Eliot “describes this phenomenon as: shape without form, shade without color, / paralyzed force, gesture without motion.” Reduced to endless subjectivizing, the individual is evacuated of all character.

This ideology – which identifies human nature as essentially solitary, reduces concrete potentiality to abstract potentiality, and disintegrates the objective world as well as individual character – is the second mode of alienation that I take Lukács to identify. It is, of course, related to the first mode. This ideology is the universal attribution of the experience of solitariness grounding the previous account. Indeed, the impulse to universalize the experience of alienation underwrites Lukács’ critique that the ideology is, itself, alienated. For, Lukács notes, the experience of solitariness presents itself as fundamentally ahistorical. From within this experience, an alternative to alienation seems impossible. Thus, the experience of alienation contains the impulse to universalize the experience. The ideology that follows from this universalization is, therefore, alienated. As such, art committed to this ideology is similarly alienated. When Lukács uses the categories of solitarniess and alienation as a critique, then, he uses them to identify a set of ideological commitments regarding the accessibility of objective reality and the possibility of meaningful human interaction.

One might object that Lukács does not adequately engage with the theoretical framework underwriting the ideology he attributes to modernist literature. Though Lukács identifies the effects of a commitment to universal alienation, he does not show that this commitment is false.

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108 Lukács, “Ideology of Modernism,” 25. While this passage from The Hollow Men captures nicely the condition that Lukács is attempting to articulate, he too readily attributes the voice of the speaker to Eliot himself. Lukács makes a similarly hasty attribution to Eliot in his subsequent discussion of The Cocktail Party. The task of locating Eliot’s voice in his work is, I think, too complex to be resolved with an argument by assertion. Further, while these lines do seem to capture an evacuation of personality, it is not immediately obvious that they are meant to be a description of a universal, human condition. Indeed, I think the rest of the poem belies Lukács’ claim.

109 Lukács, “Ideology of Modernism,” 21
Lukács does, it is true, introduce Heidegger as the exponent of a philosophical system capable of grounding the appeal to alienation as a fundamental human condition. Yet his critiques of Heidegger are either question begging or *ad hominem*, attacking him on the grounds of his association with the Nazi party.\(^{110}\) Because Lukács does not offer a robust response to Heidegger or other proponents of modernist philosophical frameworks, a defender of modernism may accept the formal implications of Lukács account of modernism while rejecting the evaluative claims. Modernist literature may, indeed, present an account of the individual as fundamentally alienated. It may in fact universalize this condition. Following from this commitment, it ceaselessly interrogates subjective experience, devaluing a relation to objective reality or denying its existence entirely. This procedure is not considered problematic, however. Rather it is a legitimate engagement with the truth of reality. For, within a Heideggerian framework, society is fundamentally alienating. It tempts us into negating ourselves.\(^{111}\) We can only, then, arrive at legitimate knowledge through an investigation of subjective experience. For example, this investigation, when turned upon the experience of *Angst*, reveals *Angst* as disorienting mode of being in the world that “discloses *Dasein* as a ‘*solus ipse.***’\(^{112}\) The experience of solipsism is not problematic, but rather “brings *Dasein* in an extreme sense precisely before its world as world, and thus itself before itself as being-in-the-world.”\(^{113}\) Furthermore, despite the temptation to lose oneself in social being, “the physiological triggering of *Angst* is possible only because *Dasein* is anxious in the very ground of its being.”\(^{114}\) The world-disclosing loss of world and the revelation of existential solipsism are not pathological experiences. They are, instead, fundamental

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\(^{110}\) Lukács, “Ideology of Modernism,” 27


\(^{112}\) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 188.

\(^{113}\) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 188.

\(^{114}\) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 190
experiences of the reality of Dasein. If modernism privileges subjective investigation over the representation of social experience, this is because subjective analysis reveals the truth of the individual while social experience obscures it.

II.2. The Critique of Historical Elision

Lukács may merely offer an analysis of the literary ramifications of this account of universal alienation in “The Ideology of Modernism” and, as such, fail to fully discredit its legitimacy. He argues more extensively against the philosophical ground of this ideology in The Destruction of Reason, however. These arguments particularly bolster Lukács’ description of the dissolution of objective reality resultant from a commitment to the universality of solitariness. Further, they offer a historical critique of frameworks that affirm the truth of such a dissolution. Specifically, Lukács argues that the impulse to reject a relationship between subjective and objective realities is, itself, conditioned by certain objective, social facts. In The Destruction of Reason, Lukács traces the development of a movement he calls philosophical irrationalism, which he identifies as a reactionary bourgeois response to dialectically evolving social-historical conditions.115 Despite differences in the particular conditions eliciting an irrationalist response, Lukács suggests that the manifestations of irrationalism exhibit fundamental similarities. Nearly all irrationalisms are committed to the “disparagement of understanding and reason, an uncritical glorification of intuition, an aristocratic epistemology, the rejection of socio-historical progress, <and> the creating of myths.”116 These characteristics appear, at first, to be individual manifestations of a general disposition. The structure of Lukács’ critique, however, reveals that these commitments are coextensive, each tenet following necessarily from the last.

115 Lukács, Destruction of Reason, 9–10.
116 Lukács, Destruction of Reason, 10.
Lukács’ account does not merely illuminate the interrelation of these seemingly distinct commitments, rather it yields this discovered unity against the theoretical positions at which it takes aim. As such, the register of Lukács’ critiques fluidly shifts between ostensibly theoretical analysis and more unabashedly polemical political critique, with the result that his theoretical pronouncements fail to meet the standard of rigorous exposition and analysis. While acknowledging these shortcomings in the specifics of Lukács’ arguments, I maintain that they nevertheless contribute to a more serious challenge with respect to the theoretical foundations of modernism.117 This challenge emphasizes the importance of the historical and social conditions that contribute to the perspective developed in works of art and problematizes the potential of those works to elide the conditions to which they respond. I take pains to articulate this structure of Lukács’ critical framework because the final section of this chapter will engage extensively with the question of how works of literature, particularly those that Lukács inveighs against in “The Ideology of Modernism,” can in fact respond to the social totality that conditions them.

Lukács’ critique develops from his identification of two reactionary impulses guiding irrationalist philosophies.118 The primary reactionary tendency that Lukács identifies is purely political. As class relations develop, dominant classes resist the changes that inevitably threaten their privileged position. In this light, for example, Lukács suggests that “Heidegger’s complicated trains of thought, his laborious phenomenological introspections” are a response to “bourgeois man’s sense of becoming inessential, indeed a nonentity,” which was “a universal experience among the intelligentsia of this period.”119 This line of critique is, in itself, rather weak and is an

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117 Though I argue that this challenge is more substantial than it may first appear, I ultimately conclude that it fails to hit the mark. The third section of this chapter is devoted to articulating the methodological shortcomings of Lukács’ approach that render the account unsatisfactory.
118 The polemical structure of this focus on the reactionary elements of irrationalism weakens Lukács’ critique and ultimately exposes him to charges of begging the question, which I will address below.
119 *Destruction of Reason*, 503.
example of the *ad hominem* attacks for which Adorno excoriates Lukács in “Reconciliation under Duress.” 120 Indeed, Lukács’ critique of Heidegger here on primarily formal grounds seems to reveal an unwillingness to engage seriously with *Being and Time* on its own terms. Lukács does not offer an immanent critique of Heidegger’s position, but rather seems to psychologize it according to an ideological rubric. 121 Argumentative shortcomings of this sort manifest throughout *The Destruction of Reason*, and, taken at face value as attempts at exegetical critique, they threaten to undermine the coherence of the work itself. A consideration of the place of these critiques within the structure of Lukács’ more general argument, however, reveals a methodological integrity that is somewhat obfuscated by the overtly polemical nature of his *ad hominem* attacks.

This line of critique targeting a fundamental conservative bourgeois tendency in the thinkers he investigates is omnipresent in Lukács analysis, though it does not always receive his primary attention. Lukács devotes more descriptive attention to a correlated reactionary tendency, one that is explicitly intellectual rather than primarily social. Developments in the sciences, he claims, facilitate an expansion of our understanding of the material world. Yet these developments also, inevitably, reveal problems for reigning intellectual paradigms. These problems appear at first as challenges to the capacity of understanding to attain knowledge of objective reality. Confronted with these challenges, the intellectual reactionary takes the appearance of difficulty to be proof of the incapacity of reason to adequately engage with objective reality entirely. János Kelemen, in *The Rationalism of Georg Lukács*, identifies this process as “evasion,” citing it as “the

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120 Adorno, “Reconciliation under Duress.” Adorno cites Lukács’ reductive account of Nietzsche and Freud, according to which they are “simply labeled Fascists” as a particularly egregious instantiation of this tendency *The Destruction of Reason*.

121 Lukács’ propensity to categorize thinkers according to what seems to be a rather blunt ideological template will recur as one of the greatest weaknesses of *The Destruction of Reason*, insofar as it threatens to undermine the fidelity of his accounts of specific thinkers.
moment which explains irrationalism substantively.\textsuperscript{122} Such reactionaries then argue for the establishment of a competing organizing principle which is, inevitably, subjective.\textsuperscript{123}

Lukács explicates this framework in his chapter “Vitalism in Imperialist Germany,” which traces what Lukács calls a vitalist thread through more than one hundred years of philosophical development in the German context.\textsuperscript{124} Perhaps begging the question uncharitably, Lukács defines vitalism as the substitution of a principle of experience, such as “life” or “intuition,” for understanding as the primary principle organizing engagement with reality.\textsuperscript{125} According to Lukács, vitalism satisfied an ideological need resultant from two forces operating in tandem. The first was a gradual bourgeois admission of the need for a Weltanschauung to compete with the developing working-class worldview. As the working-class gained “strength and awareness and became better organized,” that dominant neo-Kantian stricture against questions of worldview ceased to satisfy philosophical needs.\textsuperscript{126} The second force governing the development of vitalism was the commitment to an anti-materialist epistemology which maintained the “unknowability, indeed the non-existence, the unthinkable nature of an objective reality independent of

\textsuperscript{122} Kelemen, \textit{The Rationalism of Georg Lukács}, 77.

\textsuperscript{123} Lukács claims these reactionary impulses may exist independently of each other. In modernity, however, they become codependent. This codependence develops because, in modernity, the proletariat is unique in its possession of an ideological position, materialism, capable of competing with bourgeois ideology. As such, Lukács claims, developments in materialist sciences promote the progress of the proletariat. The bourgeois reaction against threatening socio-political developments demands, then, a rearguard action that allows it to develop its own ideology.\textsuperscript{124} Lukács identifies a host of figures who he claims promote vitalist ideologies. He devotes significant attention to Dilthey, Simmel, Scheler, Spengler, and Heidegger, while also considering a group of pre-fascist sociologists together. The breadth of content represented in these different schools gives a sense of the extent to which Lukács account traces the reactionary motivation behind philosophical developments, rather than the specific details of those philosophies themselves.

\textsuperscript{125} One of Lukács’ interpretive shortcomings reveals itself on this point, as he fails to argue convincingly that the identification of a vital principle as prior to reason necessarily entails the overthrow of reason entirely. His resultant critiques are consequently one-sided and frequently do a disservice to the positions he attempts to represent. He claims, for example, that Henri Bergson’s “main attack was leveled against the objectivity and scientific character of natural scientific knowledge” and consequently that his philosophy “became linked above all with the international movement to destroy the national sciences’ objectivity which Mach and Avernus had started” (Lukács, \textit{The Destruction of Reason}, 24, 26). Even a cursory engagement with Bergson’s work reveals a much more nuanced relationship between Bergson’s articulation of duration as a fundamental principle and the methods and conclusions of modern scientific investigation.

\textsuperscript{126} Lukács, \textit{Destruction of Reason}, 408.
consciousness.”

Vitalism, which promoted the category of “experience” as an organizing principle of intuition, “could conjure up all the necessary elements of Weltanschauung…without revoking that denial of a reality independent of consciousness which had become crucial to antimaterialism.”

Vitalism served bourgeois ideological needs by frustrating the advance of the proletariat materialist framework while also installing a principle of which the bourgeois claimed sole possession. Thus, to preserve ideological hegemony, subjective experience displaces investigation of objective reality. This causal relation reveals the connection between the aristocratic epistemology, the disparagement of rationality, and the glorification of intuition, which Lukács claims is shared by all irrationalisms. Further, the glorification of the subjective over the objective results in a split forming between the individual and reality. This split inevitably leads to the predominance of myth, as the grounds for distinguishing myth from reality are eroded.

A paradigmatic example of the mechanics of this subjective displacement of objective reality appears in Lukács treatment of Heidegger and the existentialist tradition of the twentieth century, which he identifies as a late, and indeed terminal, form of vitalism. Lukács traces multiple lines of this displacement through Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, but his general critique is consistent. Heidegger, he claims, attempts an investigation of objective reality, a concept which Lukács seems to take for granted as uncontested and which he aligns primarily with social reality. Despite Heidegger’s appeals to objectivity, however, Lukács maintains that the content of his treatment is in fact radically subjective. While in earlier vitalists “there are at least glimmers of objective social reality… in Heidegger this reality is reduced to purely a series of spiritual states described phenomenologically.” Lukács claims polemically that “what Heidegger termed

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phenomenology and ontology was in reality no more than abstractly mythicizing, anthropological description of human existence.”¹³⁰ Not only does this bait and switch, according to Lukács, replace the objective with the subjective, but it does so in such a way that suggests the futility of objective categories entirely. In proclaiming the objectivity of these subjective concepts, Heidegger seems to suggest that there can be no objective term. Even the seemingly objective reveals itself, ultimately, to be subjective.

Lukács claims this procedure is at work in a number of concepts central to Being and Time. Initially, Lukács targets Heidegger’s methodology. Heidegger presents his project as an investigation of Being. He “claimed to be arguing an objective doctrine of Being, an ontology, but he then defined the ontological essence of the category most central to his world on a purely subjectivistic basis.”¹³¹ As such, Heidegger’s investigation of the general category of Being transforms into an investigation into the being of Dasein. Thus, it inevitably becomes an investigation of subjective experience. The substitution of Dasein for Being captures particularly well the epistemological commitment to the “unknowability, indeed the non-existence, the unthinkable nature of an objective reality independent of consciousness.”¹³² The subjective category does not merely replace the objective. Rather, it does so in such a way as to deny the legitimacy of the objective altogether. Thus, an account of history or an “illumination of existence

¹³⁰ Lukács, Destruction of Reason, 498.
¹³¹ Lukács, Destruction of Reason, 496. Regardless of the accuracy of Lukács’ description here, an immanent critique of his methodology already suggests itself. Insofar as he straightforwardly posits that the investigation of the world “on a purely subjectivistic basis” divorces Heidegger’s inquiry from its ostensible object, Lukács seems to endorse a break between the subject and its historical conditions analogous to the one that he derides his quarries in The Destruction of Reason for positing. If the individual is, in fact, constituted by a relation to the social totality, an investigation of subjective experience may be expected to open onto precisely that totality. I will return to a variation of this critique as it pertains to modernist literature, voiced by Adorno, in the third part of this chapter.
¹³² Lukács, Destruction of Reason, 412.
can only come from within,” and an investigation into Being can only be an investigation of Dasein.\textsuperscript{133}

Lukács identifies a similar, though less extreme, denial of objective reality in Heidegger’s distinction between authentic and inauthentic modes of existence.\textsuperscript{134} Lukács claims that the inauthenticity “of everyday existence…is caused by social being,” as “social existence signifies the anonymous dominance of ‘the one.’”\textsuperscript{135} In this respect, every “objectively directed perception brings about a casting down, a state of surrender to the ‘one’ and inauthenticity.”\textsuperscript{136} Heidegger, Lukács claims, derides engagement with social reality and “as a consequence the primary phenomenon of history was, for him, existence, i.e., the life of the individual.”\textsuperscript{137} Analogously, Heidegger redefines temporality such that it acquires a primarily subjective connotation.\textsuperscript{138} Historical time, “the accepted one that knows past, present, and future,” is identified as “fallen.”\textsuperscript{139} The subjective experience of time, particularly the relation of Dasein to its own death, replaces clock-time as the truly authentic temporality.\textsuperscript{140} The distinction between authentic and inauthentic modes of existence achieves, Lukács claims, a more socially pernicious result than the mere privileging of the subjective over the objective. Heidegger’s subordination of social reality as

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{133} Lukács,\textit{ Destruction of Reason}, 511.
\textsuperscript{134} Ultimately, I propose that Lukács crucially misreads Heidegger on this point. As such, he overlooks the grounds on which their accounts could, in some ways, be reconciled.
\textsuperscript{135} Lukács,\textit{ Destruction of Reason}, 499.
\textsuperscript{136} Lukács,\textit{ Destruction of Reason}, 511.
\textsuperscript{137} Lukács,\textit{ Destruction of Reason}, 510. Though Lucien Goldmann, in\textit{ Lukács and Heidegger: Towards a new philosophy}, identifies a number of points of compatibility and even potential sympathy between the two thinkers, he ultimately identifies this point as marking a crucial and, I would claim, irreconcilable distinction between them (Goldmann,\textit{ Lukács and Heidegger}, 49–50).
\textsuperscript{138} Indeed, Lukács suggests that all vitalisms, in order to promote their principles of intuition, must “contain a new doctrine of time” (Lukács,\textit{ Destruction of Reason}, 508).
\textsuperscript{139} Lukács,\textit{ Destruction of Reason}, 508.
\textsuperscript{140} Lukács,\textit{ Destruction of Reason}, 509. On this point, Lukács offers his most damning critique of Heidegger. For, Lukács argues, Heidegger treats the “the coherence of human experiences far removed from the ‘original state’ as the starting point” of his investigation (Lukács,\textit{ Destruction of Reason}, 510). These experiences, however, cannot be primary, for they are “a consequence of that social Being and praxis of men in which alone such a ‘coherence’ of experiences could come about at all (Lukács,\textit{ Destruction of Reason}, 510). The reversal of priority ultimately treats a secondary phenomenon as primary and does so in order to obviate the need for an engagement with the truly prior social experience.
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“inauthentic” absolves the individual of any responsibility to engage with social-historical reality. Indeed, Lukács notes, “it comes as no surprise when [Heidegger] strongly denies that ‘resolution’ in respect of man’s surroundings might bring about even the slightest change.”¹⁴¹ Alterations in the social arena have no effect on one’s authentic or inauthentic engagement with the world. Instead, “the road to Being means a casting aside of all objective conditions of reality in order that man might escape the power of ‘the one’ that rendered him unauthentic and took away his essence.”¹⁴² Lukács identifies here the philosophical substitution of abstract for concrete potentiality. With this, Heidegger eliminates any apparent moral responsibility, or even capacity, to alter one’s society. In place of those social commitments, he presents a mythicized, pseudo-theological doctrine of individual salvation.¹⁴³ This mythical turn in Heidegger’s system introduces the final component of irrationalism. Once objective history is devalued, it can be replaced by any account. Because these accounts are divorced from objective reality, they are necessarily mythical in nature. Not only are they mythical, but they prioritize emotional categories, such as “care, despair, and so forth,” which can ultimately be manipulated with catastrophic consequences.¹⁴⁴

Lukács’ analysis of the positions he adduces to support his narrative in The Destruction of Reason is, to say the least, uneven. The ambitious scope of the account he attempts to develop results in limitations concerning the degree of close investigation Lukács can devote to any of the figures he considers. Thus Lukács claims that Heidegger prioritizes the individual at the expense of the social conditions that inform that individual while failing to acknowledge the elements of

¹⁴¹ Lukács, Destruction of Reason, 507.
¹⁴² Lukács, Destruction of Reason, 506.
¹⁴³ Lukács, Destruction of Reason, 506–507, 516.
¹⁴⁴ Lukács, Destruction of Reason, 516. Indeed, while Lukács seems careful to avoid attacking Heidegger on account of his Nazi sympathies, he consistently critiques Heidegger’s brand of vitalism as offering fertile ground for Nazi activism. Lukács particularly targets the prominence of despair, which signals a departure from earlier vitalisms, as an easy target of Nazi propaganda (Lukács, Destruction of Reason, 504, 516).
Heidegger’s account, such as his notion of historicity, that engage with precisely such a conditioning relationship. These apparent shortcomings in Lukács’ attempts at explication are exacerbated when he resorts to offering causal accounts grounded in an interrogation into the social backdrop from which a theoretical position develops rather than appealing to the internal logic and contradictions of the position itself. In his essay “Reconciliation under Duress,” Adorno highlights these shortcomings. He claims, not entirely unfairly, that “in a highly undialectical manner, the officially licensed dialectician sweeps all the irrationalist strands of modern philosophy into the camp of reaction and fascism.” In “Lukács’ Rationalism: In Defence of The Destruction of Reason,” János Kelemen also acknowledges the “one-sidedness of [Lukács’] general historical picture,” though he claims that this one-sided picture does not “compromise the Lukácsian critique of most of the authors treated by him.” By undertaking the project announced by the title of his essay, however, Kelemen does acknowledge that Lukács’ arguments are in need of defense. Kelemen provides a helpful framework for reckoning with the argumentative stance that Lukács maintains. By uncritically endorsing Lukács’ descriptions of the specific authors that he addresses, however, Kelemen ultimately fails to appreciate the more nuanced approach that Lukács actually adopts. In so doing, Kelemen ultimately defends a rather defanged version of Lukács’ position.

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145 Goldmann offers a helpful corrective to the stark antinomy that Lukács himself draws by elucidating the shared problems to which Heidegger and Lukács both respond. In doing so, he acknowledges that Heidegger presents a much more nuanced account of the individual’s relation to the social totality than Lukács gives him credit for, while simultaneously articulating the grounds on which their accounts are ultimately irreconcilable. As I have already indicated, Goldmann identifies this irreconcilable difference in the way that Lukács “conceives of history as the action of the transindividual subject and, in particular, of social classes,” while for Heidegger “the historical subject is the individual” (Goldmann, Lukács and Heidegger, 8).

146 Adorno, Theodor. “Reconciliation under Duress,” 160. Adorno’s assessment of The Destruction of Reason is, in fact, even more withering, as he claims that the book “revealed most clearly the author’s own” destruction of reason (Adorno, “Reconciliation under Duress,” 160).

147 Kelemen, The Rationalism of Georg Lukács, 70–84, 71. On this point, I think Kelemen misses the mark. I maintain that Lukács’ specific analyses have value, and I will shortly identify what I take to be the source of that value. They are not, however, entirely faithful accounts of the thinkers they with which they engage, and they are certainly compromised by a one-sidedness that manifests throughout The Destruction of Reason.
Kelemen highlights a distinction between rationale and causes that proves central to his defense of Lukács. Rational beliefs, Kelemen claims, can be analyzed according to their “rationale, that is their epistemological grounds or reason,” and they can be analyzed according to their “genesis or cause.” Interrogating the internal consistency of a position, or tracking its explanatory power, involves assessing its rationale. Indeed, a rationalist mode of discourse involves explicating and debating the reasons for a position, and, Kelemen adds, we “are rational if we accept a belief based on rational arguments.” With irrational positions by contrast, Kelemen claims, “these two distinct modes of analysis are not possible.” Kelemen leaves this claim woefully undefended, taking it to be self-evident that irrationalist positions are not ultimately referable to rational defense. With this assumption, Kelemen seems to endorse uncritically the inaccessible position Lukács ascribes to irrationalism, divorcing it from discursive reason entirely. Kelemen highlights, then, that Lukács does not endeavor to offer an analysis of the rationale behind the irrationalist positions he interrogates in *The Destruction of Reason*, as Kelemen seems to suggest that such an analysis would be a fool’s errand. Indeed, he cites Lukács’ claim that “the choice between ratio and irratio is never an ‘immanent’ philosophical question. It is not chiefly intellectual or philosophical consideration which decide a thinker’s choice between new and old, but class situation and class allegiance.” According to Kelemen, because Lukács does not take the basis of the commitment to irrationalism to be a question accessible to philosophical adjudication, he instead traces the explanatory causes behind the development of the positions he takes as his quarry.

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Kelemen, *The Rationalism of Georg Lukács*, 76.

Kelemen, *The Rationalism of Georg Lukács*, 76.

With this intervention, Kelemen helpfully shifts the rubric according to which Lukács’ appeals to the reactionary impulse of irrationalist philosophies should be judged. Kelemen’s attempt to defend Lukács purely by appealing to his prioritization of causal explanations above rational critique is ultimately underwhelming, however. On the one hand, it takes for granted that Lukács adequately characterizes the positions he aligns with irrationalism, an assumption I have already suggested should be treated with skepticism. More damningly, Kelemen’s straightforward acceptance of Lukács’ explanatory project leaves him seeming to defend either a version of Lukács committed to a genetic fallacy or a version of Lukács who develops a sweeping narrative in support of the relatively anodyne conclusion that “it is in itself irrational to believe in irrationalism.”\footnote{Kelemen, The Rationalism of Georg Lukács, 76. Kelemen in fact claims this conclusion results from irrationalism being causally determined by the social structure, though he fails to adequately explain why the same argument does not apply to rationalist positions despite his original suggestion that causal explanations are adequate to them, too.} In the first case, Kelemen would commit Lukács to appraising positions simply according to their historical origins in a particular social order.\footnote{In his more polemical moments, Lukács seems to do precisely this. And, indeed, Adorno accuses Lukács of the related genetic fallacy of appraising positions according to their imputed causal connection to fascism (Adorno, “Reconciliation under Duress,” 160.)} In the latter case, Lukács’ defense of reason amounts to a negligible tautology.

In contrast to this attempt to read Lukács’ penchant for causal explanation as a response to the fundamental inaccessibility of irrationalist positions to discursive argumentation, I maintain that Lukács does, in fact, refer his explanations back to a critique of the irrationalist position as self-contradictory and, as such, false. Throughout The Destruction of Reason, Lukács appeals to an impulse among the subjects of his investigation to obscure the historical contingency of their own positions.\footnote{This method of analysis is not unique to The Destruction of Reason, as Lukács investigates this same self-effacing structure in “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat” from History and Class Consciousness, which I discussed briefly in the first section of this chapter.} Insofar as he aligns vitalist philosophies, for example, with an appeal to the “unknowability, indeed the non-existence, the unthinkable nature of an objective reality
independent of consciousness,” he seems to suggest that they render the conditions of their own development illegible.\textsuperscript{155} Similarly, by impugning Heidegger for substituting the investigation of the phenomenological experience of \textit{Dasein} for an investigation of Being, Lukács seems to suggest that Heidegger obscures the historical situation of his own method. If Lukács is right that the various positions he identifies as irrationalist yield to a mythologizing, ahistorical impulse, appealing in various degrees to the fundamental inaccessibility of an objective reality that conditions their own appearance, then causal explanations of the development of those positions, grounded in appeals to motivating class sympathies, amount to a demystifying refutation of the irrationalist position. Thus, the arguments that Lukács adduces which seem weak precisely because they approach a philosophical position from vantage external to it actually participate in a more comprehensive argumentative structure that gives the lie to the foundational mythology of the irrationalist position as he defines it. Lukács may, in fact, fail to adequately establish that the positions he investigates yield to the ahistorical impulse, which would render his ultimate conclusions unjustified. The argumentative structure could, however, remain valid, and I have belabored the articulation of this structure because it is precisely the argumentative tack Lukács takes in his engagement with modernist literature. Furthermore, Lukács’ failure to adequately engage with the ramifications of this approach, which appeals to the historical forces conditioning the development of a theoretical position, ultimately results in his inability to successfully reckon with the formal interventions of modernism.

When Lukács, in “The Ideology of Modernism,” identifies a kinship between the philosophical project of Heidegger and the modernist literary tradition, he implicitly extends his

\textsuperscript{155} Lukács, \textit{The Destruction of Reason}, 412.
literary critique beyond the purely aesthetic sphere. Lukács identifies the ideology underwriting modernist literature, but he also associates that ideology with a longer tradition of irrationalism. Wolfe’s account of the universal experience of solitariness is neither the mere expression of an aesthetic orientation nor a claim to a simple fact. Rather, Lukács claims that the account is a response to a specific matrix of social-historical developments. Particularly, it is a response to the dissolution of the social fabric under modern capitalism, such that individuals cease to identify themselves as part of a coherent social framework. Rather than engage with these alienating objective developments, the proponents of modernism, he claims, retreat into a reactionary position. They represent their alienation not as a particular social problem, but as the truth of human existence. Doing so allows them to privilege the investigation of subjective experience over the interaction between individual and world. Indeed, it absolves them of the need to engage with the world at all. Concern for abstract potentiality dominates the actualization of concrete potential, just as Heidegger’s authentic possibilities eclipse social interactions, which are inevitably cast as inauthentic. The modernist reactionary response to alienation is, according to this account, a radical manifestation of the irrationalist impulse. In *The Destruction of Reason*, Lukács explicates the bourgeois reaction through which an intuitive principle displaces the rationalist commitment to understanding. This reaction, however, initially appears as an attempt to preserve a specific

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156 Lukács, “Ideology of Modernism,” 20–21. Lukács also draws connections between Heidegger and modernism in *The Destruction of Reason*, where he claims Joyce, Gide, and Malraux exhibit “conscious reflexes,” analogous to Heidegger’s, “which the reality of post-war imperialist capitalism triggered off in those unable or unwilling to surpass what they experienced in their individual existence and to go towards objectivity” (Lukács, *Destruction of Reason*, 300).

157 In *Theory of the Novel*, Lukács traces this fracture between individual and society to the origins of modernity and identifies engagement with the fracture as the specific difference of the novel genre. Indeed, he argues that the novel works by representing the reintegration of the individual into a society from they begin as alienated (Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, 56). World War I, Lukács argues, radicalized the sense of the individual’s alienation from society, as “the collapse of that world which subjectivism was continually criticizing, but which formed the indispensable basis of its existence, was lurking at every door” (Lukács, *Destruction of Reason*, 490). Subsequently, vitalism adopts a far more disconsolate mood.
social configuration. Even if the irrationalist attempt to posit an intuitive principle capable of mediating subjective and objective realities is doomed to fail, it still belies a commitment to social reality.\(^\text{158}\) When proponents of modernism universalize alienation as the unifying force, they retreat into precisely the problem that elicited their response. Rather than posit a mediating principle, they commit to radical solipsism. The modernist response neither addresses nor ignores alienation. Instead, it seems that, according to Lukács, modernist literature glorifies the isolation that it initially experienced as problematic and revels in its own alienated condition.\(^\text{159}\) This retreat forecloses the possibility of an alleviation of alienation, and thus ultimately propagates the problematic condition.

Lukács mentions Eliot only twice by name in “The Ideology of Modernism,” and does not address *The Waste Land* at all. The consensus account of *The Waste Land* developed thus far, however, depicts it as a paradigmatic target for Lukács’ critique. *The Waste Land* addresses the specific problem of the disintegration of social relations. This disintegration manifests in interpersonal relationships, as in “The Game of Chess,” as well as in the relations between individuals and the greater social framework, as with the commuters traversing London Bridge. The ubiquity of the alienated experience in the poem suggests the universality of this condition. By the end of the poem, this universality is confirmed, as the prisoner passage reveals alienation to be the result of epistemological solipsism, rather than specific social conditions. The affirmation of solipsism exacerbates the sense of alienation present throughout, casting doubt upon the extent to which any of the characters engage with reality beyond of their own consciousness. Limiting


\(^{159}\) This is not, in fact, so far removed from J. Hillis Miller’s thesis that the unifying feature of modernism is its specific response to the problem of nihilism. This response, he claims, demands a figurative journey into, and through, the “Heart of Darkness.” If nihilism is to be transcended, it must first be “experienced in its implications” (Miller, *Poets of Reality*, 5).
individual experience to subjectivity ultimately renders the figures “automatic” and devoid of character or possibility.\textsuperscript{160} This account of the poem aligns it closely with the ideology that Lukács presents in both “The Ideology of Modernism” and \textit{The Destruction of Reason}.\textsuperscript{161} Indeed, the trajectory is identical. The problem, alienation, is universalized, resulting in the overthrow of objectivity by subjective investigation. This reduces individuals to their abstract potential, ultimately evacuating them of identity. Eliot’s poetic vision of failure, then, appears not only despairing but pernicious. Rather than address the problem of alienation, Eliot mystifies the origins of the condition, thereby resinscribing the problem’s insolubility.

\section*{III. The Social Interventions of Literary Form}

\section*{III.1. Moving Beyond Representation}

Despite sharing a number of Lukács ideological commitments, Bertolt Brecht argues against his approach to literary analysis. Presented in the article “Against Georg Lukács,” Brecht’s arguments follow two primary trajectories. Both tracks, however, identify Lukács’ one-sided emphasis on ideology as the weakness in his account. This ideological orientation results in an overly narrow and prescriptive account of literary realism. While granting Lukács’ commitment to the importance of realism, Brecht challenges the monopoly on realism that Lukács attributes to the nineteenth century novel form. Simultaneously Lukács’ prioritization of ideology eclipses the possibilities of experimental techniques. This second line of attack subverts Lukács’ identification of a necessary connection between modernist formal techniques and a reactionary ideology. Ultimately, Brecht’s

\footnote{\textsuperscript{160} Eliot, \textit{The Waste Land}, 255.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{161} The account of Eliot’s intellectual development that Gray presents further bolsters the connection between Eliot and Lukács’ critique in \textit{The Destruction of Reason}. Gray traces Eliot’s responses to the problem of solipsism from his early adherence to Bergsonism through a commitment to Bradleyan idealism and ultimately to the negative poetics of \textit{The Waste Land}. Lukács traces a similar development from the early vitalists, who were committed to an intuitive principle capable of mediating subjective and objective realities, to the post war existentialist turn, when idealist philosophies adopted an attitude of despair and abandoned the commitment to mediation altogether. Given Gray’s account of Eliot’s pragmatic approach to religion and the mythical method, his conversion may ultimately be seen as just the sort of retreat into mythology that Lukács rejects as politically catastrophic.}
critiques of Lukács reveal productive possibilities for modernist formal techniques without dismissing the danger of a retreat into subjective fancy. Theodor Adorno, in his *Aesthetic Theory*, presents an account of artistic production that accommodates Brecht’s appeal to the capacity of work to intervene in the problematic conditions of external reality. While Brecht frames his account through a commitment, shared with Lukács, to the political possibilities of literary realism, Adorno identifies the relationship between the work of art and external reality as central to artistic production as such. Thus, Brecht’s account reveals the productive possibilities of modernist formal techniques, while Adorno’s account enjoins the reader to consider these productive possibilities or risk fundamentally misunderstanding works of art. This is, in fact, precisely my complaint against the traditional reading of *The Waste Land* outlined above.

Brecht launches his critique of Lukács by disputing the parameters of literary realism. Indeed, he directly criticizes Lukács’ programmatic identification of literary realism with the nineteenth century novel form. Against this rigid identification, Brecht maintains that “in no circumstances can the necessary guide-lines for a practical definition of realism be derived from literary works alone.” An account of realism must be developed from an investigation both of literary techniques and the historical conditions to which they respond. Lukács, Brecht suggests, correctly identifies the nineteenth century novel as a literary mode that exhibits a realist comportment. In the terminology that Lukács employs, the nineteenth century novel form maintains a commitment to the relationship between subjective consciousness and objective reality. Indeed, it proceeds by interrogating that relationship. Yet Lukács overstates the relationship by suggesting that the nineteenth century novel is the only, or best, form capable of representing it. Brecht paraphrases this prescriptive dimension of Lukács’ approach as enjoining

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the aspiring author to “be like Tolstoy – but without his weakness! Be like Balzac – but up to date!” He argues, instead, that the nineteenth century realist novel form in question responds to a specific set of social and historical conditions. So long as these conditions persist, the nineteenth century novelistic techniques may continue to adequately capture them. But because the conditions of twentieth century modernity differ from those to which that novel form responded, simply adopting its formal conventions will fail to depict the world realistically. Brecht appeals to the privileged position of character in the nineteenth century to illustrate this point. Lukács highlights the importance of character to the novel form and, particularly, to the work of Balzac. Yet, Brecht argues, “we know something about the bases on which the cult of the individual, as practiced in class society, rested. They are historical bases.” The individualistic orientation of the nineteenth century novel reflects the “primeval forest of early capitalism [in which] individuals fought against individuals, and against groups of individuals…This was precisely what determined their individuality.” As social conditions have changed, new struggles have unseated old and these new struggles are “just as fierce, but perhaps less individualistic. Not that they have no individual characteristics, for they are fought out by individuals. But allies play an immense part in them, such as they could not in Balzac’s time.” As such, it is “absolutely false to say that one should take a great figure and allow it to react in manifold ways, making its relationships with other figures as fleeting and superficial as possible.” The conditions of social reality may instead demand technical innovation. Indeed, the mutable nature of social reality necessitates the development of new forms capable of engaging with emerging problems.

164 Brecht, “Against Georg Lukács,” 47.
165 Brecht, “Against Georg Lukács,” 47
167 Brecht, “Against Georg Lukács,” 47.
Brecht does not merely present a negative account of realism in “Against Georg Lukács.” In addition to the negative claim that “whether a work is realistic or not cannot be determined merely by checking whether or not it is like existing works, which are said to be realistic, which were realistic in their time,” Brecht offers a more capacious definition of realism which admits the possibility that techniques paradigmatic of realism in one context might be thoroughly unrealistic in another.168 In this definition, he identifies five characteristics of realistic literature. Though distinct, these five characteristics operate in tandem to present a revolutionary account of realism. The first two criteria present complementary revelatory aspects of realistic literature. In the first case, “realism means: discovering the causal complexes of society” and “unmasking the prevailing view of things as the view of those who rule it.”169 Realistic art subverts dominant paradigms by revealing obvious “truths” to be products of political reality. Simultaneously, it juxtaposes that paradigm with the actual causal structure of that reality. The third criterion reinforces this juxtaposition, demanding that realist literature write “from the standpoint of the class which offers the broadest solutions for the pressing difficulties in which human society is caught.”170 In Brecht’s context, or at least in his own art, this class is taken to be the proletariat. Finally, realistic art cannot be content to simply illuminate the political structures of society, but it must also emphasize “the element of development” and make “possible the concrete, and [make] possible abstraction from it.”171 Realism, then, reveals structural problems endemic to a society in order to intervene in them.

The formal devices that Brecht employs in his own art reveal the ways in which his definition of realism accommodates experimental techniques. Paradigmatic of these experimental techniques are Brecht’s Verfremdung (estrangement) effects, “which were designed to actively

overcome *Entfremdung* (alienation).”\(^{172}\) With these effects, Brecht “attempted to shock his audiences out of their involuntary adjustment to lives ‘reified into things.’”\(^ {173}\) Thus, when “the actor speaks…as if he reciting someone else’s words” or when the action of a performance is “stopped or interrupted and even frozen into a *tableau vivant,*** the audience is forced to become aware of its own position relative to the action of the play.\(^ {174}\) In forcing audience members to acknowledge their own distance from the play, these estrangement techniques disrupt the passive reception of an individual reduced to thinghood in the state of capitalist alienation. Rather than simply depict the condition of alienation to passive audiences, Brecht “directed his ‘estrangement’ devices against a merely empirical perception of contemporary reality,” and demanded the viewer “complete the demystifying process through political action.”\(^ {175}\) Because these effects disrupt the continuity of the aesthetic experience, they may seem to depart from a realist approach to artistic production. They conform, however, to Brecht’s account of realism. By shocking the audience into an active relation to the play, the work simultaneously unmask “the prevailing view of things” and incorporates the “standpoint of the class which offers the broadest solutions for the pressing difficulties in which human society is caught.”\(^ {176}\) The estrangement effects unmask the prevailing view of things by shocking the audience into a recognition of how that prevailing view results in their own alienation. In cultivating an awareness of the audience’s subjectivity, Brecht’s experimental techniques furthermore emphasize the “element of development.”\(^ {177}\) Thus, despite disrupting the continuity of the representational experience, Brecht’s formal techniques conform

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\(^{172}\) Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism*, 115.


\(^{176}\) Brecht, “*Against Georg Lukács,*” 50.

\(^{177}\) Brecht, “*Against Georg Lukács,*” 50
to his account of realism.\textsuperscript{178} Because of the way in which the condition of alienation appears to the alienated subject as both universal and natural, a dynamic which Lukács illuminated in his critique of modernist experimental forms, artwork that seeks to engage with alienation may need to employ precisely these disturbing effects to bring that condition into view. In producing contemporary realist literature, one may, in fact, need to “wear masks of a grotesque kind” in order to “present the truth.”\textsuperscript{179}

Theodor Adorno cultivates a similar attentiveness to the interplay between artistic form and social problems in his \textit{Aesthetic Theory}. In his account, however, Adorno is not specifically addressing the terms of Lukács’ critique of modernism.\textsuperscript{180} He does not restrict his discussion to the category of realism, but rather develops a more general account of artistic production. With this, he suggests the possibility of the wider application of an approach to literary texts grounded in their responses to specific problems. Adorno claims in the opening chapter of \textit{Aesthetic Theory}, “Art, Society, Aesthetics,” that any definition of art must be dynamic because “art is what it has become,” and as such, “its concept refers to what it does not contain.”\textsuperscript{181} Instead of a stable, unchanging definition of art, Adorno insists that art “must be understood according to its laws of movement…It is defined by its relation to what it is not.”\textsuperscript{182} The incorporation of externality into

\begin{flushleft} \textsuperscript{178} One might object that the theatrical medium in which Brecht primarily employed his experimental techniques is not adequately analogous to the poetic medium primarily being discussed here. I maintain, however, that in his defense of modernist forms, Brecht himself already frustrates an attempt to sharply delimit the bounds of literary genres. He develops his defense by disputing the category of realism with an interlocutor who defines that term with narrow reference to the nineteenth century novel. Thus, Brecht himself already suggests the legitimacy of an analogy between novelistic, theatrical, and, I would add, poetic forms. The formal devices Brecht employs further dissolve rigid genre distinctions. Brecht incorporates song and poetry into his performances, thereby creating a formal montage. This technique affirms in practice the interpenetrability of literary forms. Because Brecht develops a rather capacious account of realism both in his debate with Lukács and in his own artistic work, I believe it is legitimate to consider how this account of realism illuminates the poetic medium.

\textsuperscript{179} Brecht, “Against Georg Lukács,” 51

\textsuperscript{180} Adorno does, in fact, address Lukács by name at points throughout \textit{Aesthetic Theory}, but these passages are not substantial enough for me to fruitfully develop them here.

\textsuperscript{181} Adorno, \textit{Aesthetic Theory}, 3.

\textsuperscript{182} Adorno, \textit{Aesthetic Theory}, 3. \end{flushleft}
the definition of art occurs, for Adorno, in two distinct but mutually reinforcing ways. Indeed, through this mutually reinforcing dynamic, Adorno accounts for the capacity of works of art to respond to the problems of external reality.

Adorno identifies artistic tradition as the first sense in which the concept of art depends upon what it is not. He clarifies that art is necessarily developmental. New forms develop out of an artistic tradition, and this tradition includes both the traditional forms being rejected in novel developments and the historical circumstances that engendered those forms. Thus, Adorno claims, “the definition of art is at every point indicated by what art once was,” yet he further notes that “much that was not art – cultic works for instance – has over the course of history metamorphosed into art; and much that was once art is no longer.”

A rigid distinction between artistic tradition and empirical history cannot be maintained because works of art lose their artistic value and become artifacts. Similarly, historical artifacts may be re-appropriated and become part of the artistic tradition. The second, and more extensively developed, sense in which the concept of art contains its other depends upon the relation between the work of art and empirical reality. Initially, the relation of the work of art to empirical reality seems purely antagonistic as “artworks detach themselves from the empirical world and bring forth another world, one opposed to the empirical world as if this world too were an autonomous entity.” Yet despite the attempt to establish an autonomous reality apart from the empirical world and step “outside of the constraining spell it casts...concretely unconsciously polemical towards this spell at each historical moment,” that empirical world is inevitably brought into the work of art as content. Thus, given the “dissolution of the high-bourgeois nuclear family and the loosening of monogamy,” the theme of adultery has

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become extinct and lives on “distorted and impoverished…only in illustrated magazines.”\textsuperscript{186} The theme of adultery, Adorno claims, is only approachable in a society organized around high bourgeois mores. Without a grounding in this empirical reality, “it is scarcely possible to empathize directly with this literature.”\textsuperscript{187} This simultaneous rejection of and dependence upon empirical reality is precisely, for Adorno, what generates the formal tension in a work of art. For the “unsolved antagonisms of reality return in artworks as immanent problems of form.”\textsuperscript{188} How a work of art develops these formal concerns, then, amounts to a response to empirical reality. Adorno claims, in the midst of a discussion of the demands of empirical reality upon modern art’s comportment to tradition, that “the socially most advanced level of the productive forces…is the level of the problem posed at the interior of the aesthetic monad.”\textsuperscript{189} Indeed, “in their own figuration, artworks indicate the solution to this problem, which they are unable to provide on their own without intervention.”\textsuperscript{190} Despite the attempts of the work of art to establish its own, self-contained reality, external reality is reflected in, and central to it. The formal techniques of the work of art respond to the problems of that external reality. Reckoning with this formal response to external reality is therefore central to an understanding of the work of art.

An analogous sympathy to the tension between the reality created by a work of art and the external reality conditioning its production suffuses Adorno’s critique of Lukács in “Reconciliation under Duress.” Adorno does not merely wield this insight against Lukács as a competing approach to literary interpretation. Rather, he articulates it by identifying a failure on the part of Lukács to apply his own method consistently. Adorno identifies the primary critique of

\textsuperscript{186} Adorno, \textit{Aesthetic Theory}, 5.
\textsuperscript{187} Adorno, \textit{Aesthetic Theory}, 5.
\textsuperscript{188} Adorno, \textit{Aesthetic Theory}, 7. Though he does not mention him by name, Adorno subsequent claim that “this, not the insertion of objective elements, defines the relation of art to society” suggests a rebuke of Lukács attempt to draw ideological conclusions simply from the representational content of a work of literature (7).
\textsuperscript{189} Adorno, \textit{Aesthetic Theory}, 48.
\textsuperscript{190} Adorno, \textit{Aesthetic Theory}, 48.
modernist literature developed by Lukács as the charge of ‘‘ontologism,’ which, if sustained, would allow him to pin the whole of modernist literature onto the archaic existential notions of Heidegger.”¹⁹¹ This charge, I’ve suggested, not only aligns modernist literature with Heidegger’s “theory of man’s existential forsakenness,” as Adorno describes, but more fundamentally identifies a shared ahistorical impulse.¹⁹² The modernist appeal to a universal condition of solitariness, according to Lukács, is grounded in the specifically Heideggerian theoretical apparatus that, while acknowledging the historicity of Dasein, universalizes its theoretical position, thereby obscuring its own historical conditions. I have argued that Lukács’ critique of Heidegger is formally indebted to this charge of ahistoricism. His frequent *ad hominem* attacks against Heidegger’s social standing and the imputed culturally reactionary force of his philosophy become legible as an attempt to illuminate precisely those historical conditions that Lukács claims the philosophical position itself elides.

This is the point, I maintain, on which Adorno crystallizes Lukács’ shortcomings in his engagements with modernism. For, though Lukács wields the charge of ahistorical ontologism against modernism by attributing to proponents of modernist literature the view that “‘man’ means the individual who has always existed, who is essentially solitary, asocial and – ontologically – incapable of entering into relationships with other human beings,” he fails to acknowledge the ways in which this view, itself, is historically conditioned.¹⁹³ Given his commitment to thinking in “radically historical terms,” Adorno argues, “Lukács of all people ought to know that in an individualistic society loneliness is socially mediated and so possesses a significant historical content.”¹⁹⁴ By treating modernist literary forms effectively as vessels of ideological content,
Lukács fails to appreciate the same fluidity of text and context that employed in his critique of the Heideggerian position upon which he claims that ideology is grounded. He fails to recognize the extent to which an effective literary engagement with alienating conditions might exhibit the sense of a profound ahistorical loneliness cultivated by those conditions. If conditions are experienced as fundamentally isolating, then interrogation of those conditions may, in fact, demand the investigation of experience that presents itself as radically subjective. Thus, for example, Adorno claims that “Proust decomposes the unity of the subjective mind by dint of its own introspection: the mind ends by transforming itself into a stage on which objective realities are made visible.”

This leads Adorno to conclude that “his individualistic work becomes the opposite of that for which Lukács derides it: it becomes anti-individualistic.” In his engagement with modernist literature, Lukács erroneously treats texts as atomistic entities whose success depends upon their capacity simply to reflect an accurate vision of objective reality. In doing so, he fails to account for the literary artifact as always already embedded in and determined by a historical context. By treating the work of art merely as a reflection of an ideological perspective divorced from the historical conditions that make that perspective possible, Lukács succumbs to the same ahistorical

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195 David Cunningham, in “Capitalist and Bourgeois Epics: Lukács, Abstraction and the Novel,” argues that Lukács misidentifies the novel as a bourgeois epic form rather than a capitalist epic form, a distinction that hinges on the abstracting power of capitalism. By appealing to the novel as a form capable of accommodating a social totality that “can only be understood in abstract terms” (57), this account suggests a way in which Lukács’ work on the novel may already contain a nascent response to this specific critique leveled by Adorno. Cunningham notes, however, that this response goes undeveloped because “post-1917 Lukács will seek, positively, to restore epic totality under the name of realism” while abandoning “the novel’s ‘epic’ connection to abstract form itself, as a confrontation with a totality that ‘can be systematized only in abstract terms’” (56). Though I am generally sympathetic to Cunningham’s attempt to read the novel form as an epic response to conditions of abstraction, I think his account suffers from a failure to reckon sufficiently with the ways in which Lukács locates abstracting conditions within a concrete totality. If the novel is an abstract form adequate to a “social world constituted through abstraction,” then, if that abstract social world masks its own concrete historical conditions, the abstract form risks reinscribing this elision. This is precisely the argument Lukács marshals against modernist literature, and it is one that Cunningham’s argument does not successfully forestall.

196 Adorno, “Reconciliation under Duress,” 160.

197 Adorno, “Reconciliation under Duress,” 160. This passage is perhaps one of the most fecund in “Reconciliation and Duress,” and my brief summary of Adorno’s conclusions cannot begin to do it justice.
impulse he accuses his targets of endorsing. Indeed, to put the issue in somewhat incendiary terms, in his analysis of modernist forms, Lukács perhaps could have benefitted from applying his historicizing method from *The Destruction of Reason* more liberally.

Brecht and Adorno both, then, respond to Lukács’ critique of modernist literature by illuminating the capacity of experimental forms to engage with and intervene in the conditions of modernity. Brecht, on the one hand, develops an account of realism capable of accommodating experimental forms in the service of revolutionary ends. This account is like Lukács’ insofar as it prescribes political ends for legitimate art and appraises a work of art by the degree to which it achieves those ends. For Brecht, the legitimacy of a literary form is not inherent to the form itself, but rather derives from the problem that the form addresses as well as its intended effect. Yet, because their accounts depend upon specific political agendas, critics may object that the legitimacy of both Brecht’s and Lukács’ accounts stand or fall with the merits of that political position. By identifying the dialectical relationship between the work of art and external reality as central to the concept of art, Adorno, in contrast to Brecht, broadens the applicability of his account. One seeking to develop an account of a work of art must grapple with the societal conditions to which it responds. One must do so not simply to appraise its value according to a specific political ideology. Rather, one must grapple with the dialectical relationship between external reality and the work of art in order to sufficiently understand it. Thus, if an interpretation fails to address not only the external conditions motivating a work but also the manner in which the form of the work offers a response to those conditions, it fails to adequately engage with the work of art as such.

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198 As further evidence of this latter point, Brecht claims that “the means must be questioned by the ends they serve” (Brecht, “Against Georg Lukács,” 51). See also Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism*, 88.
III.2. Reading *The Waste Land* as a Response

The critical accounts of Brecht and Adorno challenge the ideological emphasis that both dominates Lukács’ methodology and finds expression in the traditional reception of *The Waste Land*. Lukács introduces his critique of modernism with a statement of his intention to “concentrate on the underlying ideological basis of” the “two main trends in contemporary literature.”\(^{199}\) Lukács justifies his valuation of ideology above form by suggesting that “it is the writer’s attempt to reproduce this [ideology] which constitutes his ‘intention’ and is the formative principle underlying the style of a given piece of writing.”\(^{200}\) The emphasis upon the reproduction of ideology leads Lukács not only to prioritize the ideological position of the author above the form of a text, but also to accept statements made in the text as straightforward declarations of the beliefs of the author. Thus, Lukács takes the lines, in Eliot’s “The Hollow Men,” “Shape without form, shade without colour, / Paralysed force, Gesture without motion,” to be a representation of Eliot’s commitment to the actuality of the “disintegration of personality” which is “matched by the disintegration of the outer world.”\(^{201}\) Lukács does not clearly present the argument justifying his identification of these lines as an encapsulation of the ideological position of Eliot himself. Yet the suggestion seems to be that, if literary texts are simply reproductions of the ideology of the author, then claims made in those texts may be taken to represent that ideology. The effect of formal techniques can only be analyzed once the ideology underwriting a text has been determined. As such, according to Lukács’ methodology, modernist formal techniques will never complicate the relation between claims made in the text and the beliefs of the author producing the text.

\(^{199}\) Lukács, “The Ideology of Modernism,” 17.
\(^{200}\) Lukács, “The Ideology of Modernism,” 19.
Brecht and Adorno shift the interpretive priority from the ideology of the author to the problem with which a text engages. In doing so, they disrupt the hermeneutic logic that facilitates the straightforward attribution of claims made within a text to its author. Thus, in approaching a literary text, rather than interrogating the content of the work to discern the ideology that it reproduces, one should instead attempt to identify the problems with which the text engages. Doing this raises the subsequent question of identifying the response that the text offers to those problems. This response, further, may be appraised on its merits. An incoherent response may suggest a flight into subjective fancy of the sort that Lukács derides. Indeed, investigating a text’s response to the problem with which it engages may reveal a nihilistic, alienated, or simply false ideology underwriting that response. Thus, an approach to literary texts grounded in their engagements with problems does not foreclose the possibility that they represent or reproduce ideological positions. It demands, however, that the identification of those ideological positions develop through an active engagement with the organic tensions within the text. This engagement requires careful attention to the ways in which claims found in a given text may be called into question by formal elements structuring that text because this tension between discursive affirmation and formal negation may reveal the empirical reality engaged by the text, rather than an ideology promoted by it.

The debate between Brecht and Lukács, when considered alongside the methodological contributions of Adorno, illuminates a discussion of The Waste Land in three profound ways. First, Lukács’ critique of modernism identifies the political and theoretical dangers of a text that advocates either a retreat into subjectivity or appeals to the dissolution of objective reality entirely.

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202 For Brecht, the merits of a response are appraised according to the extent to which it promotes revolutionary ends, while for Adorno, the merits are determined according to the extent to which thematic material is integrated into the law of form internal to the work of art (Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, 8).
As he argues in “The Ideology of Modernism,” the retreat into subjectivity cannot, in fact, be so easily distinguished from a commitment to the dissolution of reality. Further, as he argues in *The Destruction of Reason*, detachment from objective reality conjures the possibility of a retreat into mythical fantasy. This critique questions the value, indeed the legitimacy, of *The Waste Land* as it is commonly interpreted. The nihilistic message of the poem seems to endorse just such a dissolution of objective reality decried by Lukács, while the self-conscious appeals to fertility rituals seem to promote the mythmaking Lukács associates with the late stages of irrationalism. Second, Brecht’s intervention in the debate challenges the interpretive framework grounding Lukács critique. This suggests the possibility of an interpretation of *The Waste Land* that does not subjugate its formal elements to ideological commitments derived primarily from the descriptive content of the text. Instead, the form and the content may be seen to both raise and address a problem. This approach, which prioritizes the identification of the problem addressed by a text, suggests the possibility that the condition of alienation which Lukács misidentifies as the ideology of *The Waste Land* is, instead, the problem to which the poem responds. A thorough analysis of *The Waste Land* cannot stop, then, with the identification of the social reality that the poem describes. Rather this analysis must also consider how the poem addresses that social reality and intervenes in the problems identified. Brecht’s challenge to Lukács’ methodology, and the suggestions of an interpretive procedure focused on problems, does not, however, entirely negate the force of his critique. For if the response to the problem of alienation proposed by *The Waste Land* amounts to a retreat into subjectivity, or the endorsement of a false ideology, then Lukács’ critique retains its force. The poem may yet commit to a highly problematic account of reality. Finally, Brecht’s definition of realism brings the dual nature of literary production into focus.

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203 Making sense of *The Waste Land*’s use of fertility mythology in light of Lukács’ critiques of mythical language and logic will comprise much of the work of the next chapter.
While Lukács presents works of literature primarily as mere products of social forces, Brecht’s emphasis on the political possibilities of realism illuminates the way in which literary texts are, themselves, social forces. They are shaped by culture, and they shape culture. Not only do they identify and respond to cultural problems, but they also have the capacity to transform the social landscape in which those problems appear, as Brecht’s *verfremdung* effects were designed to do, for example.

These considerations suggest the conclusions of this chapter, as well as a preview of the argument of the chapters to follow. The standard interpretation of *The Waste Land*, as outlined in the opening section of this chapter, identifies an issue central to the text. The condition of alienation dominates the poem. This alienated condition manifests, as Gillum argues, in objectifying descriptions of the characters. One woman is reduced to her hair which “spread into fiery points,” while another disappears from her own “seduction” and reappears as an “automatic hand.” As Buckley and Gray both argue, alienation also manifests in the poem through appeals to epistemological solipsism, which presents individuals as trapped within their own limited perspectives. While this account of the poem successfully identifies a problem central to the text, it too readily ascribes the condition of alienation represented in the text to Eliot himself. Thus, the appeals to epistemological solipsism are taken to amount to the message of the poem. These accounts claim that *The Waste Land* commits to a vision of reality in which objective reality is inaccessible. We are all, ineluctably, trapped within ourselves. In identifying the reality represented in the poem with the ideology to which the poem is committed, this interpretive approach...

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204 This point will be crucial in considering Eliot’s account of tradition.
206 Gray, to his credit, frames his analysis of the poem through an appeal to the problem of solipsism, rather than a straightforward attribution of a doctrine of solipsism to Eliot. Drawing the conclusion, however, that the poem fails to overcome the condition it addresses, and that this failure is, indeed, the substance of the poem, Gray approaches the problematic interpretation of Buckley, Gillum, et al.
tradition shares a methodological error with Lukács. The methodology developed by Brecht in his response to Lukács illuminates the ramifications of this error. Works of art need not straightforwardly reproduce the ideology of their authors. Instead, they may represent a social condition in order to identify it as problematic, or even to exert an effect upon it. As such, I maintain that the condition of alienation depicted in *The Waste Land* is not presented as an ineluctable condition, but rather one to be reckoned with. In the following chapters, I will argue that the text itself presents a program for overcoming this alienated condition and re-establishing social relations. Indeed, with Brecht’s account of literature’s capacity to exert effects upon political reality in mind, I will argue that *The Waste Land* not only presents a response to alienation but exerts an aleatory effect upon the alienated culture it identifies. If, as I will show, *The Waste Land* contains a response to alienation, then it must not endorse epistemic solipsism, as Buckley, Gillum, et. al. suggest.

Articulating the manner in which *The Waste Land* responds to the problem of alienation is sufficient to show that solipsism is not the epistemic position underwriting the text. Doing so does not, however, entirely respond to the charge of irrationalism raised by Lukács. As Lukács argues in *The Destruction of Reason*, the retreat into subjectivity proposed by various forms of vitalism, and subsequently promoted in works of literary modernism, results in a disavowal of the relationship between experiencing subject and objective reality. Attempts to address the condition of alienation through the investigation of subjective experience ends up reinforcing precisely that condition. Similarly, attempts to address alienation grounded in a false account of reality amount to a retreat into fancy. Again subjective experience is afforded a privileged position above objective reality, and again the relationship between subject and world dissolves. This critique necessitates an investigation of the theoretical framework underwriting *The Waste Land*’s response
to alienation. If *The Waste Land* responds to alienation by suggesting a total retreat into subjectivity, or if depends upon an incoherent account of reality, then the ideology of solitariness reappears as the central framework of the poem. Thus, in what follows, I will not only argue that *The Waste Land* confronts an alienated culture and disrupts this condition of alienation, but I will also endeavor to articulate a coherent philosophical framework capable of underwriting the therapeutic work of the poem. In doing so, I will determine that *The Waste Land* does not subscribe to Lukács’ “Ideology of Modernism.” It does not present a vision of failure.
THE WASTING OF THE WORLD AND ELIOT’S TURN TO MYTH

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued against a prominent approach to *The Waste Land* that takes the poem to endorse the reality of the social condition that it depicts. I engaged extensively with Georg Lukács as a critic who excoriates modernist literature from precisely such a vantage, claiming that, through its depiction of alienated social experience, modernist literature commits to an ideology of universal and ineluctable solitariness. I further noted that even scholars more sympathetic to *The Waste Land* read the poem as an appeal to the fundamental inescapability of alienation. Though they do not share in Lukács assessment of *The Waste Land*, they nevertheless exhibit an analogous interpretive framework. Against these accounts, I argued for the productive capacity of works of literature to engage with the problems they identify. I claimed that works of art do not simply reproduce, but are instead necessarily responses to, the material conditions of their creation. With this account, I suggested that *The Waste Land* should not be understood as an endorsement of the social reality it depicts at all. Rather it should be reckoned with as an intervention into a problem that its depiction of social conditions illuminates. In this chapter, I will pursue this line of inquiry further by articulating a logic that structures the poem, a logic that itself reveals the fundamental problem to which *The Waste Land* responds.

Though *The Waste Land* initially seems to instantiate its own description of “a heap of broken images” and “fragments shored against my ruins,” T.S. Eliot identifies an inspiration for the “plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism” of *The Waste Land* in the first of the notes appended to the poem.¹ In his note, Eliot does not clarify the precise debt he owes to Jessie

Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance*. He merely suggests that, if the reader wishes to attain a better understanding of his poem, they should first consult her work, as well as *The Golden Bough* by James George Frazer. These two works of anthropology, Eliot suggests, are capable of “elucidating the difficulties of the poem” much better than his own notes.\(^2\) In this chapter, I will argue that Weston’s investigation into the Grail legend and Frazer’s collection of fertility rituals both develop a logic that *The Waste Land* incorporates as a unifying principle. Weston and Frazer both interrogate a ritual tradition animated by a sympathetic logic according to which the health of the land is associated with the health of the people living on it. This logic provides the motivating structure of the Grail legend. In that legend, the hero’s quest involves the restoration of a wasted land through the recovery of the Grail, which is meant to heal the region’s ailing king. Through its references to the Grail legend, *The Waste Land* incorporates this sympathetic logic, providing a framework for approaching the sense of total disintegration exhibited in the poem. Ultimately, however, I will argue that *The Waste Land*’s appeal to this mythical logic does not result in the endorsement of a fantastical return to the fertility rituals catalogued by Weston and Frazer. Instead *The Waste Land* marshals this logic to illuminate a more fundamental epistemological framework that accounts for the disintegration of a shared social world.

In order to develop this account of *The Waste Land*’s engagement with Weston’s work on the Grail legend, I will first investigate the concerns that lead Eliot to promote appeals to myth in the first place. Eliot articulates these concerns in his review of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, where he champions Joyce’s mythical method as “akin to a scientific discovery.”\(^3\) Following Jewel Spears Brooker, I will locate the significance of this discovery in the mythical method’s capacity to resolve a tension inherent to artistic production under the conditions of modernity. I will also seek

\(^3\) Eliot, “*Ulysses, Order, and Myth*,” 478
to contextualize Eliot’s account of these conditions, arguing that he does not treat modernity as an ahistorical or fundamentally unprecedented moment. The chaos Eliot ascribes to his moment in fact appears throughout his corpus in varying aspects. This context clarifies that the mythical method need not be understood as an attempt to escape history into a mythical logic that defies temporality. Instead it offers the possibility of mooring a particular set of chaotic cultural conditions to a history with which they are continuous, facilitating the recovery of a coherent, though not totalizing, perspective.

In the second section of this chapter, having addressed the problem that necessitates Eliot’s turn to the mythical method, I will investigate the mythical elements of the Grail legend that *The Waste Land* develops. Some prominent scholars, such as Grover Smith, have attempted to identify the Grail legend as a source of a crypto-narrative undergirding *The Waste Land*. Others, perhaps most notably Jewel Spears Brooker, treat *The Waste Land*’s debt to Frazer and Weston as purely methodological. Against these common interpretations, I maintain that *The Waste Land* makes use of more than just the method employed by Frazer and Weston. The poem incorporates the sympathetic logic of the fertility ritual that their works explicate. This logic begins to offer a unifying perspective of the poem, for its seemingly disconnected depictions of desolate landscapes and alienated individuals begin to form a unity when approached through a logic that identifies the health of a land with the health of its people.

The appeal to this sympathetic logic as a unifying frame for the poem culminates in a challenge to the promise of *The Waste Land*’s response to conditions of cultural disintegration. The third section of this chapter will be devoted to overcoming this challenge. If the poem suggests that we should embrace the sympathetic logic of fertility rites as a response to a chaotic historical situation, then it appears to endorse a retreat into fantasy. Thus, Eliot’s poem seems to commit to
the denial of reality that Georg Lukács lambasts modernist literature in general for perpetuating. Further, in *The Destruction of Reason*, Lukács articulates the gruesome history of the coronation of fantasy, and particularly of a fantasy grounded in sympathetic logic, in Nazi Germany. If *The Waste Land* does, in fact, endorse the sympathetic logic of the Grail legend as a perspective to be adopted, Lukács provides both conceptual and historical arguments that caution us to eye this endorsement with skepticism. I will ultimately argue, however, that *The Waste Land* does not endorse a retreat into a worldview animated by sympathetic logic. Instead, I claim that it marshals this sympathetic logic to illuminate an epistemological problem. This problem manifests most clearly in Eliot’s engagement with F.H. Bradley’s response to the challenge of solipsism. According to the account Eliot develops, a shared world exists only so long as multiple individuals intend it. If they cease to perceive this shared reality, it ceases to exist. The threat of such a dissolution characterizes the historical conditions to which Eliot champions the mythical method as a response. This threat of dissolution, further, manifests in the cacophonous misunderstandings and fragmentations of *The Waste Land*. *The Waste Land*, then, does not commit itself to a mythical logic. Rather, it employs this mythical logic as a frame that ultimately resolves itself into a more fundamental epistemological problematic, revealing a structure of experience that is at risk of being elided in overdetermined cultural conditions.

**I. The Chaos of Modernity and Eliot’s Mythical Method**

*The Waste Land* confronts its reader with a cacophony of voices. The interactions in the poem are nearly all characterized by personages attempting to engage with distant or inattentive interlocutors, and these failed interactions amplify the sense of discord. Further, each passage in the poem is laden with disparate allusive material, and this material calls the reader’s attention away from the poetic moment, heightening the disorienting effect of the poem’s fragmentary form.
For example, a coincidental meeting “Under the brown fog of a winter dawn” finds one character calling out to “one [he] knew…Stetson! / You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!”⁴ And though he receives no reply, the speaker presses this acquaintance and concludes his interrogation of Stetson with the borrowed phrase from Baudelaire, “You! Hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable, – mon frère.”⁵ In this brief exchange, the time and place of the poem become disjointed, as the speaker invokes twentieth-century London, the First Punic War, and Baudelaire’s Paris of the nineteenth century.⁶ The form of the poem reinforces this sense of dislocation, as disconnected and fragmentary vignettes frustrate any attempt to derive a structuring narrative logic. The polyvocality finds expression in a ruinous and chaotic landscape, with “hooded hordes swarming / over endless plains…Falling towers / Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London / Unreal.”⁷ As the poem draws to a close with London Bridge “falling down falling down falling down,” the litany of discordant and dislocated voices that constitute the poem resolve into mere “fragments…shored against [the] ruins.”⁸

In the first of his notes that he appended to *The Waste Land* in the December 1922 edition of the text, Eliot specifically identifies two works as profound influences on the organization of the poem.⁹ First, Eliot cites Jessie Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance* as the source of “not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem.”¹⁰ Indeed, with a mischievousness characteristic of the poem’s explanatory appendix, he claims that “Miss Weston’s

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⁶ This final appeal to Baudelaire amplifies the sense of disjointedness, as an appeal to a reader is voiced by a speaker within the poem who is calling out to an unhearing listener.
⁷ Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 370–375. Here again, radically diverse places and times are juxtaposed, unified only by their reduction to ruin and Baudelaire’s haunting echo of the unreal.
book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than” even his notes will.\textsuperscript{11} In addition to \textit{From Ritual to Romance}, Eliot cites James George Frazer’s \textit{The Golden Bough} as a work to which he is “indebted in general.”\textsuperscript{12} Eliot’s appeal to Frazer should not, perhaps, come as a surprise. For Eliot is not alone in acknowledging that Frazer has “influenced our generation profoundly,” as Weston herself cites Frazer as a source of inspiration for her investigation in \textit{From Ritual to Romance}.\textsuperscript{13} Both \textit{The Golden Bough} and \textit{From Ritual to Romance} undertake anthropological investigations into diverse mythical traditions, preserved variously in records, legends, and folk practices, in order to examine the hypothesis that these disparate practices share a common source. The methods that Weston and Frazer employ, and the mythical material that they investigate, will prove to be central concerns of this chapter, particularly insofar as I will argue that scholars, in focusing extensively on the methods Eliot inherits from his sources, have systematically overlooked the importance of the structuring content of the mythical fertility rites that \textit{The Waste Land} incorporates. Yet a more fundamental question forestalls an explication of the “certain references to vegetation ceremonies” that appear throughout the poem.\textsuperscript{14} For though he highlights the central role that the vegetation ceremonies analyzed by Frazer and Weston play in \textit{The Waste Land}, Eliot neglects in his notes to articulate why he deemed it necessary to structure the poem around a myth in the first place. Nor does he explain just how this mythical framework is meant to elucidate the difficulties of such a fragmented text.

Though Eliot’s note leaves opaque the function of the references to the Grail legend in \textit{The Waste Land}, his 1923 essay “\textit{Ulysses}, Order, and Myth” offers some insight into the ends to which \textit{The Waste Land} marshals the mythical constellation articulated by Frazer and expanded by

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\item Weston, \textit{From Ritual to Romance}, 3, 6.
\end{enumerate}
Weston. In “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” Eliot endeavors to defend James Joyce’s *Ulysses* in the face of scathing criticism leveled against it in a review by Richard Aldington. In response to Aldington’s suggestion that *Ulysses* is “an invitation to chaos, and an expression of feelings which are perverse, partial, and a distortion of reality,” Eliot argues that Joyce’s method, “the parallel to the *Odyssey*, and the use of appropriate styles and symbols to each division,” is akin to a scientific discovery. Eliot claims that this methodological discovery is so significant that “in using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him.” Eliot concludes his essay with an injunction to emulate Joyce because his mythical method marks “a step toward making the modern world possible for art, toward that order and form which Mr. Aldington so earnestly desires.” By appealing to the work of Weston and Frazer to organize *The Waste Land*, Eliot seems to be engaged in precisely this project of employing mythical material to make contemporary experience legible by imposing order upon it.

A seeming digression that Eliot embarks upon, in which he professes general alignment with Aldington regarding the value of the disputed artistic category of “classicism,” promises to clarify Eliot’s insistence that this new method is, in fact, necessary. Eliot claims that he and Aldington “are more or less agreed as to what we want in principle, and agreed to call it

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16 Eliot, “*Ulysses, Order, and Myth,*” 477, 476. Eliot even likens this discovery to the work of Einstein, claiming that anyone who pursues the mythical method will not be imitators any more than “the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations” (Eliot, “*Ulysses, Order, and Myth,*” 478). Indeed, there is general consensus among scholars that this is precisely what Eliot does in *The Waste Land*.
17 Eliot, “*Ulysses, Order, and Myth,*” 478.
18 Eliot, “*Ulysses, Order, and Myth,*” 479.
Yet, Eliot notes, there are at least two ways to define classicism. One attempt to be “classical” entails “turning away from nine tenths of the material which lies at hand, and selecting only mummified stuff from a museum.” This brand of classicism installs the ancient above the contemporary as a locus of value and deems only the former to be valid material for artistic endeavors. Restricting the material suited for creative work to the traditional in this way, however, disconnects that material from the present insofar as it involves “turning away” from current conditions. The classical material is preserved, but at a detached remove, disconnected from the context of the moment. Alternatively, Eliot claims that one can be “classical in tendency by doing the best one can with the material at hand.” Here, Eliot provides a somewhat aberrant definition of classicism. Indeed, he may be accused, perhaps fairly, of shifting the goalposts. But by reconstructing the notion of classicism in this way, Eliot also reframes the methodological intervention of *Ulysses*. *Ulysses*, according to Eliot’s revised model of classicism, is not classical because it references Homer. Rather, *Ulysses* is classical because it engages with the “material at

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20 As Lehman notes, Eliot gestures towards still other accounts of classicism, but these appeals do not rise to the level of a definition. Eliot merely dismisses the notion that classicism can be defined negatively as an alternative to romanticism (Eliot, “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth,” 477. Lehman, *Impossible Modernism*, 90).
22 Insofar as Lukács excoriates those promoting a retreat into myth, he seems to be casting them as classicists in this derogatory sense. They seek simply to replace the contemporary situation with a romanticized classicism. I will argue in what follows that attacks to raise such a critique against *The Waste Land* fail to appreciate the distinction made here between valuable and mummified forms of classicism.
23 Eliot, “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth,” 477. Eliot is not concerned merely with the dichotomy between traditional and modern material. Insofar as he argues that the mythical method should replace the novel as a literary form adequate to contemporary experience, he also intervenes in debates concerning the legitimacy of formal traditionalism. Indeed, the importance of this dual facet of Eliot’s intervention, insofar as it concerns both classical material and traditional forms, will prove integral to the later stages of my argument.
24 Eliot, “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth,” 478. Though it cannot be addressed here, Eliot’s claim that this material includes the “emotions and feelings of the writer himself, which, for that writer, are simply material he must accept” illuminates the limit of his claim that the poet should remain impersonal (Eliot, “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth,” 478).
25 Regardless of whether the approach that Eliot appeals to in this account may justly be called classicism, the conceptual distinction that he draws illuminates the value that he locates in Joyce’s work. His equivocation around the term “classicism” is cause for care when appealing to the term itself, but I believe that, even if we reject the notion that it should be called classicist, the position Eliot juxtaposes with the antiquated mode of classicism is worthy of consideration as a guiding principle for Eliot’s aesthetics.
hand.”26 This material includes the “emotions and feelings of the writer” as well as world-historical events, and Eliot claims it is material for which the traditional novel form may not be suited.27 According to the structure of Eliot’s distinction, Ulysses is thus, perhaps counterintuitively, classical because it engages with contemporary experience, and it is modern because it does so by deploying a new method that manipulates “a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity.”28

For Eliot, the problem for the artist, the problem that necessitates the adoption of Joyce’s mythical method, results from a tension between two competing aesthetic criteria. Eliot articulates this tension more explicitly in his contrast between Elizabethan literary forms and an alleged Romantic and contemporary formlessness in “The Possibility of Poetic Drama,” an essay collected in The Sacred Wood. According to Eliot, “the nineteenth century had a good many fresh impressions but it had no form in which to confine them.”29 These poets did not suffer from a dearth of poetic material. Rather they had to grasp about for a form that was adequate to this material. In contrast to the Romantics, the Elizabethan period was “able to absorb a great quantity of new thoughts and new images, almost dispensing with tradition, because it had this great form of its own which imposed itself on everything that came to it.”30 This question of form is critical for Eliot because he claims that “permanent literature is always a presentation: either a presentation of thought, or a presentation of feeling,” and this act of presentation entails a refinement or

28 Eliot, “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” 477. Throughout “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” Eliot adopts a particularly polemical tone that undermines somewhat the clarity of his argument and detracts from the nuance of his claims. Elsewhere in his corpus, Eliot offers more capacious accounts of literary history that could accommodate deployments of Homeric material prior to Joyce. For example, the Eliot of “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” would, I think, rather situate Joyce within a tradition of figures who organize their work around a template provided by the Odyssey. Joyce surely marshals this material differently than his predecessors, as he must to engage with a different set of social conditions, but even in doing so he continues to operate within a more expansive literary engagement with myth.
informing of the material. Thus Eliot clarifies that a work of art must have a principle of order that structures its material, and he does so by appealing to an Aristotelian hylomorphic paradigm. Matter, such as the thoughts, ideas, images, or emotions that provide the substance of a work of art, is not alone sufficient for artistic production. This matter must be unified under a form by the artist.

In his juxtaposition of the Romantics with Elizabethan dramatists, Eliot specifies the second criterion underwriting the tension that necessitates the turn to Joyce’s method. He claims that, in contrast to Keats and Shelley, who were “certainly obliged to consume vast energy in this pursuit of form,” Shakespeare “was very fortunate” because he inherited “a crude form, capable of indefinite refinement.” This was an advantage because “to create a form is not merely to invent a shape, a rhyme or rhythm.” Instead, creating a form involves the “realization of the whole appropriate content of this rhyme or rhythm,” which entails the realization of a “precise way of thinking and feeling.” Thus, when Shakespeare inherited a nascent form, this did not merely involve the bequeathal of a stock of familiar patterns. He also had access to this framework of thought, which manifested itself in “the half-formed ὑλή, the ‘temper of the age’…a habit on the part of the public to respond to particular stimuli.” Eliot seems to suggest here, as he implies elsewhere in this discussion, that the matter that the poet works with – from the feelings and

34 Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 53. Here the debt to Aristotle is most pronounced. Eliot also fundamentally shifts the hylomorphic framework with respect to artistic production. Insofar as the artist does not merely impose form upon the material, but rather must identify a form that is adequate to, or indeed contained within, the material itself, Eliot seems to be aligning his poetics with an Aristotelian account of organic generation (I am indebted to Bethany Somma for help identifying the contours of the Aristotelian positions in play in this discussion). I will argue in the fifth chapter of this dissertation that Eliot similarly treats culture as an organism when he identifies culture as a locus of Bergsonian duration, transforming a psychological experience of time into a social historical framework. A full engagement with Eliot’s potential use of a biological hylomorphic framework as a model for artistic production is lamentably beyond the purview of this chapter.
impressions to historical events and cultural habits of thought – it itself suggests a form that is appropriate to it. The “temper of the age” is precisely this material habit to respond to particular forms, and this habit expresses itself in shared patterns of thought and feeling. Form is not arbitrary and cannot be applied indiscriminately, but rather must be adequate to the historical material that it shapes.

On the one hand then, to be intelligible, to attain a degree of permanence, a work of art must have a principle of order. It must be coherent. Eliot does not appeal specifically to this criterion of aesthetic order when he suggests this alternative model of classicism in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” but his claim that the mythical method is “a step toward making the modern world possible for art, toward that order and form which Mr. Aldington so earnestly desires” suggests implicitly that this revised mode of classicism entails the need to impose order on the material. 36 On the other hand, however, the criterion of classicism that Eliot outlines in the review of Ulysses and the explicitly hylomorphic account developed in “The Possibility of Poetic Drama” requires that the work of art be adequate to its historical context. Precisely because Eliot claims the contemporary experience is characterized by chaos, the material available to the modern artist is incommensurable with the internal order that Eliot’s aesthetics demand. Jewel Spears Brooker distills the essence of this tension when she notes that Eliot “claimed that to be true to history, art must reflect the world in which it is produced; and to be true to itself, art must be unified.” 37 Joyce’s mythical method is laudable for Eliot because it mediates these two competing artistic criteria. It captures and responds to the chaos of contemporary experience while simultaneously

36 Eliot claims here that Aldington desires this form and order. Despite his critiques, Eliot does ultimately align himself with Aldington, claiming that he and Aldington are “more or less agreed as to what we want in principle (Eliot, “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” 477).
37 Spears Brooker, Mastery and Escape, 119.
providing the artist with tools to control and order that experience, “giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.”

In her chapter from Mastery and Escape: T.S. Eliot and the Dialectic of Modernism on “Substitutes for Religion in the Early Poetry of T.S. Eliot,” Jewel Spears Brooker contextualizes this appeal to “the panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history,” which Eliot leaves unjustified. Spears Brooker follows Auden in identifying “the problem of religion and its substitutes as the modern problem,” and she situates Eliot’s early poetry as a response to this problem. She claims that Eliot treats religion as “a scheme, a system of ideas, an abstraction, which allows one to make sense of the universe and to maintain values.” The world-historic moment into which The Waste Land intervenes, however, is characterized, according to Eliot, by the breakdown of religious belief. If religion is a force, and indeed the historically dominant force, that promotes the epistemic stability that underwrites a shared worldview, then the breakdown of religious belief threatens to render the world illegible. The death of belief, which Spears Brooker suggests Eliot takes for granted, radically reshapes the situation of the poet. Poets in such circumstances must formulate their own schemata to “make sense of the universe and to maintain values.”

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39 Spears Brooker, Mastery and Escape, 478.
40 Spears Brooker, Mastery and Escape, 125.
41 Spears Brooker, Mastery and Escape, 124. Piers Gray offers a more extensive account of Eliot’s engagement with religion as a system that makes the world accessible in his chapter on “The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual” from T.S. Eliot’s Intellectual and Poetic Development 1909-1922. Importantly, in both of these accounts, the truth of religious belief is for Eliot secondary to the capacity of religion to generate a cohesive world.
42 Spears Brooker, Mastery and Escape, 126.
43 Spears Brooker, Mastery and Escape, 124. Spears Brooker identifies Yeats as a figure who embraced precisely such a project, and indeed Eliot cites Yeats approvingly in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth.” Elsewhere, particularly in The Sacred Wood, Eliot makes appeals to more temporally distant poets who intervene in similarly “Promethean” situations, complicating his suggestion that this he is describing a uniquely modern phenomenon (Spears Brooker, Mastery and Escape, 126).
Though Spears Brooker identifies one feature of contemporary experience to which Eliot undoubtedly responds with his appeal to the mythical method, her account does not adequately address the breadth of Eliot’s claims to various forms of cultural disintegration. As such, it risks amplifying Eliot’s polemical appeals in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth” to the radical novelty of the situation of the poet, despite Eliot’s own subsequent acknowledgement that these appeals are somewhat immoderate.⁴⁴ In fact, Eliot addresses a number of cultural developments in *The Sacred Wood* that add further context to, and justification for, his appeal to a fundamentally chaotic modern experience. Simultaneously, however, he also acknowledges disparate historical situations that resemble those he attributes to modernity. In “The Perfect Critic,” for example, Eliot identifies a pair of destabilizing developments that he claims are ubiquitous. The first is a pernicious verbalism, which Eliot defines as a “the tendency of words to become indefinite emotions,” that he claims is characteristic of, but not unique to, post-Hegelian philosophy.⁴⁵ He suggests that the result of this verbalism is that “words have changed their meanings,” though “what they have lost is definite, and what they have gained is indefinite.”⁴⁶ Eliot does not defend this claim. Indeed, he does not even adequately explain it, and without further elucidation, there are grounds to treat it skeptically. I am less concerned here, however, with the veracity of Eliot’s account of philosophical developments than I am with the social conditions that Eliot takes himself to be responding to. In these conditions, the definitional consistency of language has been compromised as discrete definitions become subtly loaded with emotional content, resulting in the destabilization of their meanings. Eliot identifies a complementary development that arises from the “vast accumulations of knowledge – or at least information – deposited in the nineteenth century.”⁴⁷ The

The explosion of information resulted in a consequent proliferation of “fields of knowledge in which the same words are used with different meanings.” The chaotic experience that Eliot appeals to in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth” need not be reduced to an isolated event like the death of God, which appears ahistorical in its sheer novelty, as Spears Brooker would have it. Rather, Eliot appeals to destabilizing cultural dynamics that develop over time. Eliot’s sense of the diminishing capacity of religion to provide a stable source of shared meaning surely contributes to his appeal to an anarchic modern experience. But so, too, do the proliferation of specialized fields of knowledge and the consequent unmooring of a communal vocabulary.

Further, though Eliot does identify his moment as uniquely anarchical in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” Spears Brooker is, I think, too hasty in accepting these claims at face value. Eliot appeals elsewhere to authors who responded in their own ways to conditions akin to those he ascribes to the early twentieth century. He contrasts Dante with Lucretius, for example, by suggesting that “Dante had the benefit of a mythology and a theology which had undergone a more complete absorption into life than those of Lucretius.” The lack of a unifying frame that Spears Brooker claims underwrites Eliot’s appeal to a mythical method seems analogous, if not entirely then at least partially, to the conditions under which Lucretius produced De Rerum Natura. Writing from within a culture that had not absorbed the philosophy that animates his poem, Lucretius is

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48 Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 8. One may, again, treat Eliot’s appeal to the mutual unintelligibility of various sciences with skepticism. Here, I think, the contemporary deployment, in both academic and popular arenas, of terms such as “postmodernism” and “Marxism” offers some evidence of the phenomenon to which Eliot appeals without justification. Depending on the context in which these words appear, they seem to connote radically divergent objects. The definition of Marxism in an economic context is related to, but nevertheless, I maintain, distinct from expressions of Marxism as a practice of cultural critique. These both are again distinct from the nebulous use of the term Marxism that is deployed as an object of fear in the American political arena. This equivocity further results in the terms being cathected with emotional content such that appealing to the term in certain contexts elicits an emotion prior to, or even instead of, a legible meaning.

49 Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 138. The contrast between Dante and Lucretius in this way mirrors philosophically the formal contrast between the Elizabethans and the Romantics.
left to articulate a vision of life animated by this philosophy in his work. If Lucretius appears to Eliot to be at a disadvantage compared to Dante, then Blake is hamstrung. Where Lucretius writes his poem “to find the concrete poetic equivalent” for a philosophical system that “is already in existence,” Blake must supply his own. Despite his “capacity for considerable understanding of human nature,” Blake’s poetry suffers, according to Eliot, because it lacks “a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own.” Eliot’s discussion of Blake’s response to his poetic circumstances presents, I think, an interesting foil to Eliot’s laudatory comments about Yeats in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth.” For Yeats, too, endeavors to develop a mythology, and Eliot identifies Yeats as “the first contemporary to be conscious” of the need to manipulate the “continuous parallels between contemporaneity and antiquity.” Finally, Eliot does not treat Blake in isolation, though he does identify his genius as being particularly hindered by the lack of established mythical framework. Eliot locates similar shortcomings in the “large but insufficiently furnished apartments filled by heavy conversation” of Milton’s “celestial and infernal regions” and the “historical thinness” of the Puritan mythology.

Joyce, then, in pursuing a mythical method that “has the importance of a scientific discovery,” does not in fact intervene in an unprecedented cultural situation. According to the account that Eliot develops through The Sacred Wood, societies can be more or less suffused with a dominant ideological framework, regardless of whether it is theological, philosophical, or

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50 The ramifications of Eliot’s discussion of Lucretius and Dante will receive more extensive treatment in the next chapter. Here my concern is primarily to identify situations that Eliot presents as dispossessed of a unifying framework that can serve as historical precedents for the conditions described in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth.”
51 Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 137
54 Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 133.
Cultural conditions can be more or less chaotic, and the modern absence of a unifying or ubiquitous mythology is not itself an absolute novelty. It is neither apocalyptic nor ahistorical, as Spears Brooker seems at times to maintain, following the suggestion of Eliot in his more polemic pronouncements. Rather, the various forces that contribute to the anarchy of contemporary experience – the proliferation of scientific vocabularies, the untethering of words from their traditional meanings, disenchantment with religious belief – all result from the interplay of historical forces. Indeed, the moment of chaos that Eliot addresses in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth” appears to be one of many such moments, and Joyce participates in a tradition of responses to anarchic situations. Nevertheless, even if the conditions into which Joyce intervenes are not unprecedented, they are particular. The novel form, which developed in response to a different set of cultural demands, “will no longer serve,” according to Eliot, and new forms are needed that can impart order to the specific mode of chaos the confronts Eliot and his contemporaries, thereby making “the modern world possible for art.” Specifically, he claims that the mythical method is uniquely capable of achieving this result.

56 Indeed, in the essay on Blake these terms appear to be interchangeable.
57 Though Eliot does not discuss it, the epochal shift of from the Medieval period to modern era offers an interesting point of comparison. Particularly, Hans Blumenberg’s treatment of the proliferation of absolute metaphors through this period in The Legitimacy of the Modern Age captures an analogous attempt to poetically organize a cultural situation in which dominant theoretical and mythical frameworks cease to function.
58 One may object that these revised standards for a moment to be considered anarchic are so capacious as to render the term meaningless. The possibility arises that, according to Eliot’s logic, all historical moments involve an interplay of forces that render them disruptive and chaotic (I am indebted to Tom Eyers for raising this objection). On the one hand, Eliot seems to resist the temptation to push the logic to this extreme, insofar as he references periods of relative stability alongside periods he identifies as particularly chaotic. Despite its being a period of intense political uncertainty, Eliot returns time and again to Dante’s Italy as a paradigm for the pervasiveness of a unifying philosophical perspective. On the other hand, however, Eliot does seem to at least acknowledge the intense feeling of novelty that separates the present from the past in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” when he notes that “the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent that which the past’s awareness of itself cannot show” (Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 43). Here Eliot seems to acknowledge a radical uncertainty to every present moment that is only resolved as it becomes past and is thereby integrated into our structures of understanding.
59 Eliot, “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” 478, 479. Eliot ultimately tempers this claim that the novel form is insufficient in his Postscript to “Ulysses, Order, and Myth” from 1964. That he does so, I think, bolsters my suggestion that the conditions that Eliot describes so hyperbolically in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth” are not nearly as unique as his proclamations in that essay might suggest.
Eliot’s appraisal of Joyce’s method in *Ulysses*, and particularly his claim that this method treads a path that should be followed, clarifies Eliot’s own use of myth as an organizing force in *The Waste Land*. The mythical method addresses a specific problem regarding the possibilities for literary production in modernity. According to Eliot, this mythical method is uniquely capable of resolving a tension inherent to the process of artistic production. This method simultaneously promises to provide a form capable of structuring the work of art without compromising that work’s capacity to reckon with modern conditions resistant to a single unifying order. This sense of social chaos is the result of myriad historical developments, such as an increasing sense of disappointment in religion as well as a proliferation of technical vocabularies and methodologies. One the one hand, the breakdown of established unifying ideologies results in the lack of an established formal structure of thought or art. One the other, however, to the extent that Eliot identifies this sense of social chaos with the proliferation of scientific fields, frameworks of understanding, and definitions of accepted terms, the contemporary anarchy to which the mythical method responds also manifests as a cacophonous overdetermination. *The Waste Land’s* fragmented structure effects precisely this simultaneous sense of underdetermination and overdetermination. The poem resists a unified narrative, and this resistance manifests not only in the absence of a distinct protagonist but also in the jarring transitions in setting. The first section of the poem, “The Burial of the Dead,” transitions from reminiscences of Munich to a desert, “where the sun beats, and the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,” to the memory of a Hyacinth garden, then to the fortunes of “Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,” and it culminates finally on London Bridge.  

The allusions that suffuse each stanza of the poem seem to exacerbate its resistance to unity by destabilizing the already ephemeral sense of place and time. 

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Thus, in the final stanza of “The Burial of the Dead” the fog of war hanging over London appears to be simultaneously a response to the first World War and the Punic wars.\(^6\) Just as concepts and words have lost their definitions, according to Eliot, so do events and references in *The Waste Land* become untethered from their historical contexts. The poem, then, captures both the absence of a shared pattern of thought and the overdetermining proliferation of definitions that Eliot associates with his historical situation. His appeal to the mythical method, though, promises to unify the poem’s material into an intelligible whole in the face of seemingly terminal fragmentation. Attempting to discern the poem’s interplay of unity and chaos requires first, however, a more extensive investigation of the mythical material that Eliot claims structures the poem. It requires a turn to the Grail legend as it is articulated by Jessie Weston in *From Ritual to Romance*.

**II. Searching for Order in the Grail Legend**

**II.1. The Contours of Eliot’s Debt**

Though he does not describe it in detail, Eliot gestures in “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth” towards a dilemma that confronts the contemporary artist. On the one hand, according to Eliot, a work of art must be unified. It must have a principle of order, and this principle of order renders it intelligible to others. On the other hand, for the artist to produce a work that is “classical in tendency,” a characteristic that Eliot prescribes as an aesthetic value, the artist must do “the best one can with the material at hand,” which they “must simply accept.”\(^6\) If this material is essentially fragmentary, as Eliot suggests the contemporary artist’s material is, then hewing to a principle of order threatens to do a disservice to the material, while doing justice to the chaotic nature of the material could undermine the coherence of the artistic production. Eliot heralds *Ulysses* as the


\(^6\) Eliot, “*Ulysses, Order, and Myth*,” 478.
product of Joyce’s discovery of a new method capable of resolving this dilemma. Joyce, in this account, does not organize *Ulysses* according to a principle of order internal to the material of the work itself. Rather, Joyce employs an external order to give structure to the material at hand.  

Eliot describes his own practice in *The Waste Land* in very similar terms. He claims that he derives “the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism” of the poem from Jessie Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance*. Indeed, he claims that Weston’s work is so integral to the text that *From Ritual to Romance* “will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than [his] notes can do.” As one of the central difficulties of the poem is precisely its fragmentary structure, Eliot’s note seems to suggest that Weston’s work on the Grail legend promises to coordinate the disparate material. Thus, in “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth,” Eliot identifies Joyce as the progenitor of a method strikingly similar to his own. Yet, though “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth” articulates the problem that the mythical method addresses, the methodological parallels between *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* obscure even as they illuminate. For, while *Ulysses* uses the *Odyssey* to structure the narrative of the text, *The Waste Land* frustrates attempts to discern a narrative despite the incorporation of elements of the Grail legend. Indeed, the precise contours of the methodological analogy between Joyce and Eliot are so opaque that scholars even dispute whether Eliot actually employs the material of the Grail legend in any significant capacity. So, while the appeal to Joyce illuminates the general promise that myth represents for Eliot, an account of the mythical elements in *The Waste Land* requires a more extensive investigation of the specific material that Eliot

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64 To the extent that Eliot describes this method as “manipulating the continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity,” Eliot seems to acknowledge that this structure is not, in fact, entirely foreign to the contemporary situation (Eliot, “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth,” 478). The mythical method seems, in fact, to reveal latent structures in the contemporary material. This tension between the overdetermination of chaotic material and the identification of latent orders internal to it will be the subject of the latter half of this chapter.  


66 Lehman offers a helpful chronology of the various stages of production for both *The Waste Land* and “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth.” Eliot was certainly aware of *Ulysses* while finishing drafts of *The Waste Land*, as he had agreed to respond to Aldington’s essay years before “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth” appeared.
incorporates into the poem. It calls for an explication of Weston’s work on the Grail legend. Such an explication is impossible, however, without first considering Weston’s own engagement with Frazer’s work on fertility rituals.

When Eliot cites James George Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* as “another work of anthropology” to which he is “indebted in general,” he does not merely highlight second influence for *The Waste Land.* He rather invokes a tradition of scholarship, and he establishes that *The Waste Land* is engaged with that tradition. Indeed, as I have already noted, Weston presents *From Ritual to Romance* as itself not only inspired by but also as a continuation of the project inaugurated by Frazer in *The Golden Bough.* Weston makes use of Frazer’s methods in her endeavor to explain the origin of the Grail legend, and she further argues that the Grail legend is, in fact, the “confused record of a ritual, once popular, later surviving in conditions of strict secrecy.” It is, she claims, the record of a ritual associated with the nature cults catalogued by Frazer. Thus, grappling with the effect of *From Ritual to Romance* upon *The Waste Land* requires a preliminary investigation into the project undertaken by Frazer and continued by Weston.

In *The Golden Bough,* James George Frazer endeavors to explain the origin of a ritual involving the priest of the grove of Aricia, located near the village of Nemi in Italy. In this grove devoted to Diana of the Wood, “there grew a certain tree round which at any time of the day…a strange figure might be seen to prowl…He was a priest and a murderer; and the man for whom he looked was sooner or later to murder him and hold the priesthood in his stead.” Though Frazer notes that “this strange rule has no parallel in antiquity,” he argues that parallels can be found in other cultures. From the existence of these parallels, Frazer identifies a set of conditions that, if

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met, would suggest an explanation for the origin for the practice of the priesthood at Nemi and that therefore guide the methodology of *The Golden Bough*. If Frazer can show “that a barbarous custom, like that of the priesthood at Nemi, has existed elsewhere,” and if he “can detect the motives which led to its institution” and “prove that these motives have operated widely,” and, finally, if he can prove that “these motives were actually at work in classical antiquity” then, he claims, he can “infer that at a remoter age the same motives gave birth to the priesthood at Nemi.”71 Thus, Frazer pursues a survey of rituals from various traditions that contain features analogous to the central elements of the worship of Diana at Nemi in order to identify the structure of a potential shared monomyth.72 By reconstructing this fundamental practice, Frazer hopes to answer two central questions: “first, why had the priest to slay his predecessor? And second, why, before he slew him, had he to pluck the Golden Bough?”73

A full account of the material Frazer adduces to reconstruct his monomyth is well beyond the purview of this chapter. Indeed, the practices that Frazer appeals to are so varied, both in their in specific features and their temporal and geographical locations, that such an attempt would risk devolving into a mere reproduction of the litany of practices chronicled in *The Golden Bough* itself. Yet, a crucial structural element shared by the myriad practices assembled by Frazer is a commitment to a sympathetic logic. According to this sympathetic logic, the behaviors or

72 I am following Jewel Spears Brooker in using the term monomyth to describe the hypothesized originary myth that Frazer endeavors to reconstruct.
73 Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 13. Fortunately, the legitimacy of this methodology as an anthropological practice is not my quarry here, nor is particularly relevant to the argument of this chapter. The practice of positing a hypothetical object of investigation capable of explaining an obscure phenomenon, and then treating that hypothesis as definitive in order to offer an account of the phenomenon is problematic at best. Eliot himself treats Frazer’s explanations with skepticism (Eliot, “A Prediction in Regard to Three English Authors,” 515). The legitimacy of Frazer’s explanations or the promise of his methods for anthropology are not particularly relevant to the literary deployment of analogous methods in *The Waste Land*.
conditions of individuals are reflected in their environment. For example, “in Thüringen, the man who sows flax carries the seed in a long bag which reaches from his shoulders to his knees, and he walks with long strides, so that the bag sways to and fro on his back.” In turn, the flax crop is meant to sway to and fro in the breeze. Similarly, Frazer argues that a set of rituals honoring Adonis, which involved the rapid cultivation of crops in small “gardens of Adonis” followed by their collective consignment to the sea, operated according to the same sympathetic logic. The rapid growth of “wheat and barley in the gardens of Adonis was intended to make the corn shoot up; and the throwing of the gardens…into the water was a charm to secure a due supply of fertilizing rain.” Frazer claims that the rites of the sacred grove participate in precisely this logic. In cases involving the priest of the grove, and again Frazer adduces multiple analogous versions of similar practices, the health of the priest secures the health of the grove itself. In the personage of the priest, the capacities of priest, king, and god combine, though various traditions place different degrees of emphasis on the individual aspects of this tripartite figure. This priest-king guarantees “the continuance and orderly succession of those physical phenomena upon which mankind depends for existence.” When the priest-king begins to convalesce, this enfeeblement, too, manifests in the land. Thus, “this man-god must be killed as soon as he shows symptoms that his powers are beginning to fail, and his soul must be transferred to a vigorous successor before it

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74 In some cases, Frazer claims, this sympathetic relation approaches the border of causality, leading him to suggest that this sympathetic magic is a “germ of the modern notion of natural law” and comes to find an expression in physical science (Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 15).
75 Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 16.
77 Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 262.
78 Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 194. The practices of the priest-king, furthermore, become objects of emulation for the people in general (Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 195–196). Though the priest-king functions as the nexus of the sympathetic power, the practices that effect that power are more generally dispersed. This dispersal of the land-preserving function becomes more prominent in Weston’s account of the crime identified as the origin of the wasting of the land (Weston, *From Ritual to Romance*, 163).
has been seriously impaired by the threatened decay.”

Here, then, is the answer to the first of Frazer’s questions. The priest of the grove must be killed and replaced to ensure that the priest remains continually virile, and, consequently, to ensure that the land manifests his vigor.

In her attempt to determine the origins of the Arthurian Grail legend, Weston adopts Frazer’s method of collating a specific object of investigation with analogous material in order to discern the contours of a more originary account capable of unifying the variety of evidence. Further, Weston claims that her own investigation into the Grail legend revealed a striking “resemblance between certain features of the Grail story, and characteristic details of the Nature Cults described” by Frazer. Weston, then, does not merely adopt Frazer’s method. She also further develops his catalogue of fertility rites and suggests another path along which the sympathetic logic of those rites evolved. Weston identifies seven “main features of the Grail story—the Waste Land, the Fisher King, the Hidden Castle with its solemn Feast and mysterious Feeding Vessel, the Bleeding Lance and Cup,” as well as a host of accidental yet consistent features that she claims also serve an explanatory function, such as the trial of the hero at the Chapel Perilous.

Weston’s overarching argument engages with two prominent attempts to account for these symbols, neither of which, she claims, is successful. One interpretive tradition relies “upon the undeniably Christian-Legendary elements, preponderant in certain versions, to maintain the thesis that the Grail legend is ab initio a Christian, and ecclesiastical, legend, and to analyse the literature on that basis alone.” The other identifies the central elements as fundamentally

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80 Weston, *From Ritual to Romance*, 3.
81 Weston, *From Ritual to Romance*, 3. I am not particularly concerned with identifying a specific taxonomy of features, establishing a precise number of main symbols, or litigating which symbols should be considered essential and which accidental. I am more interested in identifying the elements that appear in *The Waste Land*, such as the wasted land, the fisher king, and the tarot cards, among others, as well as their relation to the sympathetic logic explicated by Frazer.
folkloric, and argues on this basis that “while the later versions of the cycle have been worked over by ecclesiastical writers in the interests of edification, the story itself is non-Christian, and Folklore in origin.”

Weston claims that these competing schools of interpretation fail because, though each can explain certain central features of the Grail legend, neither can offer a comprehensive account. Weston argues further that this failure to provide a comprehensive genetic account results from a longstanding but pernicious trend in Grail scholarship. The prevailing methodology encourages scholars to pull the legend “into little pieces, selecting one detail here, another there, for study and elucidation.”

Dividing the story and treating the pieces individually creates the conditions under which proponents of a school of interpretation can be satisfied with an analysis that accounts for some features but not others.

*From Ritual to Romance* exhibits a number of methodological flaws, not the least of which is a selectiveness with respect to the material that Weston criticizes in the competing schools of interpretation. Jonathan Ullyot captures Weston’s methodological inconsistency, for example, when he notes in *The Medieval Presence in Modernist Literature: The Quest to Fail* that “Weston repeatedly claims that she is not concerned with the earliest form of the Grail story, but the source,” which allows her to “disregard the order in which the Grail texts were written.” Yet, he argues that this methodological commitment is self-undermining insofar as her methodology “is obviously contingent on whether her version of the earliest form of the Grail story is correct.”

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84 Weston, *From Ritual to Romance*, 64. Weston here offers a critique of scholarship that resonates with Eliot’s critique of specialization in sciences from *The Sacred Wood*. She identifies a “modern tendency to specialize which is apt to blind scholars to the essential importance of regarding their object of study as a whole” (Weston, *From Ritual to Romance*, 64). Indeed, a tension between specialist knowledge that requires an increasingly myopic perspective and the ability to relate that knowledge to a coherent whole lurks behind much of this chapter. Ultimately, I will argue that *The Waste Land* marshals the sympathetic logic of Weston and Frazer to articulate the necessity of increasingly comprehensive perspectives.
86 Ullyot, *The Medieval Presence in Modernist Literature*, 73. Ullyot identifies a number of other methodological shortcomings in Weston’s project, though he ultimately attempts to defend *From Ritual to Romance*, claiming that,
Assessing the strength of Weston’s account is not my primary concern in this chapter. Rather, I am more interested in identifying specific features of Weston’s account that are, on the one hand, continuous with the work of Frazer and, on the other, aid in the interpretation of *The Waste Land*.

First, Weston adopts Frazer’s method of assembling fragmentary evidence in the service of constructing a hypothesized progenitor of that evidence. Thus, there is a methodological continuity between *The Golden Bough* and *From Ritual to Romance*. Further, Jewel Spears Brooker argues convincingly that Eliot himself makes use of this method in the structure of *The Waste Land*.87 This shared method is not the only point of continuity between Frazer, Weston, and Eliot. Frazer highlights a sympathetic logic that underwrites the rituals he catalogues, ultimately identifying it as an explanation for one of his organizing questions about the ritual murder at the grove of Aricia. Weston, in turn, highlights this same logic as fundamental to the hero’s quest in the Grail legend. The wasting of the land is sympathetically linked to the infirmity of its king. In curing the king, the hero restores the land. This sympathetic logic at the heart of the Grail legend reinforces Weston’s methodological approach insofar as it establishes a link to the fertility rituals explicated by Frazer, suggesting a ritual rather than literary or ecclesiastical origin for the legend. Thus, by incorporating the features of the Grail legend catalogued by Weston, particularly the ailing king and the wasted land, *The Waste Land* participates in a tradition suffused with this sympathetic logic. Finally, though *From Ritual to Romance* is in many ways continuous with *The Golden Bough*, it presents a crucial point of departure. Though Weston attempts to locate the origin of the Grail legend in the practice of the fertility rites of nature cults, she investigates source
despite its flaws, Weston’s work is more rigorous than it is typically given credit for being. His defense is not entirely convincing, though the criticisms leveled against Weston are not entirely convincing either. Ultimately, *From Ritual to Romance* seems to me to be methodologically compromised but not without valuable insights.87 I will consider her account shortly, toward the end of this section. Though I find it generally convincing, I will argue that it fails to account for the effect that the incorporation of specific material from the Grail legend has upon the poem itself.
material that has already transitioned from social ritual to literary tradition. Weston, then, articulates a vision of a distinctly literary tradition suffused with the sympathetic logic of a prior social practice. By integrating the symbolism of the Grail legend into *The Waste Land*, rather than the diverse material from Frazer, and in appealing primarily to Weston and only secondarily to Frazer in his notes, Eliot offers an intervention into this literary, rather than anthropological, tradition.

**II.2. The Incorporation of a Mythical Logic**

Because of this multiplicity of textual continuities, when Eliot identifies *From Ritual to Romance* and *The Golden Bough* as influences on the structure and symbolism of *The Waste Land*, the precise nature of this influence remains opaque. Indeed, Eliot’s appeals to Weston and the mythical method have beguiled scholars since Eliot’s notes were formally appended to *The Waste Land*. Eliot himself later acknowledges the obscurity of his tribute to Weston when he laments that his notes, and particularly his appeals to the Holy Grail and Tarot cards, have led scholars astray. In “The Case of the Missing Abstraction,” Jewel Spears Brooker neatly responds to one of the primary errors committed by scholars in their attempts to account for Eliot’s inclusion of the Grail legend in *The Waste Land*. These interpretations, extrapolating from Joyce’s use of the *Odyssey* as a source of narrative structure, claim that Eliot uses the Grail legend “as a background myth” and that “this myth provides a shadow plot and shadow hero.” While the fragmented structure of *The Waste Land* resists attempts to discern a narrative in it, these interpretations treat Weston’s analysis

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88 Weston’s work at the border between ritual and romance, rite and legend, highlights a fluidity between the social conditions and their reflections in literary traditions. In the next chapter, I will pursue an investigation of Eliot’s engagement with the reciprocal effects of social conditions and literary productions.

89 Ullyot, *The Medieval Presence in Modernist Literature*. 48. Spears Brooker cites this remark from Eliot as well, and notes that it has given cover to “those who prefer to dismiss the importance of the work of Miss Weston as a factor in *The Waste Land*” (Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, 113). Ullyot and Spears Brooker both argue that Eliot’s skeptical remarks about his notes do not amount to a retraction of his appeal *tout court*. In fact, they both argue, though in different ways, that Eliot’s skeptical remark reinforces his debt to Weston by clarifying more precisely its source.

90 Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, 111.
of the Grail legend as a narrative template to which *The Waste Land* can be forced to conform. Thus, “analogous to the crafty adventurer Odysseus as a hero, we have the blind prophet Tiresias.” Spears Brooker identifies Grover Smith as the proponent of “the canonical version of this interpretation,” and in fact Smith offers multiple versions of this narrative reading of *The Waste Land*. In *T.S. Eliot’s Poetry and Plays*, as Spears Brooker notes, Smith organizes the plot of the poem around the Grail quest. By contrast, in “The Making of *The Waste Land*,” he suggests that Eliot uses the symbols of the Tarot to “introduce a set of contemporary characters corresponding more or less to those figuring in the Grail legend, and…portraying them in cameo, to compose a fantasia of Eliot’s emotional life.” On this reading, Eliot privileges the actors of the Grail legend over the quest itself. Nevertheless, Smith persists in deriving a plot in which those actors participate. More recently, Jonathan Ullyot has endorsed a similar reading in the service of his more ambitious claim that *The Waste Land* is designed to revitalize ancient fertility rituals, thereby ascribing to *The Waste Land* the role of Weston’s knight gallant at a metatextual level.

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91 Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, 112. The difficulty in identifying a protagonist in *The Waste Land* reveals incommensurability of these interpretations with the poem. Tiresias is surely an important personage, but Eliot identifies him as important because he “unites all the rest” of the characters (Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Norton Critical Edition*, 23). He does not actually do anything in the poem, and in fact is “a mere spectator and not even a ‘character’” (Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Norton Critical Edition*, 23). When Ullyot claims the Grail legend imparts a narrative to *The Waste Land*, by contrast, he claims that *The Waste Land* integrates to the narrative but incorporates a “questing protagonist who only vaguely appears throughout the story” (Ullyot, *The Medieval Presence in Modern Literature*, 79). Ullyot at times even seems to associate this protagonist with the narrator of the poem, making the assumption that the narrator remains consistent throughout the poem (Ullyot, *The Medieval Presence in Modern Literature*, 56).


93 Smith, “The Making of the Waste Land,” 134. Smith’s attempt to read the poem as primarily devoted to subject of “the emotional life of its author” seems to mistake the import of Eliot’s acknowledgement in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth” that the artist’s material necessarily includes the emotional life of the poet (Smith, “The Making of the Waste Land,” 134). The material that the poet must work with necessarily includes this personal material, but Eliot in no way suggests the artist’s material is restricted to this entirely. The claim that the subject of *The Waste Land* is Eliot’s emotional life needlessly restricts the material of the poem. Further, this claim is extremely difficult to coordinate with even a very permissive interpretation of Eliot’s appeal to the impersonality of the poet in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 47).


95 I mention this aspect of Ullyot’s thesis here primarily to acknowledge the breadth of the dubious methodological aspects of his interpretation. In appealing to the Grail legend as the source of a narrative for *The Waste Land*, I believe
These attempts to read *The Waste Land* according to the narrative template of the Grail quest all seem to make an illicit assumption about Eliot’s application of the mythical method. They seem to assume that if a myth is structured narratively, and a contemporary work of art is informed by that myth, then the contemporary work will be narrative as well. Eliot’s appeal to Joyce as a practitioner of this method obscures the matter insofar as Eliot lauds Joyce precisely for establishing a narrative parallel between the *Odyssey* and the contemporary material of *Ulysses*. Yet one work of art can be informed by another without actually adopting its form. Attempts to map the Grail legend onto *The Waste Land* necessarily end up contorting the text to conform to structure that it does not organically exhibit. *The Waste Land* does not clearly identify a protagonist, for example, and the contours of a quest cannot be derived from the text itself. As Spears Brooker notes, Smith’s attempt, for example, “to fill in the missing links in his hero’s quest for the Holy Grail underpins a conspicuously discontinuous work with a narrative structure.” These attempts are unconvincing. They fail to grapple with the formal challenges of the poem insofar as they simply import a structure external to the poem in order to resolve the difficulties it creates.

Spears Brooker argues that these attempts to map the narrative of the Grail legend onto *The Waste Land* do not fail merely because they are “sidetracked by a spurious plot and a nonexistent hero.” She claims, rather, that they make a more fundamental error regarding the identification of Eliot’s precise debt to Weston and Frazer. Drawing a distinction between the content of the material that Weston and Frazer explore, namely the Grail legend and fertility rituals, and the

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Ulyot commits a blunder. This blunder can be dismissed along the same lines as Smith’s. I will, however, devote significant attention to the problematic elements of Ulyot’s thesis later in this chapter.

96 Eliot, “*Ulysses, Order, Myth,*” 476, 478. Eliot also, however, notes Joyce’s integration of the “appropriate styles and symbols to each division,” suggesting the parallel is not purely narrative (Eliot, “*Ulysses, Order, Myth,*” 476).


method Weston and Frazer both employ to carry out their investigations, Spears Brooker argues that most scholars of *The Waste Land* have been “misled by Eliot’s choice of the word ‘mythical’” in his mythical method.\(^9\) This mistake leads them to investigate mythical content for clues that will unlock the poem. Instead, she claims, “a careful reading of the *Ulysses* review shows that he really was referring to method, and that he was using ‘mythical’ in his own way, as a near-synonym for ‘scientific’ or ‘comparative.’”\(^1^0\) Thus, she suggests that Eliot’s mythical method is not mythical at all. Instead, when he acknowledges “his debts to Frazer and to Weston, Eliot directs his readers to the great mythmakers of his day and calls attention to their method.”\(^1^1\) According to this account, the structure that Eliot inherits from Weston is actually the methodological practice of collecting and arranging fragments in order to derive an ideal abstraction capable of clarifying them. Eliot does not, according to Spears Brooker, adopt Frazer’s method wholesale. Spears Brooker identifies one main distinction between Eliot’s mythical method and the comparative method upon which it is based. While Frazer and Weston must reconstruct the hypothesized monomyth capable of illuminating their quarries, in a work of art developed according to Eliot’s mythical method, the abstraction is “selected by the artist and constructed collaboratively with individual readers.”\(^1^2\) Unlike the anthropologist, who searches for the monomyth, the artist supplies the explanatory structure.


\(^1^0\) Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, 114. Though this claim neatly captures Spears Brooker’s distinction between interpretations that emphasize material and interpretations that appeal to Eliot’s method, I think it is not entirely felicitous. While it seems valuable, to me, to clarify that Eliot appeals to a method that is analogous to a scientific method or even a comparative method, Spears Brooker does not sufficiently justify the claim that “mythical” is roughly synonymous with “comparative.” This suggestion that the two methods are roughly synonymous results in Spears Brooker overlooking the importance of the mythical material itself, as I will argue shortly.

\(^1^1\) Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, 118.

\(^1^2\) Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, 119. Spears Brooker leaves some ambiguity about whether the artist truly provides the abstraction, which would be analogous to Frazer’s monomyth, or instead provides a background myth akin to the ritual killing in the grove of Aricia around which Frazer organizes his collection of fragments. This ambiguity ultimately leads her to overlook the effect of *The Waste Land*’s integration of mythical material because it allows her to disregard the elements of the Grail legend as mere fragments among the collection. I will argue shortly that this oversight significantly weakens her account.
Spears Brooker claims that her account does more than simply clarify the contours of the relation between Eliot’s method and Frazer’s. It also illuminates the way in which this method resolves the aesthetic dilemma that Eliot presents in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth.”103 The conditions of this dilemma suggest that art is impossible in the crisis of modernity because, on the one hand, a work of art must be internally unified, while on the other, it must do justice to the contemporary material to which it responds. Spears Brooker claims that, on her account, the mythical method “solves the chaos-unity dilemma by allowing the coexistence of surface chaos and subsurface unity,” and she identifies six central features of this method.104 In a work organized by Eliot’s mythical method, “unity does not derive from the sequential relation of part to part,” nor does it derive “from the reference of the work to an abstraction preexistent in culture and shared by the artist and his audience.”105 Rather, unity results from “reference to an abstraction chosen by the artist and brought to his work.”106 The abstraction does not unify the text at the “surface of the work, which to be true to history must consist of juxtaposed fragments.”107 Rather, “disunity exists on the surface and unity beneath the surface,” and “allusions work to help generate the framework which supports and unifies the surface.”108 Finally, Spears Brooker claims that the “reference point myth exists only as an abstraction,” with the result that “each reader of The Waste Land will construct a variant of Frazer’s monomyth, a variant that will be refined and changed with each

103 This feature of Spears Brooker’s account is a marked advantage compared to interpretive attempts to organize The Waste Land according to the narrative structure of the Grail legend. As Spears Brooker notes, these accounts of Eliot’s use of the Grail Legend cannot explain how it is supposed to resolve this dilemma (Spears Brooker, Mastery and Escape, 114).
104 Spears Brooker, Mastery and Escape, 119.
105 Spears Brooker, Mastery and Escape, 120.
106 Spears Brooker, Mastery and Escape, 120.
107 Spears Brooker, Mastery and Escape, 120.
108 Spears Brooker, Mastery and Escape, 120.
Thus, the unity-disunity dilemma is resolved through a bifurcation of the poem. Superficial disorder gives way to an organizing abstraction.

Spears Brooker’s account of the debt Eliot owes to Frazer’s method is compelling in many ways. Spears Brooker clearly captures a motivating tension in the poem and identifies a formal continuity between Eliot’s poetics and the anthropologists he cites in the headnote to *The Waste Land*. Further, her distinction between the material that Frazer and Weston address and the method that they employ helps illuminate the shortcomings of competing accounts of Eliot’s mythical method. Attempts to reckon with the fragmented structure of *The Waste Land* surely benefit from an appreciation of Frazer’s methodology in *The Golden Bough*. And, indeed, Spears Brooker’s analysis of the onus this aesthetic form places on the reader offers an interpretive avenue into an unwieldy text. Spears Brooker’s distinction between content and method, however, also embroils her account in shortcomings that result from an overemphasis on an allusive method at the expense of the effect of the allusions employed. Spears Brooker ultimately treats the myths marshaled by Eliot as ciphers. They perform the formal function of providing an abstract unity to the text in whose service they are marshaled, but their effect upon the text is otherwise negligible or at least negotiable. I maintain this one-sided concern depends upon an equivocation regarding the method Eliot employs and results in a distortion of Eliot’s engagement with Weston.

Spears Brooker appeals to a chain of methodological analogies to ground her claim that “many interpreters have been misled by Eliot’s choice of the word ‘mythical’” to describe the method he heralds in “*Ulysses, Order, and Myth*” because “he was really using ‘mythical’ in his own way, as a near-synonym for ‘scientific’ or ‘comparative’ or ‘inductive.’” The first of these analogies links the method that Eliot enjoins in “*Ulysses, Order, and Myth*” with the investigative

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109 Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, 120.
approach adopted by Frazer in *The Golden Bough*. Frazer’s method, Spears Brooker correctly notes, is comparative, though his material is mythical. Spears Brooker therefore commits Eliot to the same conceptual slippage that she accuses his interpreters of. If Spears Brooker is right, Eliot substitutes the material for the method. Further, Spears Brooker suggests that “Frazer’s method, then, more or less duplicates Darwin’s.”111 She claims that Frazer’s approach is “roughly analogous to the method of the scientist who constructed the imaginary ancestor of the horse.”112 Thus, Spears Brooker maintains that when Eliot lauds the mythical method as having the “importance of a scientific discovery,” he is actually identifying it as “a term for the scientific method as transformed by its application in the arts.”113

This chain of inferences strikes me as speculative at best and question begging at worst. Though Frazer’s comparative method surely provides a powerful hermeneutic tool for illuminating the fragmentary structure of *The Waste Land*, its relevance to the method structuring *Ulysses*, one presumably shared by *The Waste Land*, is less assured. The assumption that Eliot’s debt to Frazer can straightforwardly be identified with the method he ascribes to Joyce requires, on the one hand, committing Eliot to the category error of mistaking material for method and, on the other, eliding the description of the mythical method that Eliot himself presents in the review of *Ulysses*. For the method that Eliot claims “others must pursue after” Joyce involves “manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity.”114 Through the chain of inferences of Spears Brooker’s account, this description transforms into the belief in an “original unity of human consciousness and the continuous evolution of that consciousness from prehistory to present.”115

111 Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, 118.
112 Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, 118.
The synchronic expression of a “parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity” in Eliot’s account becomes a diachronic process of evolution. Eliot’s appeal to a vision of social reality organized through a structural and enduring parallel becomes instead an exercise in the historical reconstruction of discontinuous fragments.

Spears Brooker’s elision of the parallel between antiquity and contemporaneity expressed through the mythical material marshaled in literary texts results in the prioritization of Frazer’s method over Weston’s investigation of the Grail legend. Indeed, though Eliot cites Weston first in the headnote to *The Waste Land*, the investigations of *From Ritual to Romance* seem to disappear from Spears Brooker’s account entirely. *The Waste Land* is, however, definitively ensconced within the literary tradition elaborated by Weston, insofar as that tradition provided “not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism” of the poem. Further, though Eliot cites Frazer as a secondary inspiration, he clarifies that Frazer’s influence extends to the material incorporated into the poem, as “anyone who is acquainted with these works will immediately recognize in the poem certain references to vegetation ceremonies.”

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116 Eliot, “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” 478. My claim that a parallel between antiquity and contemporaneity can be synchronic may seem counterintuitive. In the following chapters I will argue extensively that Eliot’s poetics in *The Waste Land* depend upon an understanding of the continued existence of the past into the present. This endurance entails that the parallel is not merely continuous but also, in some sense, simultaneous.

117 Again, I should reiterate that I wholeheartedly endorse Spears Brooker’s appeal to Frazer’s method as a valuable resource for reckoning with the fragmentary structure of *The Waste Land*. My contention is the more modest objection that substituting Frazer’s method for Eliot’s description of Joyce’s elides the importance of the mythical material incorporated into the poem, which is the source of the parallel to which Eliot appeals. This elision forecloses important hermeneutic avenues, particularly with respect to *The Waste Land*’s incorporation of the Grail Legend.


119 Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Norton Critical Edition*, 21. One reason for Spears Brooker’s reluctance to wrestle with this significance of the vegetation ceremonies incorporated into *The Waste Land* could be Eliot’s own skepticism with respect to the explanations offered by Frazer for the evidence he assembles in *The Golden Bough*. Eliot lauds Frazer for progressively withdrawing “in more and more cautious abstention from the attempt to explain” (Eliot, “A Prediction in Regard to Three English Authors,” 515). Thus, it may seem preferable to develop an account of *The Waste Land* that does not make recourse to Frazer’s theories but instead relies only on his method. To the extent that Eliot engages primarily with Weston, however, the content of the mythical frameworks cited seems inescapable, particularly since the material presented by Weston is already in the process of transitioning from ritual ceremony into a part of the literary tradition.
poem manifests in the symbols incorporated into the work, symbols implicated in a tradition of fertility rituals. An investigation of *The Waste Land*’s deployment of a mythical method analogous to Joyce’s must be able to account not merely for Eliot’s appeals to Frazer’s methodological innovations but also for the ceremonial symbols incorporated into the poem from Weston’s investigations into the Grail legend.

Though *The Waste Land* resists the narrative structure that would permit the Grail legend to serve as a plot device, in the way the *Odyssey* provides a frame for *Ulysses*, the incorporated elements of the Grail legend nevertheless provide a structure to the poem. The poem’s title announces the debt to the Grail tradition, and the second stanza elaborates upon this debt. The depiction of a wasted land, “where the sun beats, / And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief, / And the dry stone no sound of water,” suggests a kinship between the environment of the poem and the blasted earth that necessitates the quest of the Grail. The final section returns once more to this wasted land, appealing to both the Fisher king and the mad king Hieronymo in the final lines of the poem. Between these clear references to the problem that motivates the Grail quest, the wasted land and the ailing king, the poem incorporates incidents from the stories, such as the meeting with death at the chapel perilous, and symbolism of mysterious provenance, such as the Tarot deck. No hero embarks upon the journey to cure the king and restore vitality to the land. But the symbols incorporated into the poem invest it with their own logic, a sympathetic logic according to which the wasting of the land, the ailing of the king, and the destitution of the inhabitants are reflections of the same condition. Thus, the depictions of sterile erotic love in “The Fire Sermon” are wedded to images of decay. The speaker remarks, for

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example, upon “white bodies naked on the low damp ground / and bones cast in a little low dry garret.”\textsuperscript{123} The repetition of “low” obscures what minimal distance separated the scene of copulation from the scene of decay. Similarly, the undeath of the crowd that “flowed over London bridge” in “The Burial of the Dead” resonates with the “dead sound” echoes by Saint Mary Woolnoth “on the final stroke of nine.”\textsuperscript{124} The waking death of London’s inhabitants finds expression in their environment.

Though attempts to use the Grail legend to identify a narrative in \textit{The Waste Land} run aground on the poem’s fragmented form, their failures do not entail that the material incorporated from Weston’s investigation plays no role in structuring the poem. These symbols invest the poem with the sympathetic logic that animates their tradition, a tradition that \textit{The Waste Land} participates in through its engagement with them. This animating logic organizes the poetic fragments. The seemingly disparate juxtaposition of an abstract, barren landscape with social interactions characterized by miscommunication and sterility are revealed, within the logic of the vegetation ceremony, to be manifestations of the same malady. The land suffers because of the ailing, or malpractice, of the people. The people suffer because the land wastes.

\textbf{III. Sympathetic Logic and the Loss of a World}

\textbf{III.1. Escaping History into Myth}

I have argued that \textit{The Waste Land’s} incorporation of imagery derived from the Grail legend establishes it as part of the tradition of fertility rituals within which that legend is embedded. Eliot does not merely adopt a comparative method from the work of Weston and Frazer work, as Spears Brooker claims. He also imbues the poem with the imagery that those anthropologists interrogate. Figures central to \textit{The Waste Land}, from the image of the wasted land itself to the personage of

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the fisher king, are integral to the Grail legends that Weston chronicles. Further, Weston argues that these legends themselves participate in a more ancient tradition. This tradition, traced and explicated by Frazer, is animated by a sympathetic logic according to which the health of the land is tied to and preserved by those living upon it. With its incorporation of these symbols, *The Waste Land* intervenes in this tradition and is thereby invested with its sympathetic logic.

Jonathan Ullyot and Robert Lehman present complementary accounts that reckon with Eliot’s incorporation of mythical material into *The Waste Land*. Lehman argues in *Impossible Modernism: T.S. Eliot, Walter Benjamin, and the Critique of Historical Reason* that Eliot appeals to myth as a cohesive force in *The Waste Land*. According to Lehman, Eliot conceives of history and myth in oppositional terms. History, for Eliot, is fundamentally degenerative, while myth provides the promise of cohesion precisely because it is, in some sense, outside of time. Eliot’s mythical method, then, offers an alternative to the chaotic overdetermination of his moment by integrating a timeless framework that resists the degenerative historical impulse towards anarchy. While Lehman builds this argument concerning the general function of myth by appealing to the variety of mythical material scattered throughout *The Waste Land*, Jonathan Ullyot adopts a similar conceptual framework to make a much more specific argument. He claims that Eliot appeals to Weston’s account of the Grail legend in order to recover the pre-logical perspective inherent to this ritual tradition. In doing so, Ullyot seems to suggest that Eliot appeals to this tradition, and particularly its sympathetic logic, as a livable response to the dissolution of a shared contemporary worldview. According to Ullyot, when confronted with the weakening hegemony of the Christian perspective, in Spears Brooker’s terms, or the entropic force of history, in Lehman’s, Eliot endorses myth itself as a substitute. Poetry allows us to recover a shared cultural vision by simply retreating into a mythical past.
Ullyot’s account of *The Waste Land* is not particularly defensible because it commits Eliot to a poetics of return that he resists throughout his critical corpus, even in the passages to which Ullyot appeals. I will argue, however, that precisely these deficiencies in Ullyot’s account illuminate a serious challenge to the legitimacy of *The Waste Land*’s response to a modern cultural landscape marked by alienation. If the mythical method ultimately entails a straightforward endorsement of a mythical perspective, then it amounts to precisely the retreat from reality that Georg Lukács associates with modernist literature. Such a retreat from reality could have profound implications concerning the possibility of a shared objective reality, a concern Lukács investigates in *The Destruction of Reason*. Further a complementary historical critique becomes relevant, insofar as the specific mythic structure that Eliot appeals to in *The Waste Land* was deployed to devastating effect by the Nazi party, which raises cause for concern about the felicity of appealing to fertility rites to recover a sense of a shared social totality. This concern is, indeed, amplified by Eliot’s own flirtations with fascism and his antisemitic leanings. In the face of these potentially damning critiques, I will argue that Eliot’s mythical method does not promote a retreat from reality.125 Rather I will claim that the mythical structure invoked in *The Waste Land* serves to illuminate a more fundamental and objective epistemological framework. The fertility rites incorporated into *The Waste Land* through the Grail legend raise the problem of the relation between individuals and their world, a problem that the poem also invokes through a reference to F.H. Bradley’s engagement with the problem of solipsism. Though the poem employs the mythical logic of the Grail legend as a formal device capable of organizing the poem, the structure this logic

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125 This argument is not meant to absolve Eliot of his abhorrent views. Rather, I make this appeal in order to justify my claim that *The Waste Land* does not exhibit a commitment to a fundamentally mythical logic. Ultimately, I will suggest that the poem, in fact, contains a response to this logic that renders the retreat into fascism or antisemitism untenable. This will be the work of later chapters. Here I mean only to mark a distinction between the theoretical position Eliot articulates in *The Waste Land* and the complex of prejudices Eliot himself exhibited.
imparts reveals a problematic that is not grounded in myth at all. The mythical problem of a wasted land resolves into the epistemological problem of the loss of a shared world.

In the chapter “Myth” from his *Impossible Modernism: T.S. Eliot, Walter Benjamin, and the Critique of Historical Reason*, Robert Lehman illuminates Eliot’s appeal to myth in *The Waste Land* by interrogating the contrast Eliot draws between myth and history. Myth, Lehman argues, names for Eliot “first of all, an interruption of the narrative of literary modernism.”126 Indeed, myth appears throughout the chapter as an interruptive force, not merely of the “narrative of literary modernism” but of the vicissitudes of history more generally. The appeal to myth serves Eliot’s aim of establishing “in *The Waste Land* a moment or a space outside of the historical world that *The Waste Land* describes, one from which this world might be ordered, controlled.”127 Myth, on this account, fulfills the role that Eliot proclaims for it in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth” because it offers a vantage that is not subject to the logic of decay that Eliot, according to Lehman, associates with literary history. Lehman reads the opening lines of *The Waste Land*, with their allusions to Chaucer and to Whitman, as an instantiation of the poem’s commitment to a historical vision of cyclical decay. Chaucer initiates a revolution in English verse, and Whitman represents the repetition and conclusion of that revolution. Despite the poem’s appeal to the cyclical changing of seasons, “Whitman is not only the repetition of Chaucer’s verse revolution,” as could perhaps be expected of a historical cycle of renewal.128 Rather, “he is, in some sense, the latter’s falling to waste.”129 And so, “the poem thus presents the coadunation of a closed, cyclical process—the

129 Lehman, *Impossible Modernism*, 101. While I find much of Lehman’s account impressive in its attention to the myriad intertextual elements at work in *The Waste Land*, I do not find his claim that Eliot adopts a fundamentally degenerative view of history particularly compelling. Eliot’s discussions of history in *The Sacred Wood* present history as developmental and accretive. Even as Eliot can be critical of world-historical moments, he presents a far more nuanced engagement with the process of becoming than Lehman ascribes to him in *Impossible Modernism*. Further, the degenerative account of history leads Lehman to ascribe to Eliot a poetics of rupture, according to which *The
repetition of the seasons and the repetition of literary-historical moments—with a degenerative process.™130 As a poetic production, The Waste Land, too, is embroiled in the temporal logic of degeneration.

Lehman argues that the rejection of a narrative method in favor of a mythical method promises an escape from this cyclical decay. Myth, according to Lehman “imposes a vision of history absolutely incompatible with narrative presentation; one that ‘lacks a truly temporal dimension’; one for which ‘historical time does not exist’; and so one that refuses the before and after on which accounts of literary tradition depend”™131 By rejecting a narrative method for a mythical one, then, Eliot seems to be suggesting that order can be imposed on the anarchic conditions of modernity through the imposition of an extra-temporal vision. Indeed, Lehman claims that Eliot’s adoption of bricolage facilitates the development of this extra-temporal perspective. Insofar as he “cuts lines from Webster or Baudelaire free from their textual or historic contexts,” Eliot “cuts this narrative’s joints, denies the progressive continuity of its moments.”™132 This process establishes a dilemma for Eliot, one that Lehman claims is fundamentally unresolvable. If The Waste Land is to invoke myth as an alternative perspective freed of the historical cycle of degeneration, then it must itself escape that cycle. But as a work of art, The Waste Land already exists as a created object. It is bound to the history.

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Waste Land must include all of literary history as a final moment. C.D. Blanton offers a more compelling account of The Waste Land’s project of including history in his Epic Negation, which emphasizes the fluidity of the poem’s borders. According to his argument, which I will discuss further in the next chapter, the poem includes history while remaining, itself, a part of history. This possibility remains open for Blanton because history is not, according to his account, treated as a degenerative force to be escaped.

130 Lehman, Impossible Modernism, 101.
131 Lehman, Impossible Modernism, 108. Lehman curiously associates the “time of myth” in this passage with cyclicality, introducing a frustrating equivocation into the structure of his argument. For, on the one hand, his attempt to read the seasonal transition as a disruptive vehicle for temporal decay in The Waste Land suggests an affinity between the changing of the seasons and the historical process of degeneration. On the other, cyclicality is here meant to characterize the timelessness of myth. These categories are, surely, confused somewhat by The Waste Land’s dual engagement with history and myth, but the precise function of the cycle remains an underdeveloped feature of Lehman’s account.
132 Lehman, Impossible Modernism, 108
Though Lehman concludes that “Eliot can try to affirm both history and myth in The Waste Land” but cannot “really bring them together,” his account captures the appeal of a retreat from history. This sense of a retreat from history is, I think, heightened by Lehman’s focus on rupture over continuity. Lehman presents myth and history as occupying incommensurable positions in Eliot’s imagination, which leads him to claim that, if Eliot’s critical work is “on the side of continuity,” then The Waste Land “is on the side of rupture.” Just as Lehman identifies the boundary between myth and history to be fixed, the site of rupture, so too does he identify such a sense of rupture within the notion of history itself. By ascribing to Eliot a position according to which literary history is merely a process of degeneration that concluded with Whitman, Lehman identifies the modernist’s situation itself as one of rupture. Both of these appeals to rupture elide Eliot’s engagement with historical and literary continuity. They require Lehman to treat Eliot the poet and Eliot the critic as discontinuous figures. Yet Lehman also acknowledges that Eliot’s engagement with myth involves a greater concern for continuity than he allows. Tiresias, for example, is a mythical figure who seems to exist in the poem “both inside and outside of history,” insofar as he is “a literary-historical allusion, having passed through the hands of Homer, Sophocles, Ovid, and Dryden before being taken up by Eliot himself.” It is not clear to me that such a nuanced engagement with Tiresias is possible within a framework that treats the boundary between myth and history as fixed. Though this feature of Lehman’s account results, I think, in inconsistencies and a failure to recognize the poem’s appeals to continuity in spite of rupture, I maintain that the account generally raises the important problem of whether Eliot appeals to myth as an alternative to history.

133 Lehman, Impossible Modernism, 109.
134 Lehman, Impossible Modernism, 113.
In the chapter entitled “Jessie Weston and the Mythical Method of The Waste Land,” from The Medieval Presence in Modern Literature: The Quest to Fail, Jonathan Ullyot suggests more emphatically than Lehman that Eliot marshals myth as an alternative to degenerate historical conditions. A poem that, in Lehman’s account, carefully and unsuccessfully attempted to reconcile myth with history becomes in Ullyot’s interpretation a call to retreat into ritual. Ullyot associates the unifying promise of Eliot’s appeal to myth with his development of Weston’s work on the Grail legend. Like Spears Brooker, Ullyot argues that Eliot’s deployment of From Ritual to Romance is fundamentally methodological, but the methodology that Ullyot derives is radically distinct from the comparative method that Spears Brooker explicates. Ullyot identifies Eliot’s mythical method as a methodology of return. He claims that “for Eliot, the only way to make the modern world possible for art was for literature to return to its anthropological roots: its primitive and ritualistic nature.” Not only does Ullyot claim that Eliot enjoins the artist to return to the “primitive and ritualistic nature” of poetry, but he claims that in doing so the “job of the artist is to unearth the pre-logical mentality.” Confronted with “the Waste Land of contemporary life,” the poet is charged with “revivifying the contemporary activities” by returning to the practice of “poetry as ‘primitive’ and poetry as a reflection of a pre-logical mentality.” Ullyot does not sufficiently explicate what this pre-logical mentality entails, opting instead to focus on its emotive function. It is, for him, a source of life, a source of energy. I have argued already in this chapter, however, that Weston and Frazer both articulate a conceptual framework animating the rituals that

135 Ullyot, The Medieval Presence in Modern Literature, 54. Here the contrast between Spears Brooker’s account and Ullyot’s is perhaps the most pronounced. Spears Brooker appeals to Eliot’s adoption of a method modeled on the anthropological procedure of Frazer and Weston. Ullyot, by contrast, appeals to a method that recovers the anthropological material, the mythical mentality, that Frazer and Weston investigate.

136 Ullyot, The Medieval Presence in Modern Literature, 54, 55.

137 Ullyot, The Medieval Presence in Modern Literature, 54, 55.

138 In doing so, Ullyot implicitly endorses a framework that he acknowledges is “of a time” and “far from scientific” (Ullyot, The Medieval Presence in Modern Literature, 55, 56).
they investigate and that Eliot integrates into *The Waste Land*. This mentality is grounded in a sympathetic logic according to which the health of the land is identified with and causally tied to the health and behavior of its inhabitants.\(^{139}\)

The specific structure of Ullyot’s argument is, I think, deficient. Ullyot does not sufficiently attend to the copresence of past and present in Eliot’s appeals to a privileged poetic engagement with the “primitive.” Because he fails to recognize this temporal dimension to Eliot’s poetics, he too easily ascribes to Eliot a poetics of return. Eliot consistently rejects the notion that poetry can be relevant simply by returning to previous forms. And I find no reason to believe that appealing to the destruction of established forms to return to a prior, pre-logical perspective somehow legitimizes an analogous poetics of return. Ullyot’s account, therefore, strikes me as committing Eliot to precisely the forms of classicism that he rejects. Ullyot simply replaces a commitment to an established classical cannon with the fetishization of a pre-logical, “primitive” mentality.\(^{140}\) Despite its problems, however, Ullyot’s account brings an important question into relief regarding the attitude that Eliot adopts toward the mythical material he incorporates into *The Waste Land*.\(^{141}\) On the one hand, Eliot may endorse myth as a straightforward alternative to the

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\(^{139}\) Ullyot obliquely references Weston’s appeal to fertility rituals, claiming that the attempt to locate a fertility ritual at the heart of the Grail Legend is one of the weaker parts of her argument (Ullyot, *The Medieval Presence in Modern Literature*, 73). He claims that “Weston’s main evidence for the description of an esoteric fertility rite is a very obscure passage from the *Perlesvaus*,” thereby eliding Weston’s appeals to a sympathetic logic (Ullyot, *The Medieval Presence in Modern Literature*, 73). Though the evidence she adduces is not uniformly compelling, Weston does not merely appeal to one passage to ground her claim. She establishes myriad links to the tradition of rituals explicated by Frazer, from parameters the quest itself to the symbols of the Tarot. Ullyot’s elision on this front allows him to appeal to the more generalized incorporation of a pre-logical feeling rather than the specific logic explicated by Weston and Frazer.\(^{140}\)

\(^{140}\) As Ullyot notes, Eliot certainly adopts an imperialist, and at times particularly cringeworthy, stance throughout his works, including his dabbling in anthropology. I do not mean to contest this. Indeed, I think Ullyot himself downplays these problematic aspects of Eliot’s criticism, despite acknowledging them (Ullyot, *The Medieval Presence in Modern Literature*, 55–56). I object, however, to the way in which Ullyot’s account reduces Eliot’s appeal to myth to this imperialist element despite such a reduction committing Eliot to a position expressly rejected in his critical corpus. For a more nuanced exploration of the category of the “uncivilized,” Lehman offers an insightful treatment of modernist engagements with primitivism and Eliot’s relation to them (Lehman, *Impossible Modernism*, 109–111).

\(^{141}\) Spears Brooker, by contrast, evades this question by eliding the significance of the mythical material altogether, instead focusing exclusively on Eliot’s methodological debt to Frazer.

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contemporary moment he identifies as anarchic. This endorsement may manifest as the attempt to abscond to a timeless perspective, as Lehman suggests, or as an attempted return to a pre-logical mentality, as Ullyot does. I maintain that reading The Waste Land as a straightforward appeal to myth as a viable alternative to a disappointing world-historical moment commits the text to a problematic position that should, I think, be regarded with suspicion. Indeed, reading the text in this way renders it subject to the challenges to modernist literature and its theoretical foundations posed by Lukács. After articulating these challenges, which I take to be damning, I will develop an alternative account of the function of mythical material in The Waste Land, one that neither elides the significance of that material nor commits the poem to a tacit endorsement of it as a prospective ground for communal life.

If Eliot endorses an earnest return to the mythical logic grounding a tradition of vegetation ceremonies, then The Waste Land seems to exhibit the precise retreat from objective reality that Georg Lukács claims characterizes modernist literature. In addition to offering a scathing critique of such a retreat from reality, Lukács traces the grim historical trajectory of appeals to fertility myths of just the sort Eliot employs in The Waste Land. This history offers grounds to treat with suspicion any potential appeal to fertility ceremonies as a panacea for the crisis of modernity. In “The Ideology of Modernism,” Lukács associates modernist literature with a commitment to the human condition as fundamentally alienated. This commitment, in turn, results in a “disintegration of personality” that is “matched by a disintegration of the outer world.”142 With this disintegration, “distortion becomes as inseparable a part of the portrayal of reality as the recourse to the pathological.”143 Though Lukács acknowledges that modernist authors “often rightly” present life in capitalist modernity as “a distortion (a petrification or paralysis),” he claims that the modernist

tendency is to “present psychopathology as way of escape from this distortion.”

When the relation between individual subjects and objective reality fractures, a state of affairs reminiscent of the conditions Eliot describes in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” pathology and distortion become the only apparent recourse. Reality dissolves and yields to fantasy. The desire to escape from a historical logic of degeneration fosters a yearning to retreat into the mythical logic of environmental sympathy.

In the chapter on “Pre-Fascist and Fascist Vitalism,” from The Destruction of Reason, Lukács further articulates the ideological trajectory from the philosophical denial of objective reality to a retreat into politically motivated mythmaking. Lukács identifies Ludwig Klages as the vanguard of this retreat. In Klages, the Vitalist commitment to subjectivity, which acquires a particularly polemical tone, “no longer constituted a simple nihilistic negation, but an about-turn into direct myth” with an explicit “epistemology of his new doctrine of myths.” Lukács does not merely trace the ideological ramifications of the retreat from objective reality into mythical fantasy. He also acknowledges the historical development of this line of thought, particularly as it finds expression in the self-conscious mythologizing of the Nazi party. Lukács highlights more specifically the Nazi deployment of mythical language identifying a land with its people by appealing to the life or health of each, which is precisely the mythical structure that organizes The Waste Land. Lukács argues that the ideologues of German fascism cultivated a mythology focused on the dichotomy of life and death. They inherited this dichotomy from the radicalized version of the Vitalist philosophical framework found in Klages, among others.

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145 One may claim that “denial of objective reality” is too strong a phrase. Yet, according to the logic that Lukács traces, the commitment to a subjective principle above the objective quickly dissolves the distinction between objective and subjective, resulting in a purely subjective universe.
146 Lukács, The Destruction of Reason, 525. For the polemical nature of the antagonism between life and intellect, see 524.
147 Lukács, The Destruction of Reason, 522–530.
was used, in the first place, to distinguish the Nazi political framework from competing political orientations. Thus, Lukács claims that in Baesmler, “vitalism comes in, ‘with a virile people the soldier’s life represents a life-form.’ The ideal of the ‘political soldier,’ the S.A. and the S.S. man, was therefore life incarnate, in contrast to the fossilized bourgeois world.”

A nexus of equivalencies develops. Life, myth, the paradigmatically German, and the virile are held in contrast to the dead, the fossilized, the sterile, the historical, and, ultimately, the “insufficiently” German.

In Lukács’ account, this equivalence reaches its apogee in the work of Alfred Rosenberg. Following the racial essentialism of Stuart Houston Chamberlin, and, according to Lukács, simplifying it for mass consumption, Rosenberg claimed that “no nation was racially unitarian, not even the German.” Further, “from this it followed that the dominance of the higher-ranking, purer race (the Nordic) needed safeguarding by every possible means.” This dominance, however was not cast simply as political dominance. Rather, the demand for the dominance of the Nordic race was presented in the mythical language of sanguinity. Thus, “the day that Nordic blood runs completely dry, Germany would fall apart and go to the wall in chaos.” The health of Germany was presented as depending upon the presence and dominance of Nordic blood, which was carried by the National Socialist movement. By enshrouding the political aspirations of the Nazi party in the mythology of race purity, Rosenberg seemingly legitimized violence on a mass scale. He “extracted from racialism’s reactionary theory of inequality all of the barbaric

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149 Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason*, 533. In this instance, the insufficiently German draws a contrast to previous political movements within Germany. It subsequently acquires an even more malevolent caste, as it is used to justify genocide and military expansion. The inclusion of the historical in the complex of terms associated with death is most saliently established in Lukács’ account of the anti-historical dimensions of Hitler’s political project (Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason*, 721–723).
consequences possible, and took them to bestial extremes.” Lukács derives from this claim the conclusion that “the German Reich ought to expand, conquer fertile lands and expel or wipe out their population.” In this way, a fertility logic analogous to that appealed to in *The Waste Land* was used to explicitly justify the suppression of political dissent, the militaristic expansion of the nation, and the extermination of great swathes of the population.

*The Waste Land* is clearly not responsible for the Nazi mobilization of a similar mythical structure. Lukács’ arguments, though, offer cause to further interrogate the suggestion that Eliot’s mythical method entails a proposal to escape from history into myth. If Eliot endorses a retreat into myth, then *The Waste Land* becomes a legitimate target of Lukács’ claim that modernist literature entails the denial of objective reality. Further, advocating such a retreat entails that all narratives, as Lukács shows, take on the aspect of myth. Myth ceases to function as a force capable of imposing order on history and making it possible for art. Instead, history is annihilated, and myth is installed in its place. Since the retreat entails a denial of the relation to objective reality against which to compare the narratives, they all appear equally valid.

This final turn results in

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157 A full investigation of Eliot’s conservative political tendencies is beyond the purview of this chapter. Because those tendencies developed over the course of his career, and become increasingly pronounced after his conversion, I am reluctant to engage with them extensively. Further, because my primary quarry is the theoretical intervention of *The Waste Land* itself, rather than the personal commitments of Eliot, I intend to address these concerns only as they raise avenues of inquiry for the poem. Nevertheless, Péter Egri addresses the parallels between Eliot’s conservative tendencies and the Nazi platform in “T.S. Eliot’s Aesthetics.” Though he ultimately argues that what Eliot “wants is a Christian society, and that, he thinks, cannot be reconciled with fascism,” Egri acknowledges the “right-wing character” of Eliot’s criticism, which manifests in his “stressing the necessity of an organic community, insisting upon the sustaining and saving power of blood and soil, idealizing the purity of race, making anti-Semitic pronouncements now and then,” and a host of other loathsome tendencies (Egri, “T.S. Eliot’s Aesthetics,” 6–7).
158 The challenge that a retreat from reality entails intolerable philosophical consequences will reassert itself throughout the dissertation as the philosophical demands of *The Waste Land’s* poetic vision become clearer.
the possibility, or inevitability, that a mythical framework serves insidious ends, just as the logic of fertility ritual was used to justify Nazi expansion.

III.2. Resolving Myth into Reality

I maintain that Eliot marshals the Grail legend as neither as an alternative to history nor an ancient ritualistic possibility to which we must return. Rather, *The Waste Land* employs the sympathetic logic of the Grail legend to reveal an epistemological reality. In revealing this epistemic structure, the poem leverages myth but moves beyond it. Myth operates as an organizing principle that brings a more fundamental reality into view, and, as such, should not be the treated as itself a reality endorsed by the poem. The final section of *The Waste Land* signals this transition from the mythical to the epistemological. In a stanza that captures the breakdown of communication characteristic of all of the poem’s interactions, the speaker remarks “I have heard the key / Turn in the door once and turn once only / We think of the key, each in his prison / Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison / Only at nightfall, aethereal rumors / Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus.”159 The image of the prison evokes personages throughout the poem, such as the speaker who, when approached by their beloved who had returned from the Hyacinth garden, “could not / Speak,” “was neither / Living nor dead” and “knew nothing / Looking into the heart of light, the silence.”160 The interlocutors of “A Game of Chess,” too, are trapped in their own prisons of misunderstanding despite the presence of a companion, while the depictions of sexual union in “The Fire Sermon” all result in some form of isolation.161 Not only does the prison stanza capture the sense of isolation that manifests throughout the poem, but, as Eliot clarifies in the notes, it also invokes F.H. Bradley’s account of the relation between the individual and the world. In

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161 The dialogue from “A Game of Chess” and the failed sexual encounters of “The Fire Sermon” will ground my account of Eliot’s appeal to the unifying power of tradition in the next chapter.
doing so, it establishes an epistemological parallel to the mythical relation between individual and land incorporated into the poem through the Grail legend.

I maintain that Eliot’s engagement with F.H. Bradley reveals that, instead of simply endorsing a retreat into myth, *The Waste Land* employs this sympathetic logic to illuminate the structure of a shared world. Particularly, Eliot’s dissertation chapter concerning the problem of solipsism clarifies his understanding of the relationship between the individual and the world. In doing so, it reveals how the existence of a shared world depends upon the individuals who relate to it. The shared world is neither a stable nor given existent. Rather, it is intended by individuals with distinct perspectives. To the extent that the individuals interpret their world in broadly the same way, they can be said to share a world. But, when their points of view are not commensurable, their worlds fracture. This framework attempts to resolve the problem of solipsism by suggesting how disparate points of view can, in fact, be unified. The problem does not entirely disappear, however, as the world is always at risk of disintegration. Thus, the appeals to a sympathetic logic do not endorse a mythical connection between the people and the land. Rather, they speak to an epistemological reality in which the existence of a world depends upon those who share it.

The sixth chapter of Eliot’s *Knowledge and Experience*, “Solipsism,” endeavors to address a problem that arises from the previous chapters, each treating a dimension of knowledge in the philosophical framework of F.H. Bradley. The conclusions of the previous chapters, indeed, necessitate a treatment of the problem. For Eliot has argued that “there is no other object than that which appears, and its appearance as an object gives it, in an absolute sense, all that objectively it could possibly mean.”[162] To be an object is simply to appear to an individual consciousness, and

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objective reality is reality as it appears to that individual. From this, Eliot draws the further
conclusion that “beyond the objective worlds of a number of finite centers, each having its own
objects, there is no objective world.” For the purposes of this discussion, the term finite center
may be understood to refer to an individual. Because the objective world appears as the horizon
of experience for an individual consciousness, it cannot be taken for granted that a single external
reality unifies the frames of multiple finite centers, or even that other finite centers exist. This
brings Eliot to the main questions of the chapter: “how do we yoke our divers worlds to draw
together? how can we issue from the circle described about each point of view? and…how can I
know that there are other points of view, or, admitting their existence, how can I take any account
of them.”

Eliot’s response to these questions depends upon his account of identity. A shared world
arises through the recognition of identity by multiple individuals. These individuals come to
“interpret [their] own experience as the attention to a world of objects, as [they] feel obscurely an
identity between the experiences of other centres and [their] own.” In some sense, this response
to the problem of solipsism is rather straightforward. We “issue from the circle described about
each point of view” by recognizing that, within our point of view, objects appear which seem to
engage with a world that is identical to ours. Through this recognition, we enter into a shared
world. Yet, Eliot specifies that “the identity between one man’s world and another’s does not
consist, as we are readily led to believe, in one world which is the world of right perception, and

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163 Eliot, Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley, 357.
164 Eliot endorses this preliminary identification of the individual with finite center, though he complicates it when he
suggests that the “life of a soul does not consist in the contemplation of one consistent world but in the painful task of
unifying (to a greater or less extent) jarring and incompatible ones” (Eliot, Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley, 362).
165 Eliot, Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley, 357.
166 Eliot, Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley, 358.
167 Eliot, Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley, 357, 358.
which is, apart from being known, exactly what it is when we know it.” The identity of these shared experiences of the world does not refer to an external reality that transcends those experiences, and against which they can be judged true or false. Rather, the identity of the world is, in some sense, agreed upon by the individuals. To the extent that their “points of view are essentially akin,” they engage with the same world. This is because the nature of identity is such that when we recognize an identity, “an identity is intended, and it could not have been intended…unless it was there; but its being ‘there’ consists simply in the intention, and has no other meaning.” The identity exists because it is recognized.

On the one hand, this argument results in a technically sufficient response to the problem of solipsism. I know there are other finite centers because they appear in my world and behave in such a way that I can recognize them as similar to myself. Similarly, I recognize that we share a world because I observe those finite centers behaving in ways that suggest an identity between the worlds of their experience and my own. This entails that “there are two (or more) worlds each continuous with a self, and yet running in the other direction – somehow – into an identity.” On the other hand, however, the ideal nature of this identity entails that the shared world is volatile. In order “to come to intend an identical world,” we must “adjust our behavior to that of others and co-operate with them.” Eliot engages primarily, though not exclusively, with the positive formulation of this account. Insofar as disparate points of view recognize an identity between their objective worlds, they may be said to inhabit a shared world. Yet Eliot also recognizes that such an identity cannot be assumed. It must rather be won through labor. Through “adjusting our

168 Eliot, Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley, 359.
169 Eliot, Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley, 360.
170 Eliot, Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley, 359.
171 The conclusion of this argument is found on page 365.
172 Eliot, Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley, 358. Italics in the original.
173 Eliot, Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley, 358.
behavior to that of others and in co-operating with them we come to intend an identical world.”

Further, because we “come to intend” this identity, conditions could arise such that we cease to do so. In this case, the threat of solipsism would return, and the objective world would potentially disintegrate into myriad worlds of experience. In this sense, the health of the world is determined by the health of its inhabitants, instantiating epistemologically the sympathetic logic of fertility rites. The ability of individuals to accommodate each other’s perspectives, their openness to communication and interaction, preserves their world. Furthermore, this determination is reciprocal. As individuals become alienated, they cease to inhabit a shared reality. In this sense, the health of the world and the health of its inhabitants are inextricable.

Eliot’s appeals in *The Waste Land* to the fertility rituals of *The Golden Bough* and *From Ritual to Romance* need not be taken as endorsement of a mystical connection between the land and the people living on it. Though they invest the poem with a sympathetic logic, this logic is not a straightforward re-inscription of the fertility rites explicated by Frazer and Weston. Rather, the appeal to the sympathetic logic develops a poetic representation of an epistemological relation. The health of the world does, in fact, depend upon the health of those in it, because a shared world exists only insofar as there is an established identity between the worlds of disparate individuals, an identity won through shared work. When, in the conditions of social transformation and philosophical, social, or religious crisis, such an identity cannot be preserved, the shared world risks disintegration. As individuals become increasingly alienated and locked in separate spheres of experience, objective reality suffers. Indeed, when the problem becomes critical, as described in *The Waste Land* for example, a shared objective reality seems to cease to exist entirely. Thus, *The Waste Land* incorporates a sympathetic logic that structures the poem, but it employs this

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mythical logic to articulate the breakdown of a more fundamental epistemological reality. The myth, then, structures the work of literature. Imbued with this framework, however, the work of literature subsequently transforms its mythical element to reveal the importance of human connection for the maintenance of a shared world.

*The Waste Land*'s transformation from sympathetic logic to epistemic problematic illuminates the operation of Eliot’s mythical method. Eliot presents the mythical method as a literary form capable of navigating the competing demands of artistic creation in historical conditions characterized by fracture. While art must, according Eliot, be unified and organized, it must also adequately reflect the historical conditions that give rise to its production. Thus, for Eliot, the modern artist must strike a tenuous balance between the order demanded by the work of art and the simultaneous overdetermination and lack of unifying framework exhibited in the modern historical context. Myth provides a means for resolving this tension by offering established and relatively stable forms around which to structure the disparate and seemingly incommensurable material that the modern artist must manipulate. The forms provided by myth may be narrative, such as the stages in Odysseus’ journey that structure *Ulysses*, but they need not be. Indeed, *The Waste Land* does not incorporate a narrative mythical element at all. Rather, it is organized around the sympathetic logic that animates the ritual tradition in which, according to Weston, the Grail legend participates. Further, the mythical method does not, and cannot, entail the mere application of an ancient form to contemporary material, for the form must be adequate to the material that it shapes. Myth is thus deployed to illuminate a parallel between the antique and the contemporary. This parallel, further, ultimately renders legible contemporary conditions that had previously seemed too anarchic to be recognized.
Thus, *The Waste Land* exhibits the revelatory promise of myth. Myth can function as a tool to illuminate realities otherwise obscured in social conditions characterized by overdetermination. When the meanings of words, events, or ideas become overburdened with incommensurable meanings, myth can serve a coordinating function. It brings those overdetermined terms into a stable, though temporary, arrangement, one that facilitates a vision of the underlying and enduring relations. The myth, then, does not operate as an end in itself. It does not offer a refuge from chaos to which we can simply retreat. Rather, the mythical method succeeds to the extent that it resolves the myth into a more fundamental reality. Adopting this inherited framework, inhabiting this antique vision, ultimately allows us to see our own world anew. It does this not by casting a veil of enchantment over a fallen world, nor by freeing us from the vicissitudes of history. Rather it organizes our vision around constellations of cultural material already available to us in our own historical moment, allowing some features to shine brighter and revealing their latent connections. It thereby provides a framework with which to orient our vision, a structure around which to shore the fragments of a chaotic moment, and the foundation for the synthesis of a shared world.
A VISION OF SYNTHESIS

HISTORICAL SENSE AND THE RECOVERY OF CONNECTION IN THE WASTE LAND

Introduction

In the preceding chapters, I have argued that The Waste Land presents a vision of failure. The poem depicts a social reality characterized by isolation and fragmentation. The dissolution of the social totality is reflected in the desolation of the landscapes described in the poem, while the overwhelming sense of social dissolution is reinscribed in the fragmentary form of the poem itself. I originally identified the condition depicted in The Waste Land as a state of alienation, which I defined as the individual experience of a breakdown of the social totality. In the second chapter of this project, I further specified the poem’s explication of this condition. I argued that Eliot invests The Waste Land with a sympathetic logic derived from fertility rituals, most immediately the Grail Legend. According to this sympathetic logic, the conditions of a people are reflected in the land upon which they live. Thus, the wasting of the environment in the poem can be understood as a result of the behavior of the personages that populate it. By incorporating this sympathetic logic, the poem simultaneously internalizes a principle of unity, as demanded by Eliot’s conception of the work of art, while giving voice to anarchic social conditions that resist unified representation.

I have argued that, instead of endorsing this vision of reality as an inescapable fact, The Waste Land takes it up as a problem to be worked upon. I suggested that an investigation of the sympathetic logic structuring the poem provides insight into the sense of alienation that suffuses it, maintaining that The Waste Land deploys this sympathetic logic to identify a more fundamental epistemological problem concerning the possibility of inhabiting a shared world. According to the epistemological framework that Eliot develops through his engagement with Bradley, the
existence of a shared world depends upon the mutual recognition among individuals that they intend the same field of objects. So long as this recognition holds, they may be said to inhabit the same world. But if their perspectives cease to align, the world they share disintegrates. The preservation of a world depends upon the shared capacity to synthesize perspectives.

If *The Waste Land* offers a response to the condition of alienation that it diagnoses, then it must offer an account of how to “yoke our divers worlds to draw together” and “issue from the circle described around each point of view.”¹ In this chapter, I will argue that Eliot identifies in *The Sacred Wood* a capacity for synthesis that intervenes in the problematic developed through *The Waste Land’s* incorporation of a sympathetic logic. He identifies this capacity as historical sense, describing it as involving “a perception not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence” and “a feeling that the whole of literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.”² Elsewhere in his corpus Eliot appeals to historical sense as granting the ability to integrate material from vastly different contexts into a new perspective. In the opening section of this chapter I offer an analysis of Eliot’s notion of historical sense, explicating in particular Eliot’s appeals to the ways in which it synthesizes perspectives. Drawing on the work of C.D. Blanton and Piers Gray, I attend to the pressure in Eliot’s thinking to pursue increasingly comprehensive perspectives, illuminating the philosophical problems motivating Eliot’s appeal to historical sense as well as relevance of this concept to Eliot’s work in *The Waste Land*.

Though I agree with Gray and Blanton on many accounts, I argue that in they both exhibit an overwhelming focus on Eliot’s appeal to an ideal order and the sense in which this appeal forces a renegotiation the limits of the text. I maintain that they overlook the ways in which traces of the

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past reconfigure the social relations presented within the poem itself. In the second section of this chapter, I pursue a reading of *The Waste Land* that emphasizes the changes effected in the poem by a past that endures. I attend to the poem’s use of allusion and repetition to foster connections between isolated personages in disconnected vignettes. I appeal, in particular, to the two appearances of Philomel, arguing that her inclusion in the poem calls attention to structures of violence that silence the characters in the scenes in which she appears while also establishing connections between seemingly disconnected victims of violence. I argue, thus, that *The Waste Land* appeals to Eliot’s notion of historical sense to synthesize perspectives and restore the possibility of connection, thereby offering an alternative to the vision of alienation developed in the opening chapters of this project.

In the final section of this chapter I address the concern that, even if *The Waste Land* is designed to cultivate historical sense in its reader, adjustments to the relationship between text and author or text and reader are incapable of reckoning with the totalizing sense of alienation presented in the poem. I argue that formal elements of *The Waste Land*, in addition to Eliot’s capacious account of history, elide the borders between text, author, reader, and context. I ultimately argue that, through its dissolution of the boundary between text and context, *The Waste Land* imbues historical sense into the literary tradition, suggesting a far more comprehensive response to the loss of a world than the limited relationship between text and reader might permit.

I. The Synthetic Potential of Historical Sense

In *The Sacred Wood*, Eliot identifies a capacity for synthesis that promises an alternative to the myopic tendencies of modern social experience. These tendencies include the stultifying modes of classicism that mummify the past by merely cataloguing it and the rapid specification of scientific fields of study into subfields, which makes it “difficult for anyone to know whether he knows what
he is talking about or not.”

The social implications of this analytic circumscription of perspectives dominate the social interactions of *The Waste Land* and manifest in the loss of a shared world. In “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot introduces this synthetic capacity, which he identifies as historical sense, as a necessary condition for the cultivation of “Tradition,” itself a prerequisite for the creation of enduring works of art. Because of the limited scope of this discussion, Eliot only obliquely captures the juxtaposition of this synthetic power with those analytic tendencies critiqued elsewhere. Nevertheless, as he does in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” Eliot draws a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate approaches to his object. His description of an illegitimate approach to tradition as “following the ways of the immediate generation before in a blind or timid adherence to its successes” resonates with his description of a mummying classicism from the *Ulysses* review. In both problematic cases, the past is treated as a reified monument with no meaningful relation to the present. By presenting his account of tradition in opposition to this reifying tendency, Eliot implicitly suggests a response to the greater complex of fragmenting forces, which include the social anarchy and mummying classicism of “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” the scientific specificity identified in *The Sacred Wood*, and the social isolation of *The Waste Land*. The substance of his account of historical sense, however, amplifies this juxtaposition, for with his appeal to historical sense, Eliot identifies a capacity in its possessor to integrate disparate material, facilitating an understanding that coordinates seemingly incommensurate perspectives. In doing so, Eliot identifies a capacity that promises to intervene in the epistemological problem of the dissolution of a shared world that organizes *The Waste Land*.

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3 Eliot discusses the mummification of history in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” while the specification of modern science is a theme he returns to throughout *The Sacred Wood*, receiving particular attention in “The Perfect Critic” (Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 8).

4 The justification for this claim constituted much of the argument of the second chapter of this dissertation.


I.1. Historical Sense and a Vision of Order

In “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot defines historical sense as “a sense of the timeless and of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together.” More specifically, it “involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence” and “a feeling that the whole of literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.” Because Eliot identifies this capacity as “historical sense” and appeals to a vast literary history in its explication, he may give the impression that this characteristic he appeals to as a prerequisite for any serious artist is little more than an encyclopedic knowledge of history. The hyperliteracy of Eliot’s own poetry may, in fact, reinforce this impression. On this deflationary reading of historical sense, Eliot may be taken as enjoining the artist to study the work of previous artists and to memorize the chronology of historical events. While an understanding of history, both literary history and a history more generally, is certainly a necessary condition for the quality Eliot describes, reducing Eliot’s appeal to historical to a matter of historical knowledge would be a mistake. Eliot explicates the notion of historical sense in language that appeals to an awareness of relations rather than an awareness of facts. Historical sense is a recognition of the ways in which the past remains present. It entails a sensitivity to the enduring effects of historical events. Not only does historical sense involve an awareness of the relation between past and the present, but it also entails the recognition of a complex network of relations, an ideal order that connects the entire history of texts and events.

7 Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 41.
9 I will complicate this claim momentarily with a discussion of Eliot’s concern regarding the possibility of establishing historical facts, which he inherits from Bradley. Though the epistemological issue that motivates Eliot’s appeal to historical sense involves problems pertaining to the possibility of knowing history, I nevertheless maintain that Eliot prioritizes an awareness of relations over an awareness of facts in his explication of the concept in The Sacred Wood.
in addition to including the present moment. Historical sense, then, is a quality that requires a knowledge of history but that cannot be reduced to knowledge. It is more fundamentally a relational attunement to an enduring past. It is a feeling of the past’s continued relation to and influence on the present, as well as a perception of the present’s situation within a vast network of historical relations.

Though the language of feeling central to this initial formulation seems to suggest that the simultaneous order depends upon the artist who perceives it, Eliot clarifies that the order is not dependent upon the poet. Before the poet’s intervention, “the existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them.” Though it does not depend upon the artist, this pre-existing order is, however, altered by their efforts. When a new work of art is produced, “the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted.” Here again, a tension manifests between the vision of an artist capable of perceiving the order and the enduring quality of the order itself. That the order “must be…altered” suggests the conscious activity of an agent external to it. That the “relations, proportions, values of each work…are readjusted,” however, seems to be the passive result of the inclusion of a new entity in the structure. This tension expresses the dual capacity of the artist as one who both perceives the order and intervenes in it. Indeed, the prominence of this tension in Eliot’s

\[\text{\footnotesize 10} \text{ So far, I have only engaged with historical sense as a concept pertaining to the production of literary texts. I will argue in this chapter, however, that Eliot’s critical and poetic practice necessitate a far more capacious understanding of the structure of historical relations than the limited appeal to literary history affords. In \textit{The Nostalgic Imagination}, Stefan Collini offers an insightful treatment of Eliot’s own relation to this blurring of the boundaries between literary and general history. In addition to adducing Eliot’s explicit appeals to the necessity of taking historical context into consideration, Collini’s account of Eliot’s Clark lectures ironically confirms Eliot’s commitment to approaching the literature of a given period with a capacious view of the borders of history by analyzing his tortured attempts to obfuscate his own more ambitious historical pronouncements within sentences of presenting them (Collini, \textit{The Nostalgic Imagination}, 34–37).}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 11} \text{ Eliot, \textit{The Sacred Wood}, 41.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 12} \text{ Eliot, \textit{The Sacred Wood}, 41}\]
explication suggests an avenue for illuminating the problem that motivates Eliot’s poetic and critical methodology.

In *T.S. Eliot’s Intellectual and Poetic Development 1909–1922*, Piers Gray argues that Eliot’s commitment to the perception of an ideal order is grounded in an epistemological framework derived from Bradley. According to Gray, Eliot presents historical sense as a tool for developing an absolute perspective, thereby resolving the Bradleyan problem of the incommensurability of points of view. Though various versions of this problem appear throughout Bradley’s corpus, and throughout Eliot’s engagement with it, Gray traces the formulation relevant in this context to Bradley’s account of history. Bradley argues that the identification of a historical fact is problematic because the perception of a fact is inevitably grounded in an individual perspective. Yet, without the ability to identify individual facts, a framework for historical knowledge remains elusive. The possibility of knowledge, then, is foreclosed. Bradley’s account of historical knowledge demands a totalizing absolute perspective. Because this absolute perspective includes all other perspectives, because it must be comprehensive, it is capable of separating fact from limited point of view. Eliot, in articulating his account of historical sense, develops a program for aesthetically addressing Bradley’s problem. Historical sense facilitates an awareness of the relations between perspectives, thereby expanding the scope of a given point of view. Eliot’s work, however, does not merely employ his own historical sense, but rather thematizes it. To illuminate this point, C.D. Blanton argues in *Epic Negation* that *The Waste Land* functions as an element of Eliot’s larger poetic project, his curation of *The Criterion*. With this interdisciplinary work, Eliot attempts to imbue history into a work of poetry, thereby satisfying

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13 The appeal to this epistemological motivation is, I think, well defended. Despite its explanatory value, I will ultimately argue that Gray overemphasizes the ideality of the structure, thereby eliding the continued effect of the historical upon lived experience. Indeed, this latter aspect of historical sense is precisely what I will attempt to establish in the second section of this chapter.
Pound’s definition of epic as “a poem including history.” Eliot achieves this by creating a text that perpetually extends beyond itself by self-consciously appealing to other works. The text, then, becomes explicitly intertextual, and this intertextuality establishes the historical order that Eliot appeals to in his account of tradition. The Criterion appears to be an attempt to cultivate the absolute perspective. Not only is it an attempt to invigorate poetry with history, but it is, further, an attempt to make history possible.

In their explications of Eliot’s account of tradition, both Blanton and Gray appeal extensively to order as the impetus for the operation of historical sense. Historical sense is a tool for recognizing and presenting an ideal structure and, as such, it grounds the possibility of a totalizing account of history. This is, I think, generally correct. Yet this emphasis on a structure that remains a regulative ideal ultimately fails to capture the synthetic possibilities of historical sense for the individual perspective. Similarly, in grounding his account of Eliotic tradition in the Bradleyan epistemological framework, Gray fails to capture the social and ethical dimensions of Eliot’s appeal to history. Granted, Eliot does rely heavily on the language of structure and order in “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” Yet in his “Note on Ezra Pound,” Eliot presents historical sense as a thoroughly integrative capacity. It does not simply perceive the relations between historical elements. Rather, it synthesizes these elements and their relations into a new perspective. It facilitates the commensurability of disparate points of view. This integrative capacity illuminates

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14 Blanton, Epic Negation, 3. Blanton is quick to note that what Pound means by “including history” is relatively impoverished compared to the operation of Eliot’s historical sense. A “poem including history” appears, in this treatment, to be merely a poem treating historical content, and that which is historical is by necessity temporally removed. A poem manifesting historical sense, conversely, is infused with the sense of the past as present.

15 Considered against the epistemological background developed by Gray, this project is necessarily doomed to fail. The absolute perspective only functions because it is beyond the individual perspective, but this is precisely what renders the individual pursuit of it a tragic errand. The poetic historical sense is necessarily always in flux and, therefore, cannot be complete.
the effect that, according to Eliot, the present exerts upon the past. It is precisely this capacity that promises a response to the loss of a shared world.

Eliot’s “A Note on Ezra Pound,” published in _To-Day_ in 1918, appeals to the concept of historical sense to articulate what he takes to be the particular value of Ezra Pound’s work. Pound’s “knowledge of history,” according to Eliot, extends beyond his “extensive knowledge of literature” or his “particular passion for and minute knowledge of Provençal.”16 Rather, his view of history includes “a perception of our position relative to the past, and in particular the poet’s relation to poets of the past.”17 The dual emphasis here on the relative position and the particularity of the poet mirrors the framework of “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” As in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” the concern for relation reveals a preoccupation with order. Eliot presents this vision of order in terms identical to those used in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” when he identifies this sense of relations as involving “an organized view of the whole course of European history from Homer.”18 Yet Pound’s historical sense is not merely a vision of an ideal order or an intimate knowledge of the relations between its parts. His sense of history entails also “a perception of the relation of these periods and languages to the present, of what they have that we want.”19 This latter point is framed rather unfortunately and betrays the appropriative dimension of Eliot’s eurocentrism, a concern that I will address below. The claim productively suggests, however, that historical sense as Eliot defines it does not merely attain a panoptic view of related historical events or perspectives. Rather, the poet possessed of historical sense synthesizes those perspectives, incorporating “what they have that we want” and integrating the material into a new point of

19 Eliot, “Note on Ezra Pound,” 750, emphasis in the original.
This new point of view, further, also engages with present conditions. In doing so, it mediates between the historical and the contemporary, the past and the present. It does not merely draw a relation between them through the introduction of a new work of art. Rather, it merges these perspectives into one, coordinating disparate historical points of view and contemporary material in the service of a new poetic intervention.

Eliot’s claim that the sense of history entails “a perception of what they have that we want” raises a host of problems. Yet it also reveals a productive, if not entirely untroubling, tension in Eliot’s thought. The claim is immediately problematic because it seems to align Eliot with an appropriative vision of Europe as a colonial force. World history appears in this phrase to be a newly discovered continent to be explored and conquered. This impression is reinforced by the reception of Eliot as a representative of a thoroughly conservative poetics and further bolstered by some of his own work, particularly his immature poetry, which is infused with a racism that is smug in its superiority. The claim is also troubling because it presents cultures as bounded wholes. Indeed, these two aspects are fundamentally connected, for the sense of smug cultural superiority depends upon a rigid distinction between cultures. The dependence on a distinction between “us” and “them” reifies each into a fixed category. The appropriative attitude expressed in the phrase seems to be undergirded by the belief that material could be taken from a particular context without fundamentally altering either the culture from which it was taken or the culture into which it is being transposed. It seems that an element can simply be lifted from one discrete whole and dropped into another, as if cultures are merely containers for historical material.

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21 The “King Bolo” poems are the most egregious examples of this racist strain in Eliot’s poetry, though they are certainly not exhaustive of Eliot’s problematic attitudes. In tracing the productive tension expressed by this statement I do not intend to defend Eliot’s racism. Rather, I suggest that the poetic argument of The Waste Land is, itself, fundamentally opposed to this position. Thus, I hope to develop the unifying promise of a position articulated by Eliot while acknowledging that the theoretical consequences of such a position may condemn him.
Taken in isolation, the commitment to the completeness of cultures which underwrites the
appropriative model of an engagement with history re-inscribes at a cultural level the challenge of
solipsism raised on an individual level in the previous chapter. Cultures on this model are
irrevocably distinct. They operate according to different configurations of ideological and
historical relations, and therefore they instantiate alternative perspectives. Ultimately, according
to the Bradleyan epistemological position endorsed by Eliot, this entails that they cannot truly
communicate, as they lack a shared framework for understanding. Crucially, however, throughout
*The Sacred Wood* Eliot employs an articulation of culture that reveals the one-sidedness of this
expression in the “Note on Ezra Pound.” In “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot describes
the traditional order as “complete before the new work arrives,” but he also notes that “for order
to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly,
altered.”[^22] Culture is, of course, a more capacious term than tradition. Eliot treats it in an analogous
manner in *The Sacred Wood*, however, gesturing to the ways in which the culture of a specific
time or place will adjust to accommodate novel elements.^[23] Though Eliot suggests that cultures
are bounded and complete in the “Note on Ezra Pound,” his account of tradition reveals that this
completeness is not absolute. A culture may be complete insofar as it seems to offer a unified
perspective, but this perspective adjusts to accommodate new material. The relations within it are
perpetually shifting. This tension between the bounded self-sufficiency of individual cultures and
their capacity to reorganize around the intervention of novelty forms the crux of Eliot’s argument
in his speech “The Good European,” addressed to the general assembly of the Alliance française
in 1951.^[24] In this speech, Eliot argues that the cultivation of a pan-European culture depends upon

[^23]: Much of the final section of this chapter will, in fact, be devoted to Eliot’s account of the mechanisms of cultural
reorganization and transformation.
the organic promotion of relations between individual European cultures. Here, Eliot affirms the bounded nature of individual cultures, but he does so in order to promote their synthesis within a larger integrated whole. Eliot appeals to precisely this capacity of culture to form new wholes already in the “Note on Ezra Pound” when he identifies the historical work of art as a synthesis of past and present points of view. This synthesis facilitates the organization of increasingly comprehensive perspectives.

This consideration of the one-sidedness in Eliot’s claim that historical sense involves a sense of “what they have that we want” reveals that the experience of historical sense minimally contains two elements. On the one hand, the poet works to attain a vision of disparate perspectives separated by time, place, and language, as well as of their relations to each other, cultivating a sense of order. These disparate perspectives are, both in the individual’s vision of them and internally to themselves, complete wholes. And, indeed, even throughout the process of cultural exchange, they remain complete as new material is absorbed and reorganized into ever-expanding structures. This aspect of historical sense encourages Eliot to speak of cultures as discrete entities. Thus, he appeals to “the mind of Europe,” or analogously the French and English cultures in “The Good European,” as a monolithic entity, though he also recognizes that it is “a mind which changes.” On the other hand, in the work of art, the poet integrates these perspectives, synthesizing them with contemporary material in the service of a new perspective that is infused with the others. This new perspective does more than just reproduce an existing order, though even this would be better than the rote reproduction of classical forms. It brings seemingly incommensurable perspectives together, altering their relations to each other and to the present. In doing so, it reconfigures them. It creates a new whole. Thus, cultures simultaneously

26 Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 42.
appear to be discrete and in flux, internally complete yet ever expanding and capable of integrating diversity.

I.2. Expanding the Limits of Historical Sense

Eliot’s account of historical sense, then, is not merely a normative account of poetic production. Nor is it simply the aesthetic articulation of a response to Bradley’s epistemological puzzle concerning the possibility of accessing historical facts. Instead, it also offers a solution to ethical dimension of the epistemological problem expressed in The Waste Land as a crisis of fertility. This crisis, I have argued, is an articulation of Eliot’s concern regarding the inability of individuals to accommodate each other’s perspectives. People, according to Eliot, have become increasingly trapped in their own points of view, and this has resulted in the loss of a shared world. Throughout his corpus, Eliot presents this crisis in different registers. He appeals to a state of anarchy in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” and this appeal acquires renewed force through Eliot’s incorporation of Herman Hesse’s Blick ins Chaos into both The Waste Land and the first volume of The Criterion.\(^{27}\) Eliot repeats this appeal to epistemic distance in both the first and last essays of The Sacred Wood. In the first, he argues that scientific language has become so specified that words no longer retain their meanings across contexts and that this specification results in a loss of accurate self-understanding. In the last, he introduces the world of Dante by comparing Dante’s shared social reality to the modern state of dissolution.\(^{28}\) Historical sense demands the perception of the ideal order comprising the relations between all works of art, both within a narrowly defined

\(^{27}\) The simultaneous allusion to and inclusion of an essay from Blick ins Chaos in The Criterion grounds Blanton’s argument that The Waste Land should, in fact, be read as a part of the more comprehensive poetic project of The Criterion.

\(^{28}\) Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 8, 135. Eliot both begins and concludes his engagement with Dante by appealing to the relative poverty of the contemporary experience. In the final lines of the essay, Eliot suggests that “when most of our modern poets confine themselves to what they had perceived, they produce for us, usually, only odds and ends of still life and stage properties; but that does not imply so much that the method of Dante is obsolete, as that our vision is perhaps comparatively restricted” (Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 145).
cultural tradition and external to it, as suggested by Eliot’s appeal to the incorporation of Chinese material in Pound’s poetry. The recognition of this ideal order suggests a restoration of the connection between individual perspectives, as it demands the recognition of their interdependence as well as an understanding of the ways in which individual points of view fit into, and constitute, an organized whole. Further, in addition to articulating this vision of order, the poetic intervention integrates these disparate perspectives. With this process of integration, the work of art suggests that the gap between individuals can be bridged and a shared world may be recovered.

Though the synthetic capacity of historical sense is crucial to Eliot’s account of poetic production in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” the broader social effects of this power are made less explicit. Though I maintain that the function attributed to historical sense in that essay suggests a response to the social crises outlined elsewhere, Eliot does not address these social concerns in his explication of historical sense itself. Historical sense is, in Eliot’s account, certainly necessary for the aspiring poet. Yet, perhaps a comprehensive vision of the “simultaneous existence and…simultaneous order” of “the whole of literature of Europe from Homer” seems less beneficial to one who does not wish “to continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year.”

While the framework in which Eliot presents his explication of historical sense is restricted to the activity of poetic production, the notion itself does not demand such a narrow application. Indeed, because of the way in which, according to Eliot, the material for poetry changes with social conditions, the historical sense relevant to the poet cannot fully be disentangled from a more capacious understanding of history.

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30 Though I will argue in this chapter that his critical and poetic practice complicates, and even elides, distinctions between various modes of cultural expression, Eliot does not assent to the homogeneity of all expression. In his essay on Dante in *The Sacred Wood*, Eliot identifies poetry as uniquely adequate to presenting a vision of life in contrast to a philosophical account (Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 144). As I will argue in the second section of this chapter, Eliot marshals this poetic capacity to distill a vision of lived experience in *The Waste Land* to juxtapose two radically distinct perspectives, one animated by historical sense and one devoid of it. Further, recognizable poetic devices, such
Just after presenting his definition of historical sense in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot elaborates upon the “relation of the poet to the past.”31 In this discussion, Eliot addresses the material that the poet takes up in her work. He claims that the poet “must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same.”32 Eliot’s association of this poetic material with the mind of Europe, “a mind which changes” and which, in this development, “abandons nothing en route,” lends credence to interpretations that would restrict the value of historical sense to explicitly poetic arena.33 For it may seem at first that the mind of Europe appears simply to be the ideal order of existing literary monuments.34 Such an interpretation would result in an extremely hermetic account of literary production. The material that informs the work of art is the mind of Europe. The mind of Europe is an ideal order, perpetually in flux because “for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered.”35 As such, the material for art is “never quite the same.”36 If the material of art is simply the ideal order of previous works, and historical sense provides the ability to engage with the material of art, then historical sense truly seems of limited value. It certainly seems incapable of addressing a more general epistemic condition.

Such a narrow account of Eliot’s appeal to tradition fails to engage with the complexity of literary production. Elsewhere in The Sacred Wood, Eliot suggests that an appreciation for the

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31 Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 42.
32 Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 42.
34 Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 41.
material of art cannot be restricted simply to previous artistic works. In “Imperfect Critics,” Eliot critiques George Wyndham for failing to consider the effects of the cultural environment on literary production in his explication of Elizabethan literature. He argues that Wyndham neglects “what is the cardinal point in criticizing the Elizabethans: we cannot grasp them, understand them, without some understanding of the pathology of rhetoric.” Eliot here acknowledges that a sufficient understanding of Elizabethan literature is impossible without a proper understanding of the historical conditions of its production. For “rhetoric…was endemic, it pervaded the whole organism; the healthy as well as the morbid tissues were built up on it.” This critique of Wyndham’s failure to engage with historical context in his criticism appears in Eliot’s own attempt to contextualize Wyndham himself. Eliot argues that accounts of Wyndham that treat him simply as a Romantic fail to capture Wyndham’s complete submersion in Victorian culture. Indeed, in order to chart “the mind of George Wyndham,” Eliot claims, “the key to its topography is the fact that his literature and his politics and his country life are one and the same thing.” As such, “we can criticize his writings only as an expression of this peculiar English type, the aristocrat, the Imperialist, the Romantic, riding to hounds across his prose, looking with wonder upon the world as upon a fairy land.” Wyndham’s work cannot be detached from its historical context, and, further, that immediate context is implicated in a more extensive complex of historical relations. A properly historical understanding of Wyndham, then, cannot be restricted to his particular literary interests. It must instead take into account the forces that shaped those interests and the

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37 In fact, Eliot suggests that such a restriction would be stultifying.
42 One may object that Eliot treats Wyndham as something of a unique case, as indicated by his repeated suggestion that Wyndham inhabited a fairy land. Yet, when describing Wyndham’s antithesis, Leonardo da Vinci, whom Eliot claims was capable of fully compartmentalizing activities in contrast to Wyndham’s fully integrated orientation, Eliot proceeds by elaborating the historical context that facilitated this compartmentalized approach.
particular prejudices revealed by his tastes. It must account for his position in a broader historical situation, as well as the ways in which his work both responds to and reinscribes that situation.

Eliot, in the final essay of *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, employs a similar methodology to explicate the richness of Dante’s poetic project. In this essay, Eliot addresses a series of problematic approaches to Dante’s *Comedy*, all of which are akin in their commitment to the analytic extraction of poetic material from material deemed to be contaminant. Paul Valéry, for example, suggests that a rigid distinction must be maintained between poetry and philosophy, and that attempts to combine the two are doomed to fail. Dwight Sidgwick attempts to isolate Dante’s poetry from his teaching in order to “improve our understanding of Dante as a ‘spiritual leader’” Landor similarly bifurcates Dante into poet and prophet, as he “deplore[s] the spiritual mechanics and finds the poet only in passages where he frees himself from his divine purposes.”

Eliot argues that all of these approaches to Dante commit a fundamental error insofar as they attempt to quarantine distinct elements of Dante’s *Comedy* that must actually be understood in conjunction with each other. For, he claims, “Dante had the benefit of a mythology and theology which had undergone a more complete absorption into life” and, with them, “philosophy is an ingredient, it is a part of Dante’s world just as it is a part of life.” Approaching Dante requires, then, an understanding of the way in which his poetic vision is infused with his philosophy, and further demands a recognition of the historical conditions facilitating such an infusion. Similarly, critiques, such as those offered by Sidgwick, of passages in which “the preacher and the prophet

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45 Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 139.

are lost in the poet,” miss their mark insofar as they identify “something which is certainly not ‘lost in the poet’, but is part of the poet.”47 These critics all overlook the unity of Dante’s poetic vision. They fail to understand that “the vision is so nearly complete…the significance of any single passage, of any of the passages that are selected as ‘poetry,’ is incomplete unless we ourselves apprehend the whole.”48 This whole is a manifestation of the relationship between the individual poet and the historical situation of the poet’s activity. The infusion of the world with philosophy, theology, and mythology, the political turmoil, and his participation in it, all constitute fundamental elements of Dante’s vision. For, as Eliot enjoins, “no vision of life can be complete which does not include the articulate formulation of life which human minds make.”49

These examples clarify that, for Eliot, the application of historical sense cannot engage with a model of tradition that is taken to be comprised narrowly of works of art. The historical material of “whole of literature of Europe from Homer” far exceeds the mere production of literary works. One may object that, by applying historical sense in this way, Eliot actually reduces historical relations to a form of literary text. He renders complex networks of forces discrete and accessible to interpretation, much like poems are.50 Were Eliot’s works of poetry themselves discrete wholes, this critique would have purchase. Eliot’s use of bricolage and the way he marshals this technique to demand critical engagement from the reader erode the clear boundaries of the text. The Waste Land calls attention to its own historical overdetermination and implicates

49 Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 144.
50 My thanks to Tom Eyers for raising this as a point of concern. The tension between treating entities as discrete, isolable wholes and eliding the boundaries of their identities will return throughout the latter part of this project. It will receive significant attention in the final chapter of this project, particularly in my explications of “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” and “Gerontion.” My treatment here of the literary aspects of this tension in Eliot’s thought thus anticipates a more robust discussion of Eliot’s productive equivocity with respect to identity.
the reader as one of many forces structuring its meaning. Thus, if Eliot seems to reduce context to text in his critical work, his poetic practice highlights the extent to which text and context both inevitably resist the temptation to treat them as discrete and inspectable wholes. Perhaps the work of literature incorporates historical material, converting it to a kind of source text. In doing so, however, it also exhibits its own status as a historical artifact that is implicated in the same forces that it represents. Rather than merely reduce the historical to the literary, Eliot’s account of tradition expresses the dynamic interplay of social forces, themselves bound in networks of historical relations. An awareness of the presence of the past demands a vision of this extensive matrix of historical forces.

Historical sense, then, is the capacity to perceive the simultaneous order formed among discrete historical perspectives. In addition to including the perspectives themselves, this capacity illuminates the relations between them, as well as the various forces conditioning those relations. Finally, in articulating this order, historical sense synthesizes these disparate historical positions into a unified vision. It integrates them, bringing in new material, and through this integration it facilitates a mutual intelligibility that had previously seemed impossible. Individuals and discourses that seemed trapped in hermetic and incommensurable worlds are revealed as participating in a shared web of causal forces, affecting each other, if only imperceptibly. Thus, the perspective of the present reorganizes the past, and the operation of the past is recognized as permeating the present. Historical sense reawakens the possibility of a shared social reality and promises to alleviate the crisis central to *The Waste Land*. The fulfillment of this promise, however, does not find expression in Eliot’s critical corpus. Rather, the transformative power of historical sense manifests in *The Waste Land* itself.

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51 Eliot’s elision of the boundaries between text and author, text and reader, and text and context will be treated more extensively in the third section of this chapter.
II. The Recovery of Voice in *The Waste Land*

Throughout *The Sacred Wood*, Eliot appeals to the concept of historical sense and argues for its power to illuminate the object of one’s interest, be that a text or an individual. He develops this argument both through an analysis of the notion of historical sense and through its performative application to specific poetic and critical figures. He further identifies the effects of an absence of historical sense, suggesting the poverty of the point of view that lacks this quality. In these explications and applications, however, Eliot does not articulate the operation of historical sense, much less the experience of the individual possessed of it. He argues that historical sense promises to synthesize perspectives, but he presents neither this synthesized point of view nor an exploration of the synthetic experience. Indeed, he frequently approaches historical sense through its absence, lamenting the paucity of historical connections made by the figures he investigates. Thus, historical sense operates as something of a cypher in *The Sacred Wood*. It is central to the text but is striking, too, in its absence. Eliot offers a clue about the cause of this seeming omission in his discussion of the dichotomy between philosophy and poetry in “Dante,” where he suggests that discursive forms can limit the treatment of their objects. As such, he intimates that a more complete investigation of historical sense demands a return from Eliot’s purely theoretical critical work to his poetry itself, for poetry is the medium in which a philosophical worldview can be expressed as a vision of life.

II.1. The Poetic Presentation of a Vision of Life

As part of is interrogation of the status of philosophical poetry in “Dante,” Eliot identifies what he takes to be the difference between philosophical and poetic expression. He suggests that philosophical and poetic activities cannot properly “be carried out at the same time.”\(^{52}\) They cannot

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be accomplished simultaneously because, though philosophy and philosophical poetry both engage with ideas, they engage with these ideas in very different forms. The philosopher, Eliot claims, “is trying to deal with the ideas themselves,” and engages with them “as a matter for argument.”

The philosophical poet, by contrast, tries “to realize ideas,” and does so when the idea “has reached the point of immediate acceptance, when it has almost become a physical modification.”

Philosophical discourse engages with ideas in order to define them rigorously and test their validity. Philosophical poetry interrogates these ideas as they interact with lived experience. In the *Divine Comedy*, Eliot claims, there are passages that present the “pure exposition of philosophy,” but in these passages “we are not studying philosophy.”

Rather, “we see it, as part of the ordered world.” The philosophical material both organizes and animates the poetic vision. It grounds “the articulate formulation of life” without which the production in the reader of an emotional state is “nothing whatsoever.”

This distinction between the analytic exposition of a philosophical framework and the poetic presentation of a vision animated by philosophy illuminates Eliot’s engagement with historical sense in *The Sacred Wood*. As a work of criticism, *The Sacred Wood* is not the proper medium, according to Eliot, in which to articulate a complete account of the effects of historical sense. Rather, Eliot’s critical project accommodates the explication of historical sense and the application of it as a criterion of aesthetic judgment. An “articulate formulation of life” grounded in historical sense is not in the purview of criticism but is rather a poetic project. I intend to argue that this is precisely the project of *The Waste Land*.

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53 Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 138. This does not, to me, seem to be a particularly nuanced account of philosophical activity. At the very least, it seems needlessly restrictive. I mention it only to juxtapose Eliot’s account of philosophy with his account of poetry. In doing so, I intend to illuminate Eliot’s own poetic activity and its relation to his more argumentative work.


In *Epic Negation*, C.D. Blanton argues that *The Waste Land* participates in a larger poetic project animated by historical sense. Blanton argues that the intertextuality of *The Waste Land* dissolves the boundaries of the poem. The text participates in the critical project of Eliot’s editorial work in *The Criterion*, and *The Criterion* simultaneously extends the poem’s borders. Through this process of accretion, the historical connections of the poem become increasingly complex and *The Waste Land* becomes a poem infused with history. Though Blanton provides an illuminating account of *The Waste Land’s* intertextuality, particularly in his articulation of the way in which the text appeals to historical sense by demanding it of the reader, he does not sufficiently engage with the function of historical sense within *The Waste Land* itself. Indeed, by focusing on the coordination of *The Waste Land* with historical material external to it, Blanton treats the poetic deployment with historical sense as a formal project. *The Waste Land* exemplifies the application of historical sense and invites the reader to follow the example. It identifies the web of historical connections that can be drawn by integrating disparate historical sources into the dynamically expanding *Criterion*. In tracking this formal dimension of Eliot’s poetic project, and by emphasizing the ways in which *The Waste Land* obscures the borders of its own textuality, Blanton overlooks the extent to which the poem engages with history in the presentation of a vision of life. Blanton’s account of history in the poem emphasizes the externality of *The Waste Land’s* sources, illuminating the poem’s coordination of them. This emphasis on coordination obscures the effects that those historical sources have upon the vision internal to the poem itself. The poem neither merely includes history nor organizes it, but rather the poem articulates the transformative power of historical sense through the presentation of an account of life activated by it.

In what follows, I intend to explicate this transformative power of historical sense as it appears within *The Waste Land*. Indeed, I will argue that the poem does not simply present a single
vision of life animated by historical sense, for the historical conditions of modernity foreclose the possibility of presenting a straightforwardly unified perspective, according to Eliot. Rather, insofar as historical sense operates as a synthetic faculty capable of unifying perspectives, it appears in *The Waste Land* juxtaposed against the chaotic experience of fragmentation. The poem thus contains competing visions: one dominated by alienation and one that is capable of integrating perspectives and forging meaningful relations between individuals. To construct this argument, I will analyze two scenes from *The Waste Land* in which the mythical figure of Philomel appears. These scenes both depict breakdowns in interpersonal communication. In isolation, they seem to reinforce the sense of social fragmentation that dominates the poem. Indeed, scholars often appeal to these passages to ground their claims that *The Waste Land* is a text that endorses an account of the fundamentally alienated character of modern experience. The scenes superficially evoke a vision of life according to which individuals remain trapped in their own perspectives, alienated from each other and ultimately themselves. I maintain that the appearance of Philomel in the poem frustrates this ubiquitous interpretation in multiple ways and in doing so reveals the transformative operation of historical sense. First, a sensitivity to the appearance of Philomel reveals that interpretations identifying alienation as an essential, and as such static, feature of modern life fail to appreciate the way in which these scenes depict acts violence that silence their victims. By silencing their victims, these individual acts of violence participate in historical structures of violence and oppression. One of the features of these structures is their capacity to obscure themselves and, in doing so, disguise oppressive conditions as unremarkable. Thus, because the

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58 The argument that Eliot treats the presentation of a unified perspective as problematic constituted the movement of the first two chapters of this dissertation. Further evidence is suggested by the final lines of *The Sacred Wood*, where Eliot claims that “when most of our modern poets confine themselves to what they had perceived, they produce for us, usually, only odds and ends of still life and stage properties; but that does not imply so much that the method of Dante is obsolete, as that our vision is perhaps comparatively restricted” (Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 145).
acts of violence obscure themselves within structural conditions that facilitate and sanction such violence, victims’ expressions of suffering, which manifest in the poem as frantic anxiety and estranged indifference, are made to seem like alienated responses to a natural condition. By incorporating Philomel, herself brutally silenced and ultimately transformed, into the poetic landscape, the poem illuminates the capacity of violence to render its victim voiceless. The song of Philomel results from a savage attempt to silence her in order to keep her brutal violation secret. It originates as a response to an act of violence that endeavors to mask itself, and this origin unites Philomel with the characters for whom her song cries out. Not only, then, does the appearance of Philomel uncover acts of silencing that would remain hidden, but it also subverts the sense of isolation cultivated by those acts. Her song awakens a sense of the endurance of the past in the present. It coordinates the experience of characters throughout the poem and across time. In doing so, it suggests the possibilities of historical sense, and, further, it articulates a vision of life attentive to it. Philomel makes her initial appearance in the poem in a painting, but she is not reduced merely to a “withered stump of time.” Rather, she sings into the poem, coordinating scenes and characters. Thus, through a mythical song, an echo of the past, violence is exposed, and voices are restored. Alienation in *The Waste Land*, taken by many to be inescapable, is overcome through attentiveness to the song of the nightingale.

**II.2. The Past Sings into The Waste Land**

The majority of the second section of *The Waste Land*, entitled “A Game of Chess,” details a failed conversation between two partners. On its surface, the conversation fails because the interlocutors are incapable of hearing each other. The female speaker poses a series of questions throughout the

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59 In this respect, Eliot claims in his notes that “all the women” in the poem “are one woman,” just as all the male characters collapse into a single perspective. This unity is effected through the appearance of Tiresias, another mythical figure and another victim of sexual violence in *The Waste Land.*

passage which, despite their increasing urgency, elicit literally “nothing” from her partner. She accuses this partner of thinking nothing, seeing nothing, remembering nothing. As if to affirm her accusation, the man responds to this series of challenges with the cryptic “I remember / Those are pearls that were his eyes” His response negates her question entirely and, in doing so, seems to confirm her accusation. He engages her with unseeing pearls for eyes, the unseeing eyes of “Phlebas,” “the drowned Phoenician sailor.” The connection between the male figure in “A Game of Chess” and the drowned sailor further amplifies the sense of his inability to engage with his interlocutor. In the fourth section of the poem, “Death by Water,” the pearls that were Phlebas’ eyes have ceased to focus on “the gulls, and the deep sea swell / And the profit and loss.” The fleeting concerns of Phlebas’ life appear meaningless in the face of the permanence of death, and the final lines of the section caution the reader to remember the fate of Phlebas, suggesting that even in life his eyes were no less blind than they are beneath the waves. The male speaker in “A Game of Chess” manifests precisely this blind lack of attention, as he negates the woman’s plea for genuine response. Mirroring Phlebas’ misplaced concern for “profit and loss,” he listens to “O O O O that Shakespeherian rag” rather than the call of his interlocutor. Through his unseeing sight, the man reveals that he is incapable of engaging meaningfully with her. The scene presents a simple, but total, breakdown of intersubjectivity. According to accounts that take this representation of the breakdown of intersubjectivity to affirm a fundamentally alienated human condition, the evacuation of character responsible for frustrating this interaction is not limited to

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61 Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 122–123. Another historical voice breaks into the poem in these lines, as they invoke Ariel’s song in *The Tempest*. In this scene, and in the poem itself, the echoes of the past form a chorus, multiplying the opportunities for the illumination of connection through historical resonance. Though it would bolster my general account, explicating each of these voices individually is a task worthy of a more extended investigation and is beyond the purview of the specific argument I am pursuing in this section.


the male speaker. Indeed, the woman’s exaggerated manner of speech belies its own mode of alienation, as Michael Gillum and Susan Colón both highlight.\textsuperscript{66} Thus, the two interlocutors appear to be so thoroughly trapped in their private perspectives that they fail to engage meaningfully with one another, and indeed, this incapacity for intersubjectivity seems inevitable.

A detail in the description of the room in which this conversation takes place, however, frustrates the attempt to take this scene simply as the depiction of a failed interaction. In the background, “Above the antique mantel was displayed / As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene / The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king / So rudely forced.”\textsuperscript{67} The juxtaposition of the myth of Philomel with the interaction between the two characters in “A Game of Chess” calls for the scene be reassessed with an attentiveness to voicelessness and suffering, as well as to the sightlessness that allows that suffering to go unacknowledged. With the story of the brutal silencing of a woman’s cries in mind, the male speaker’s contributions to the conversation appear more troubling. He registers her concerns as “nothing, again nothing” or simply refuses to acknowledge them at all.\textsuperscript{68} In response to her question “What are you thinking? What thinking? What? / I never know what you are thinking. Think.”\textsuperscript{69} The man cryptically asserts “I think we are in rat’s alley / where the dead men lost their bones.”\textsuperscript{70} His simple refusal to acknowledge her voice undermines the perceived legitimacy of her expression and, simultaneously, elicits an

\textsuperscript{66} Gillum, “Ennui and Alienation in Eliot’s Poetry,” 392. Colón, “This Twittering World.” Gillum connects the woman’s frantic questioning to the restless boredom exhibited by other personages in Eliot’s early poetry, particularly Prufrock and the speaker of “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” (Gillum, “Ennui and Alienation in Eliot’s Poetry,” 388). Colón argues that the woman in the scene “babbles incessantly to distract herself from the emptiness of her relationship to her husband,” and connects this babbling to the spiritual condition of acedia, as, in addition to pusillanimity, “another offspring vice of acedia is loquacity” (Colón, “This Twittering World” 74).


\textsuperscript{68} Eliot, \textit{The Waste Land}, 118–120.


amplification of the anxiety in her tone. Despite her heightened anxiety, her contributions remain ignored, exacerbating the degree to which her subjectivity is nullified.

The poetic descriptions of the scene reinforce the reification of the woman and the evacuation her subjectivity. Thus, the elision of her voice is also effected at the formal level of the poem. When the woman speaks, she is not identified as the speaker. Rather “her hair / Spread out into fiery points / Glowed into words, then would be savagely still.” This use of synecdoche aligns with Eliot’s deployment of the device to convey a sense of alienation throughout his early poetry, as Gillum notes. Yet the reification of the woman is exacerbated with the use of the word “glowed” to describe her speech, as her words are not the only glowers in the scene: “The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne, / Glowed on the marble.” The verbal repetition equates the woman, or more precisely her speaking-hair, with a gaudy armchair. From human body part, she is further reduced to a decorative object. These descriptive objectifications intensify the male speaker’s nullification of his female interlocutor. And so, despite her attempts at self-assertion, with each non-sequitur and each negation, the man reduces her to a piece of the scenery. She becomes just another “withered stump of time” depicted upon the walls, “leaning out” into the room. Against the literal backdrop of Philomel’s brutal silencing at the hands of a male relative, the negation of the woman’s concerns becomes tinged with violence. This ceases to be a case of mere miscommunication. Rather, by ignoring her, the man renders the woman voiceless. He

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72 Indeed, Gillum argues that Eliot’s use of the figure disrupts the traditional structure of synecdoche. Synecdoche typically operates by using a part of an object to represent the whole. Eliot uses the technique, however, “to express an analytic and objective way of perceiving other human beings, a consequence of alienation.” In traditional synecdoche, the subjectivity of the subject is preserved in its representation by the object. In Eliot’s deployment of the form, the subjects are reduced to the mere objects of representation. He argues that “one cannot empathize with the border of a dress or the corner of an eye. The way of seeing suggests an unbridgeable gap between subject and object; people so perceived are grotesque and mechanical, generating indifference, contempt, or, at best, fear” (Gillum, “Ennui and Alienation in Eliot’s Poetry,” 392).
participates in the violence of Tereus, though admittedly in a less gruesome way. Yet while the woman suffers this process of reification, rendering her an object among objects, the “inviolable” voice of Philomel leans out into the room crying “jug jug to dirty ears.” Philomel protests the negation of the woman, even as this negation frustrates the woman’s capacity to speak for herself.

A more radical depiction of the effacement of female subjectivity occurs in the subsequent section, “The Fire Sermon.” “The Fire Sermon” presents a series of failed sexual encounters. The most extensive of these is narrated by the blind prophet Tiresias who experiences the scene as a vision. The vision follows a “typist home at teatime” as she prepares for her date with “A small house agent’s clerk, with one bold stare / One of the low on whom assurance sits / As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.” The date seems at first to be wholly uncharacteristic of the passion suggested by the title of the section. After dinner, the typist is “bored and tired” and the clerk “Endeavours to engage her in caresses / Which still are unreproved if undesired.” This apparent apathy reaches its zenith in the stanza post-coitus, after the departure of the clerk. The typist is “Hardly aware of her departed lover” as she remarks briefly to herself “Well now that’s done: and I’m glad it’s over” before smoothing “her hair with automatic hand” and putting “a record on the gramophone.” As in “A Game of Chess,” the language of the poem objectifies the female participant, her “automatic hand” is juxtaposed with a gramophone, seeming to suggest a voluntary abdication of voice to the machine. Gillum claims that these manifestations of indifference are “tonally at variance” with the title of the section, “The Fire Sermon,” and its final line, “burning burning burning.”

75 Eliot, The Waste Land, 101, 103
burning’ etc. becomes, if anything, ironic.” Ultimately, Gillum concludes that this section is “a testament to apathy,” and this apathy is a manifestation of the fundamentally alienated vision characteristic of Eliot’s poetry. With this assessment, I vehemently disagree. For Philomel reappears just before Tiresias’ vision, and the repetition of her cry reveals in this scene a force far more sinister than indifference. A mere ten lines separate Tiresias’ vision of the typist from Philomel’s reappearance in the poem. Rather than appearing in a description of the scene, however, Philomel sings into the poem itself, explicitly lamenting her experience of sexual violence. She sings “Twit twit twit / Jug jug jug jug jug / So rudely forc’d. / Tereu,” and just as her previous appearance demanded attentiveness to the silencing enacted in the scene upon which it commented, Philomel’s cry “so rudely forc’d” prefigures The Waste Land’s nearest approximation to a romantic encounter and alerts the reader to the violence hidden in it.

The poetic meter of the middle portion of Tiresias’s vision, which recounts the tryst itself, announces its importance. Though most of The Waste Land is composed in free verse, with only occasional rhyme and no discernible metrical pattern, once this date begins, the poem adopts the sonnet form. This is, in fact, one of only two sections in the poem in which something like a sonnet appears. The intervention of metrical regularity in the stanza calls the reader’s attention to the significance of the passage, while the sonnet form employed activates expectations regarding its substance. Indeed, in marshalling the traditional relation between the sonnet form and seduction, a tradition explicitly referenced in the first stanza of “The Fire Sermon” with the invocation of Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress,” this passage seems to develop further the romantic theme of the section. Yet a pair of troubling details appears within this sonnet itself, problematizing its status

as an expression either of love or of merely evacuated passion. First, while the form of the passage may be romantic, the diction is definitively not. The language of the sonnet is overwhelmingly violent. In the first stanza, the young man “endeavors to engage her in caresses,” suggesting the prelude to a military advance. The second stanza realizes this presaged violence. “He assaults at once” and “encounters no defense.” In a poetic aside, which occupies the space of the scene’s erotic consummation, Tiresias notes that he has “foresuffered” this experience. The language of the sonnet belies its romantic form, emphasizing the violence of the encounter.

Here, a skeptical reader may respond that, if the interaction is violent, the woman herself seems unaware of it. As Gillum notes, apathy is the emotion most directly attributed to her throughout the scene, and she seems to express this apathy twice in the sonnet. The advances are “unreproved if undesired” and the young man “makes a welcome of indifference.” Yet the sonnet’s representation of her voice renders this deflationary account of the scene untenable. Tiresias’ vision begins and ends with the young typist. She is the content of his prophecy. When the young man arrives, however, the focus of the scene shifts. Suddenly, this house agent’s clerk becomes the subject, and the typist is presented through his eyes. The claim that “the meal is ended, she is bored and tired” is the result of his guesswork (“the time is now propitious, as he guesses”). The possibility that the woman is not interested in sex with him remains hypothetical. His advances are “unreproved, if undesired,” leaving open the possibility that they could be both. The young man’s vanity, which “requires no response,” frustrates a straightforward interpretation of the

86 Eliot, The Waste Land, 244.
woman’s “indifference.” In a scene that is ostensibly focused on the young typist, her voice is excised from the poem at precisely the moment in which her testimony would be valuable. She is rendered speechless. Worse perhaps than in the case of the woman in “A Game of Chess,” who is transformed into an object among other objects, the young typist is elided entirely. Her voice is evacuated from the scene, leaving only the young man’s myopic vanity and aggression.

The appearance of Philomel exerts a complex effect on the scenes in which she appears. I have suggested already that the allusions to Philomel prepare the reader to recognize subtle expressions of violence in situations that appear anodyne. But her story also exposes the way in which that apparently unobjectionable condition is a function of the violence itself. For, central to each of these accounts – the myth of Philomel, the story of the typist in “The Fire Sermon,” and the reification of the woman in “A Game of Chess” – is the surgical removal of the female voice. Philomel’s tongue is cut from her mouth. The woman’s voice is systematically relegated to the background. The typist is removed entirely from the scene of her own assault. Attendant upon the violence inflicted against women is the tactical elimination of their capacity to speak on their own behalf. When the victims are deprived of the ability to communicate their experiences, only the narrative of the violent party remains. Thus, Tereus maintains for a time his status as king, the clerk can present an act of sexual violence as a mutual arrangement, and the male speaker in “A Game of Chess” gets the final word. By illuminating these acts of violence, then, Philomel’s appearance not only calls attention to the act of silencing, but also exposes the power through which structural violence obscures itself. She illuminates both the acts and the more pervasive power structures in which they participate. Furthermore, in doing so, the appearance of Philomel highlights the historical contingency of the estranged condition experienced by the characters in

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these scenes. The violence in these scenes is perpetrated by individual figures, and these figures participate in specific structures of oppression. The specificity of the agents, along with the active quality of their violent interventions, disrupts the sense of a universal and permanent condition of alienation. The solidarity communicated by Philomel’s appearance in the poem shows that these structures of oppression can be resisted, and this very fact belies the suggestion that their effects are an essential feature of experience.

This dual unmasking of violence and its capacity to obscure itself does not exhaust Philomel’s complex effect upon the poem. By asserting herself into disparate scenes in the poem, she establishes connections between seemingly unconnected events. In doing so, she begins to re-establish relations for characters in the poem who have been effectively isolated. In “A Game of Chess,” the male speaker’s negations of the female speaker isolate her and, in doing so, transform her into an object. She is evacuated of self and ceases to connect to others. She becomes a thing. Similarly, the violent self-assertion of the house agent’s clerk overcomes the subjectivity of the typist. She concludes the scene in a condition similar to that exhibited by the woman in “A Game of Chess.” She is alone and objectified, her voice transferred to the gramophone. Yet, despite the ways in which their experiences impose isolation, the appearance of Philomel offers a restoration of connection. With her song, Philomel connects to each of them, her story blending with theirs. And, through her, the women relate to each other. The capacity for an intersubjectivity cultivated through solidarity appears. Philomel, an echo of the past, cries out for them, victims like herself. And in her cry, she gives voice to those whose have been rendered voiceless. With this gift, their

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92 My thanks to Tom Eyers for identifying this ramification of the appearance of Philomel for my argument concerning the status of alienation as a historical, rather than essential, condition.
93 In his notes to The Waste Land, Eliot goes so far as to suggest that the relation connecting these figures collapses into an identity. “All the women,” he claims, “are one woman” (Eliot, The Waste Land: A Norton Critical Edition, 23). This claim is too philosophically loaded to engage with here. It will, however, receive more extensive treatment in subsequent chapters.
voices are transformed, becoming more human through the intervention of the inhuman, more present through the operation of the past, and singing together though alone.

By illuminating structures of violence that silence their victims, and in establishing connections between those silenced, the appearance of Philomel in *The Waste Land* delineates two opposed visions of life and the role of historical sense in it. According to one vision, the vision traditionally ascribed to the poem itself, individuals appear to be fundamentally estranged from each other and incapable of interpersonal relation. Alienation is an irremediable condition, and it is irremediable because it is natural. This vision treats the past like a mere “withered stump of time” upon the walls.\(^94\) It is simply an adornment, inactive and ultimately inconsequential. The alternative vision suggests that the voices of the past never actually recede and that they are capable of illuminating nascent connections between individuals in the present. Attunement to these voices restores the capacity for interpersonal relation. The poem does not simply articulate these two opposed visions, juxtaposing them against each other. Rather, through its account of the tendency of violence to silence its victim and thereby obscure its operation, the poem suggests a contest between them concerning the precise issue of historical sense. For the work of making violence appear inconsequential and natural necessarily entails the effacement of the historical conditions that made that violence possible.\(^95\) It entails severing the historical connections that coordinate the experiences of victims, uniting them in solidarity. Conversely, a vision attuned to connections established by historical sense and invested in the work of integrating perspectives will necessarily expose those structures of violence that thrive so long as they remain hidden.

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\(^95\) This is, I maintain, a poetic formulation of an argument very similar to the critique raised by Lukács against modernist literature. Lukács claims that literary modernism obscures the historical conditions of the experience of alienation in modernity, thereby rendering an historically contingent condition as ontologically primary. Analogously, *The Waste Land* reveals the capacity of structures of violence to obscure themselves by isolating their victims, which requires the denial of history.
III. The Operation of Historical Sense

*The Waste Land*, I have argued, contains a vision of life animated by historical sense, and it juxtaposes this vision against the alienated experience of a life from which this attentiveness to history is absent. This juxtaposition illuminates the capacity of historical sense to reveal the ways in which structures of alienation elide their own historical conditions. Not only does historical sense have the capacity to expose the structures of violence that perpetuate the experience of alienation, but it also appears capable of integrating perspectives, thereby alleviating the conditions of alienation that it reveals. Phlebas the Phoenician, the blind prophet Tiresias, and Philomel all effect this integration of perspectives within the poem, while Eliot argues for it in his “A Note on Ezra Pound.” Yet, while Eliot explicates the structure of historical sense and argues for its importance in his prose work, and while he presents an account of the possibilities of a life animated by historical sense in *The Waste Land*, a lacuna remains at the heart of the account. The analysis so far does not include an account of how historical sense is developed, nor does the analysis account for the role of poetry in its cultivation.

I maintain that Eliot’s prose materials and the structure of *The Waste Land* itself both suggest the complex mechanism by which historical sense is developed. *The Waste Land* is not merely a vision of life animated by historical sense. It is also a vehicle for historical sense’s cultivation. The poem both identifies alienation as a dominant force in modern society and also intervenes in the cultural structure of that society in order to alleviate this condition. An investigation of the mechanism by which *The Waste Land* is capable of having such an effect

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96 Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 47, 312–321, 99, 198–206, 215–247. This list of figures in the poem who synthesize perspectives, of course, is not complete. Repeated references to Wagner, though not personages in the poem, suggest similar connections between passages in the text and context external to it. Allusions to Baudelaire operate in a similar fashion. In addition to its being a project beyond the scope of this chapter, providing a comprehensive catalogue of the structures of allusion that facilitate historical sense would make it increasingly difficult to trace the effect of any single allusive element. This tension is worthy of further investigation in its own right.
involves three relations, each operating in conjunction with the others. Of these relations, the most specific is that between the poet and the text. The text, in this capacity, works as a vehicle for the cultivation of the poet’s own historical sense. It serves as the tool with which the poet pursues, according to Eliot, the complete perspective that promises release from the Bradleyan prison of limited perspective. This developmental account, according to which the poet cultivates historical sense through the production and revision of the poem, is at odds with the catalytic model of poetic production that Eliot develops in “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” I will argue, however, that Eliot’s own methodology, as well as other passages in The Sacred Wood, necessitate a reappraisal of the limits of this catalytic model, thereby preserving the capacity of the creative process to cultivate a sense of history.

Nevertheless, even this developmental account of poetic production is extremely limited insofar as it restricts its analysis to the author and the text. While composition is one way to cultivate historical sense, Eliot does not present it as the exclusive, or even a necessary, means by which historical sense is developed. A more complete investigation of the operation of the poem demands an attentiveness to the relationship between the poem and the reader. Such an investigation is, indeed, necessitated by the chains of allusions built into The Waste Land, as these allusions implicate the reader in the synthesis of a poetic vision. While an account of the effect of the poem upon the reader expands the scope of the poetic intervention, it, too, remains incomplete. In his critical work, Eliot conveys a sensitivity to the interaction between the individual and culture, articulating the ways in which the culture shapes the individual and the effect the individual can have upon culture in return. Thus, the two limited interactions between text and

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97 In the course of this analysis, I will also attempt to show the extent to which many excellent readings of the poem focus on one of these relations at the expense of the others. In doing so, they fail to account for the full force of the poetic intervention.
author and text and reader must be contextualized against the complementary relations between
the text and the culture within which it appears and the culture and the individuals that it produces.
The interplay of forces in this network of relations reveals the full scope of the intervention effected
by the work of poetry while also eliding the boundaries between reader, text, and history. Indeed,
the breadth of the intervention effected by the poem depends precisely upon the mediating role
that it plays between individuals and cultures, a role which is facilitated by the expansion of poetic
scope.

III.1. The Limits of the Catalytic Model

In the second section of “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot appeals to the metaphor of a
catalyst to explain the artist’s relation to the poetic product. Eliot employs this metaphor to
explicate his claim that “the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, continual extinction
of personality.”98 Rather than create a poem as an expression of her individual personality, Eliot
claims that the mature poet operates as a “medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at
liberty to enter into new combinations.”99 He claims the poet is like a filament of platinum in the
presence of oxygen and sulphur dioxide. When the gasses are mixed without the platinum present,
they remain inert. With the platinum present, however, they react to form a new sulphurous acid,
while the platinum remains unchanged. The mind of the poet, then, will “digest and transmute the
passions which are its material,” but “the man who suffers and the mind that creates” remain
separate.100 Though Eliot’s metaphor of the catalyst powerfully articulates the importance of

98 Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 44.
99 Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 44.
100 Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 45. With the introduction of the metaphor of digestion, Eliot undercuts one of the essential
features of the catalyst analogy. For, in digestion, the material worked upon is incorporated into the entity that digests.
I will argue below that this metaphor actually better illuminates Eliot’s poetic activity.
considering the work of poetry independent of the personality of the poet, it presents both the poem and the poet in static, and I will argue misleading, terms.

The catalytic account of poetic production suggests that the poet remains unchanged through the composition. The poet assembles the disparate material that is transmuted into the finished poetic work, but, like the piece of platinum, subsists unaltered throughout the process. Similarly, once the poem is complete, it is simply a finished product, and the process comes to a distinct conclusion. The material for the reaction is exhausted, and the poetic process begins anew. Appealing again to this model, Eliot gives the impression that this process of production is itself rather quick.\(^{101}\) The cultivation of the necessary elements may take time, but Eliot distinguishes this process from the act of literary production itself. He suggests that the “poet’s mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.”\(^ {102}\)

Though he does not explicate Eliot’s use of the catalyst metaphor in *T.S. Eliot’s Intellectual and Poetic Development 1909–1922*, Piers Gray depends on a model of poetic production that seems to accept the assumptions underwriting the catalytic metaphor. Building his account of Eliot’s poetic project around Bradley’s problem of historical knowledge and the need for an absolute perspective, Gray argues that Eliot seeks “through language to make realizable here and now that demand for the Absolute.”\(^ {103}\) Eliot’s poetic aim, according to Gray, is to develop a work of art that attains “an absolute degree of coherence which is also an absolute degree of comprehensiveness.”\(^ {104}\) The poetic work promises to overcome the alienating incommensurability

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\(^{101}\) This is one element of the account that Eliot’s own poetic practice counter-indicates. The many drafts of *The Waste Land*, along with its continued revision after publication, suggest that the production of the poem was not immediate in the sense demanded by the catalytic model.


of perspectives by unifying those perspectives into a complete and coherent point of view. The finished poem is supposed to present this point of view, and in writing poetry, the poet attempts to create this single, unified work. This demand that the point of view be presented by the discrete poetic work, which aligns with the catalytic model of poetic production, necessitates Gray’s conclusion that *The Waste Land* inevitably fails to present the unifying perspective that it pursues.\textsuperscript{105} For, if “the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered” after the “supervention of novelty,” then even if an individual poem were capable of presenting a complete vision of the existing order, its production would necessarily alter that order, demanding a new perspective.\textsuperscript{106} The discrete work of art cannot itself present a complete and comprehensive historical perspective because that history is perpetually in flux and is, indeed, altered by the work of art itself.

Eliot’s account of the poet’s development of historical sense, as well as his own poetic practice, suggests that this catalytic model presents too static an account of the relations involved in poetic production. The disruption of this static account necessitates a reappraisal of Gray’s conclusion that Eliot’s poetic project inevitably ends in failure. For, when the relation between poet and text is understood as a dynamic interaction, the possibility develops that the totalizing vision is not contained in the poem. Rather, in composing the poem, the poet actively develops historical sense, working towards the cultivation of her own totalizing perspective.

Though Eliot, in likening the poet to a catalyst in a chemical reaction, indicates that the production of a poem occurs immediately and leaves the poet relatively unchanged, his account of

\textsuperscript{105} Gray’s use of early drafts of *The Waste Land* to justify his conclusion that the poem is a tragical satire similarly suggest an embrace of the catalytic model, as the drafts themselves are transmuted into the final product. Though the appeal to the earlier drafts acknowledges that the creation of the poem is not instantaneous, the attempt to draw conclusions about the finished work from the form of the earlier drafts suggests a teleological account of poetic production. The drafts are stages on the way to a finished product, intermediate attempts at formulating the unifying vision.

\textsuperscript{106} Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 41.
the development of historical sense presents a radically divergent sense of poetic production. Rather than emphasize the stable relationship between the poet and the poem, and the poet and the past, in his explication of historical sense Eliot appeals more consistently to a persistent development. He insists not only that the poet “must develop a consciousness of the past,” but also that “he should continue to develop this consciousness through his career.” If the poet pursues the formulation of an absolute perspective, Eliot seems to acknowledge that this perspective cannot be contained within a single poetic work. Rather, because the past is constantly in flux and contains limitless perspectives, the integration of these perspectives into a unifying vision is necessarily an ongoing project. In *Epic Negation*, C.D. Blanton makes a compelling case for considering Eliot’s poetic production in precisely these developmental terms. Like Gray, Blanton argues that Eliot orients his poetics around the concept of order as a concept capable of “naming the way in which language adjoins fragmented parts to some all-encompassing system that constitutes and conditions them, admitting no essential difference between an aesthetic sphere and any other.”

For Blanton, Eliot’s engagement with order operates analogously to Gray’s account of the pursuit of an absolute perspective. Blanton’s account diverges from Gray’s radically and productively, however, in its presentation of the limits of the poetic work. Blanton argues that *The Waste Land*

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107 Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 43. This is Eliot’s most explicit claim in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” that the development of historical sense is a lifelong process. The description of historical sense is, however, dominated by the language of development. The “mind of Europe” is perpetually undergoing a process of development (Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 42, 43). The past is “altered by the present” just as the present “is directed by the past” (Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 41). These appeals to the development of the past do not merely suggest the value of the perpetual renewal of the poet’s historical sense, they demand this renewal as a necessary condition for any serious engagement with tradition.


109 Though this emphasis on order allows Blanton to explicate formal elements in Eliot’s poetry that may remain opaque under the framework of a unifying vision, Blanton’s sometimes exclusive focus on order risks rendering his analysis merely formal. The account powerfully illuminates structures at work in Eliot’s poetry that are often underappreciated even by astute readers like Gray and Spears Booker, but it fails to engage with the full range of effects that these structures give rise to. For example, Blanton presents a striking account of the poetic history of the swallow, and the levels of that history in Eliot’s allusions in *The Waste Land* (Blanton, *Epic Negation*, 59–61). But this history serves the illumination of a structure of reference and never returns to the effect of the swallow within the poem.
should be read in relation to the journal in which it first appeared, *The Criterion*, a journal curated by Eliot himself, because “the more obvious poem establishes a technique that enables the larger review to do ‘poetic’ work.”¹¹⁰ A limited reading of *The Waste Land* as a discrete poem may provide insight into the method that Eliot employs, but this method permeates Eliot’s larger project of which *The Waste Land* operates as merely a part. Thus, “with its swirl of voices and endless borrowed texts, the review concretizes and answers the formal idea first posed by *The Waste Land*.”¹¹¹ In “making good on Eliot’s redefinition of poetic composition as an *editorial* labor,” *The Criterion* dissolves the boundary between poetic and critical production. *The Waste Land* crystallizes the method of the journal, while the journal pursues the unifying order promised by *The Waste Land*.

Blanton offers the example of Eliot’s engagement with Herman Hesse’s *Blick ins Chaos* to illuminate the extent to which Eliot’s method obscures the boundary between *The Waste Land* and *The Criterion*, the poetic and the critical. The final section of *The Waste Land*, “What the Thunder Said,” contains as passage in which, in Blanton’s words, the section “resolves itself into a synthetic major chord and reclaims the poem’s earlier sequence of Baudelairean allusions in another key.”¹¹² The passage depicts “hooded hordes swarming / Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth / Ringed by the flat horizon only.”¹¹³ Eliot only explicitly identifies the inspiration for these lines when he publishes the annotated version of *The Waste Land* two months after its initial appearance in *The Criterion*.¹¹⁴ Yet already in this initial appearance, Eliot suggests his indebtedness to Hesse’s *Blick ins Chaos* through the inclusion of Hesse’s review of “Recent German Poetry,”

separated from *The Waste Land* by only one contribution (“The Victim” by May Sinclair). The reference,” Blanton notes, “was already there even before Eliot added his notes, etched into the order of *The Criterion*. The passage of *Blick ins Chaos* quoted in Eliot’s notes to *The Waste Land* further amplifies the textual resonances between *The Waste Land* and *The Criterion*, for Hesse appeals to Dostoevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov*. The second piece in *The Criterion*’s first issue is a version of the “Plan of the Novel ‘the Life of a Great Sinner’” by Dostoevsky, translated by S.S. Kotoliansky and Virginia Woolf. Thus, the annotations to *The Waste Land* signal an indebtedness to Hesse, who appears within *The Criterion* and who also alludes to Dostoevsky, who also appears in *The Criterion*. The poem calls attention to its position within the larger critical edifice of the journal, while simultaneously coordinating the various elements of that larger work. The poem “does not merely allude, that is, thereby reinforcing its own language with that of other texts, but systematically externalizes the essential functions of poetic language, ranging from the sensuous order of sound to the intelligible order of meaning.” In doing so, the poem ceases to operate as a self-contained unit, but incorporates and fuses with the material around it. It calls attention to its place within the ordered vision of the critical enterprise. Because the boundary between the poetic and the critical already dissipates with the poem’s initial appearance in *The Criterion*, the border of the text continues to expand with the subsequent editions of the journal. The work of the poem does not end with its publication. The poem does not appear completed, the result of an immediate catalytic reaction. Rather the poem accretes material over time, forming an ever more complex and complete vision of historical order. In its perpetual expansion, the work,

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115 Hesse, “Recent German Poetry,” 89–93.
118 Dostoevsky, “Plan for a Novel,” 17–33.
both critical and poetic, manifests the ever-developing historical sense of the poet/curator. This expanding work of art serves as one means by which one can cultivate “the consciousness of the past” and “continue to develop this consciousness” over the course of a lifetime.120

Blanton offers a compelling argument for considering *The Waste Land* as a part of the critical project initiated with *The Criterion*, and thus as a text with borders that are under perpetual renegotiation. His explication of the chains of intra-textual reference reveal the extent to which the allusive structure of *The Waste Land* exceeds the mere inclusion of textual references within the poem. These arguments render the restriction of an analysis of *The Waste Land* to the published text untenable. Because the catalytic model of poetic production, presented by Eliot himself and tacitly endorsed by Gray in his explication of the poem, depends upon a restrictive account of the limits of the text, Blanton’s analysis reveals the extent to which Eliot’s poetic practice does not align with the model that he presents in “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” Blanton’s analysis falls short, however, in its overemphasis on the expansion of limits of the text at the expense of a recognition of the effects this process of accretion has on the text itself. In framing Eliot’s poetics around the problem of a comprehensive structure, Blanton makes the same mistake as Gray of reading Eliot’s poetics as a strictly formal enterprise. Both scholars emphasize the formal pursuit of a comprehensive vision without engaging the content or experience of that vision. Further, while Blanton clearly articulates the means by which *The Waste Land* extends beyond itself through the expansion of *The Criterion*, he does not explicate the complementary movement through which the expansion of the text adjusts the significance of the narrowly defined poem. Thus, each point in the chain of allusions attendant upon the reference to *Blick ins Chaos* not only expands the scope of the poem but also enriches the content of that original passage. Through this process, the image

of “hooded hordes / Swarming over endless plains” acquires the content of a specific critique of European decadence, bolstered by an appeal to Dostoyevsky that, through Woolf’s translation, extends beyond Hesse’s more singular focus on *The Brothers Karamazov*.  

Blanton’s explication of the expanding lattice of allusions in *The Waste Land* does not merely highlight the ongoing cultivation of the poet’s own historical sense. Blanton’s account additionally illuminates the extent to which the poem demands the development of this capacity in the reader as well. *The Waste Land* and *The Criterion* certainly supplement each other through networks of allusions and textual juxtapositions. The texts systematically withhold, however, the significance of these allusions and the chains of inference linking them. Even the short series of notes that Eliot appends to *The Waste Land* seems to conceal with its explanations. As Blanton notes, though Eliot “credits ‘sylvan scene’ (l. 98) to Milton,” he makes no mention of the “softer strains of Gascoigne (‘The Steel Glass’), Milton (‘O Nightingale’), and Keats (‘Ode to a Nightingale’)” that “are lurking, along with a stronger doubled echo of Coleridge.” Eliot’s notes signal that the reference to Philomel is derived from other sources but does not signal the extent to which that allusion is overdetermined. The poem leaves the work of tracing these networks of allusions to the reader. Further, even when Eliot identifies the provenance of his textual

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121 Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 368–369. I have, in the second section of this chapter, attempted to show how attention to specific networks of allusions can alter the significance of the passages in which those allusions appear. Thus, I have implicitly argued against a methodology that would simply treat the way the allusions expand the text without acknowledging the effect that this expansion has upon the original context in which the allusion appears.


123 Insofar as the poem enjoins readers to identify the allusions informing the text, it already begins to implicate them in the further production of the text itself. For the reader must decide which textual resonances qualify as allusions and which are mere similarities. With this, the reader participates in establishing the borders of the text in contrast to the text’s own impulse to expansion. The difficulty of this challenge is exemplified most strikingly in *The Poems of T.S. Eliot: The Annotated Text*, which includes extensive references not only to clear source material and to relevant contextual details but also to texts which share much more ambiguous resonances. Thus, the line “in the mountains, there you feel free” (Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 17) receives a reference to the death by drowning of King Ludwig II of Bavaria in the Starnbergersee, a note that the line of the poem is a near translation of a line from *Das König-Ludwig-Lied*, and two references that are slightly more tenuous, to Milton and Wordsworth—“The mountain nymph, sweet Liberty” from *L’Allegro* and “The freedom of a mountaineer” from *To the Highland Girl of Inversneyde* (Eliot, Ricks, and McCue, *The Poems of T.S. Eliot: The Annotated Text*, 604). In addition to references to historical textual
insertions, his notes rarely suggest the significance of those allusions within the structure of *The Waste Land*. When Eliot identifies individual sources, he leaves the reader with the task of developing an understanding of those sources in their own context and in their relation to the surrounding poetic material. The reader must reckon with the definite ways in which the past material shapes the present poetic text. This is precisely the work of cultivating historical sense. Yet, just as Blanton’s explication of the lattice of allusions in *The Waste Land* and *The Criterion* emphasizes the referential structure formed through the series of allusions without fully engaging with the effect that this structure exhibits upon the meaning internal to the poem, his account of the reader’s implication in the excavation of the referential network fails to fully reckon with the effects of the poetic vision upon the reader. Blanton explicates the work that the poem demands of the reader but does not engage with how this work alters the reader’s experience of the poem. Indeed, the work of tracing the chains of allusions contained in the poem does not alone facilitate the development of historical sense or the integration of perspectives. Rather, the reader must unify that excavated system of allusions into a vision of life and must, further, inhabit that vision.

### III.2. Engaging Historical Sense in the Reader

The constellations of allusions in *The Waste Land* demand a tremendous degree of historical literacy from the reader, as Blanton convincingly argues and as *The Annotated Edition* exemplifies. Eliot’s notes call attention to this demand for literacy both in their presence and in their absence. Eliot provides examples of the requisite attention to minute detail with his references to some seemingly insignificant material in his notes appended to the poem.124 Conversely, however, Eliot

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124 In reference to the lines “with a pocket full of currants / C.i.f London,” for example, Eliot notes cryptically that “the currants were quoted at a price ‘carriage and insurance free to London’; and the Bill of Lading etc. were to be handed to the buyer upon payment of the sight draft” (Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Norton Critical Edition*. 23).
passes over some clearly allusive material without a remark, requiring the reader to identify the source independently.\textsuperscript{125} The historical literacy required to trace these networks of allusions does not alone, however, entail the possession of historical sense. Historical sense requires not only the encyclopedic knowledge of poetic references to nightingales, for example, as such knowledge in isolation barely surpasses an awareness of the sylvan scene painted in the background in “The Game of Chess.” Historical sense requires an attunement to the endurance of the past. It calls for a recognition of the relevance of Philomel’s brutal silencing by Tereus to the scene at hand. It demands attention to the circumstances in which “still she cried, \textit{and still the world pursues}, ‘Jug Jug’ to dirty ears.”\textsuperscript{126}

A pair of formal elements of the poem cultivate precisely such an attention to the enduring operation of the past. Within the poem, the repetition of lines and images from previous sections forces the reader to maintain an awareness of those earlier passages while engaging with the present material. At the level of textual production, the bricolage technique wrests phrases from their original contexts and arranges them into a new textual artifact. Thus, the poem itself instantiates the continued relevance of the historical material to which it appeals, providing an explicit example of one way in which the past exerts an influence on the present. In both cases, the poem invigorates historical material, material that perhaps has receded from view into a reified existence akin to that identified in the essay on Joyce, by bringing it into new contexts.\textsuperscript{127} The poem confronts the reader with the allusive material’s historical status while also calling attention

\textsuperscript{125} For example, Eliot cites \textit{The Tempest} as the source of the lines “Musing upon the king my brother’s wreck / And on the king my father’s death before him” and “The music crept by me on the waters,” but he does not mention Ariel’s song as the source for “those are pears that were his eyes,” which appears twice in the poem (Eliot, \textit{The Waste Land}, 192–193, 257, 47, 125. Eliot, \textit{The Waste Land: A Norton Critical Edition}, 23–24)


\textsuperscript{127} Eliot, “\textit{Ulysses, Order, and Myth},” 476, 477.
to its present relevance. Thus, these techniques enjoin the reader adopt a way of seeing that is animated by historical sense.

The distinction between sedimented language and speech, drawn by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *The Prose of the World*, illuminates poem’s transition from fostering the reader’s historical literacy to cultivating historical sense. 128 Sedimented language, Merleau-Ponty explains, “is the language the reader brings with him, the stock of accepted relations between signs and familiar significations without which he could never have begun to read.” 129 In his development of this notion of sedimented speech, Merleau-Ponty generally employs it at the most basic level of the received meanings of words. Thus, in the example of Stendhal’s “Rossi the revenue man,” which Merleau-Ponty develops extensively in this discussion, Merleau-Ponty knows “what a rogue is” and can therefore understand what Stendhal means “when he says that Rossi the revenue man is a rogue.” 130 Yet, Merleau-Ponty clarifies that individual words and expressions are not the only units of speech that become sedimented, for sedimented speech also includes “the literature of the language,” and thus “it is also Stendhal’s work once it has been understood and added to the cultural heritage.” 131 The historical material that *The Waste Land* incorporates in its deployment of bricolage is precisely this “literature of the language,” which is already understood and “part of the cultural heritage.” 132 Yet, in rearranging “the already available signs and significations,” the language of *The Waste Land* becomes speech insofar as it “transfigures each of them, so that in the end, a new signification is secreted.” 133 Speech, according to Merleau-Ponty, “is the effect through which [the author’s] own language comes to life in the reader’s mind, henceforth for the

reader’s own use.” The previously understood “sighs, short and frequent,” from the fourth canto of the *Inferno* attain new significance in juxtaposition with the poem’s appeal to Baudelaire’s “Unreal city,” especially as they are both brought into relation with the horde of shambling London commuters. And indeed the city, itself a sedimented signifier, appears anew through the perspective of the poem as it is imbued with the infernal and unreal attributes of the allusive material.

Merleau-Ponty’s distinction between sedimented language and speech illuminates *The Waste Land* insofar as it highlights the extent to which works of literature transform the language that they employ. This transformation, further, entails that an engagement with the allusions and repetitions structuring *The Waste Land* must provide an account not of the historical material they call upon but also of the new signification generated through the inclusion of this material in a new context. Engagement with the poem demands attention to the ways in which the poem brings the past into the present and the ways in which the present inclusion alters the significance of the past. Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of literary language reveals how the operation of the language of *The Waste Land* itself forces the reader to adopt a perspective of historical sense.

The demands that *The Waste Land* makes upon the reader ultimately result in the dissolution of the boundaries between the reader and the text. The structure of allusions alone already intimates such a dissolution. The reader must determine which resonances to trace and must further determine the limits of chains of allusions. Thus, while the networks of allusions facilitate a textual accretion over time in the form of the *Criterion*, as Blanton argues, they also implicate the reader in establishing the borders of the text. Merleau-Ponty’s analysis, further, suggests the dissolution of the boundary between text and reader at the level of literary language.

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itself. The revitalization of language in literary speech does not merely render a new signification from sedimented language, it also facilitates the process by which the author’s “language comes to life in the reader’s mind.” Yet, by awakening the author’s language in the mind of the reader, the literary work allows the reader to assume the author’s thoughts. It brings the reader “within the imaginary self and the internal dialogue of the author,” and, moreover, renders this dialogue available for the reader’s use and, indeed, transforms it into part of the reader. Thus, through the dissolution of the boundaries between text, reader, and author, the organon of the development of the author’s historical sense facilitates the cultivation of this sense in the reader, as well.

The elision of the distinction between reader and text is already suggested by both the method of bricolage and the operation of poetic language, yet the text of the poem itself further effects this dissolution. *The Waste Land* twice addresses the reader explicitly. The first time it does so, in “The Burial of the Dead,” the address functions both to challenge and disorient the reader. The speaker of the poem confronts the reader, asking “what are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / Out of this stony rubbish?" It responds immediately, answering “Son of man / You cannot say or guess, for you know only / A heap of broken images.” In this challenge, the disconnected vignettes of the poem appear to be an indictment of the limited vision of the reader. In the last of addresses to the reader in “The Burial of the Dead,” the speaker of the poem promises to restore the reader’s vision in light of the previous challenge. It offers “to show you something different from either / Your shadow at morning striding behind you / Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you.” It promises to “show you fear in a handful of dust.” Though this stanza

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incorporates the reader into the poem, it does so in such a way that preserves the critical distance of the reader. The poem speaks to the reader as an external agent, one whose vision is woefully incomplete. It offers to remedy this incompleteness, though the tone of the offer is perhaps more foreboding than it is genuine. But even the remedy would preserve the reader’s position as an external interpreter. The vision that could become more complete is a vision of *The Waste Land* itself.

When the poem addresses the reader again in its penultimate section, “Death by Water,” the effect of the address fully incorporates the reader into the poem, thereby eliding the border between text and reader. Though it is the shortest section of *The Waste Land* by far, it unifies multiple chains of allusions that appear throughout the poem. Beyond simply incorporating the reader into the poem in this small passage, the echoes of other sections effect a much broader diffusion of the reader into the text. “Death by Water” describes the decomposition of “Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead” as “A current under sea / picked his bones in whispers.”¹⁴² Not only do the sinews of Phlebas unspool, but his memory seems to as well. For “as he rose and fell / He passed the stages of his age and youth,” and he “forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell / And the profit and the loss.”¹⁴³ In the final stanza of the section, however, the focus shifts from Phlebas’ immediate condition to his fate, a fate that is shared by all. The poem enjoins “Gentile or Jew / O you who turn the wheel and look to windward / Consider Phlebas, who was once as handsome and as tall as you.”¹⁴⁴ The poem forces the reader to confront her own mortality and, in doing so, recognize her ultimate identity with the dead Phoenician. Taken alone, this stanza serves as a *memento mori*. Its status as such connects it to the poem’s first address to the reader, as well

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as to the pseudo-sonnets at the beginning of “The Fire Sermon,” which both invoke Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress.”

“Death by Drowning” does not merely develop the theme of death’s omnipresence, which appears throughout the poem in various ways. Rather, it manifests the vision prophesized in the opening section of the poem by “Madam Sosostris, famous clairvoyante.” In “The Burial of the Dead,” Madam Sosostris offers a tarot reading to an unidentified interlocutor. Though she speaks cryptically of “the Lady of the Rocks, / The lady of situations,” and “the man with three staves,” her reading both begins and ends with imagery that anticipates the penultimate section of the poem. First, she identifies the reader’s card as “the drowned Phoenician sailor,” and the reading ends with a warning to “Fear death by drowning” before it segues into a vision of the following section. In addition to presenting a vision that anticipates the “Death by Drowning” section, Madam Sosostris, herself, anticipates the appearance of Tiresias in “The Fire Sermon.” Like Tiresias, Sosostris foresees the substance of the poem. Further, functioning as a mirror of Tiresias, the character from whom the name Sosostris is taken is, like Tiresias, “throbbing between two lives.” The prefiguration of Tiresias in the fortune teller reinforces Eliot’s claim that Tiresias “is the most important personage of the poem,” one who has a vision of “the substance of the poem.”

As a mirror of the prophet, Sosostris reinforces the sense in which “the two sexes meet in Tiresias.” The chains of references and repetitions that foster connections between the

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149 Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 218. The name “Madam Sosostris” is borrowed from character in Aldous Huxley’s *Chrome Yellow* (Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Norton Critical Edition*, 40-42). Indeed, Huxley’s Madam Sesostris is, in fact, the alternate persona of a character named Mr. Scogan. Thus, though Sosostris’ namesake does not exhibit a clear effect on the scene in the poem, the duality of her gender amplifies her connection to Tiresias.
seemingly disparate sections of the poem thus frustrate an attempt to isolate the address to the reader in “Death by Water.” While the address to the reader in “Death by Water” dissolves the reader’s critical distance from the poem by appealing to the reader’s ultimate identity with the dead Phoenician, the connection to the vision of Madam Sosostris incorporates the reader into the poem more generally. Recasting the reader as an object of the poetic vision, which finds completion in the figure of Tiresias, the appeal ultimately integrates the reader into the entirety of the poem, implicating her in a vision animated by historical sense.

Eliot’s commitment to the ongoing labor of both the author and the reader, as well as the poetic techniques that blur the boundaries between them, illuminates the capacity of The Waste Land to cultivate historical sense in individuals. The author’s sense of tradition continues to deepen as the work, in this case both The Waste Land and The Criterion, expands to include new material and new connections. The attentive reader, too, develops historical sense, as the allusive structure of the poem demands that the reader do the labor of reconstructing the historical network of the poem. Further, as the reader works to synthesize the seemingly disparate elements of the poem, she begins to inhabit a vision of reality animated by historical sense. This vision suggests not only the formal, organized structure of the poem, itself a vision of the structure of Eliot’s tradition, but also the capacity of this sense of tradition to restore connections between isolated individuals. Through these relations to the author and the reader, the text intervenes in the individual experience of alienation. In cultivating the historical sense of the individual, the text develops her capacity to integrate perspectives into a more unified vision, thereby bridging the seemingly endless gulf between disparate points of view.
III.3. Dissolving the Borders of Text and Context

The problem identified by *The Waste Land*, and developed elsewhere in Eliot’s corpus, however, is not fundamentally an individual problem. The sense of alienation that permeates *The Waste Land* is societal. The epistemological crisis that renders points of view incommensurable appears in the first stanza of the poem as a crisis of the land itself, as the “sun beats / And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief / And the dry stone no sound of water.”152 This desolate imagery appears again in the final stanza of the poem, only it identifies more specifically a distinctly European historical trajectory in the “Falling towers” of “Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London.”153 The prospect that a poem could address this pervasive condition of radical isolation by animating the historical sense of individual readers or poets appears hopeless. *The Waste Land* itself gestures towards the experience of those possessed of historical sense but lacking interlocutors. The blind prophet Tiresias “foresuffers all” in the poem but does so from outside of the action of the text.154 His capacity for vision simultaneously binds him to and distances him from the personages in the poem. The individual possessed of historical sense may be capable of synthesizing points of view. Surrounded by those that do not acknowledge the unifying force of such a perspective, however, this capacity may throw the individual back into a state of radical isolation. While the expression of alienation at the societal level in *The Waste Land* frustrates, perhaps, an attempt to locate the effect of the work primarily in the relations between the text and the author or the text and the reader, this same feature underscores the importance of Eliot’s account of the relationship between the author and her cultural environment. Throughout *The Sacred Wood*, as well as in other works of criticism, Eliot exhibits an attentiveness to the way in

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which a culture organizes the experience of those within it. Eliot also acknowledges the capacity of works of art to alter the contexts in which they appear. This dually conditioning relationship, in which culture and individual exert formative effects upon each other, suggests a framework for understanding *The Waste Land’s* response to the condition of alienation that it diagnoses.

Eliot’s analysis in “Imperfect Critics” suggests the extent to which a work of art can be informed by the cultural conditions in which it is produced. Indeed, Eliot’s commitment to this formative relation transcends individual historical periods, as he claims that “an understanding of Elizabethan rhetoric is as essential to the appreciation of Elizabethan literature as an understanding of Victorian sentiment is essential to the appreciation of Victorian literature and of George Wyndham.”

Eliot’s attentiveness to the ways in which the cultural context shapes the works of art produced within it manifests, as well, in his treatments of Blake and Dante. Dante, Eliot notes, “had the benefit of a mythology and theology that had undergone a more complete absorption into life than those of Lucretius.” Because Dante writes in a culture with, according to Eliot, a ubiquitous philosophical and theological perspective, he is capable of dealing with philosophy “as an ingredient, it is part of Dante’s world as it is a part of life.” Eliot describes Blake’s genius, by contrast, as lacking a “framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own.” He explicitly blames the shortcomings of Blake as a poet on “the shortcomings of the environment which failed to provide what such a poet needed.” Eliot offers an aside in “The Conceit in Donne and Crashaw” about John Donne’s relation to his own context that further evidences this formative relation between culture and poet.

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In fact, it suggests a narrative trajectory. In his analysis of Donne’s “The Relique,” Eliot notes that “the analogy of the impermanence of graves to the fickleness of women is an association of ideas peculiar to Donne’s idiom.”

Not only is this analogy peculiar, but Eliot proposes that “it indicates that something was beginning to go wrong with civilization about that time” because “there is something ominous when such very dissimilar thoughts and feelings become yoked in one poem.”

The cultural conditions of dissolution, in which a unified theoretical framework is in the process of disintegrating, fosters poetry in which passion “fades into the play of suggested ideas.”

Along with his accounts of the formal techniques of these poets, Eliot traces a parallel narrative of the cultural conditions to which these techniques respond.

In addition to acknowledging the extent to which cultural conditions guide the sensibility of the poet, Eliot also highlights throughout *The Sacred Wood* the capacity of the artist to exhibit an effect upon her culture. This effective reflexivity is most pronounced, perhaps, in Eliot’s claim concerning Philip Massinger that “every vital development in language is a development of feeling as well” and in Massinger this development “is not a development based on, or resulting from, a new way of feeling” but rather “seems to lead us away from feeling altogether.”

This evacuation of feeling, Eliot later notes, is precisely the characteristic that renders Puritanism hideous because

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163 This narrative is generally pessimistic, and one may reject the conclusions that Eliot draws, particularly regarding the tendency towards cultural dissolution or linearity of this trajectory. It is, perhaps, unsurprising that he traces structural fragmentation as a dominant theme given the claims that he makes about state of theoretical and social fragmentation in modernity. Ultimately, my aim here is not to adjudicate the accuracy of this particular narrative, but rather to establish that Eliot postulates a formative relationship between cultural conditions and the artistic developments of poets operating within those conditions.
164 Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 110. In this passage, Eliot leaves ambiguous the causal direction of the development, and this ambiguity reinforces the reflexivity of the account. It is unclear whether Massinger developed, or more precisely detached from, feeling and put this development into language, or whether he captured in language a received development in feeling that had not previously been articulated. Eliot more clearly attributes the development of feeling to the literary work itself when, in the same passage, he claims that “the verses of Shakespeare and the major Shakespearian dramatists is an innovation of this kind, a true mutation of the species” (*Eliot, The Sacred Wood*, 110).
“Puritanism itself became repulsive only when it appeared as the survival of a restraint after the feelings which it restrained had gone.” Eliot marks a development of feeling through, according to Eliot, the evacuation of it, and this evacuation of feeling manifests in developments within Puritan culture. Eliot makes a more explicit suggestion of the cultural effects produced by works of art in his account of the Romanticism of George Wyndham. For, while Wyndham is a manifestation of a particular form of Victorian imperialism, Eliot ponders whether “it might be of interest to divagate from literature to politics and inquire to what extent Romanticism is incorporate in Imperialism; to inquire to what extent Romanticism has possessed the imagination of Imperialists, and to what extent it was made use of by Disraeli.” Though Eliot sadly does not pursue this inquiry, the language of incorporation and possession suggests a strong formative influence. This reflexivity is captured in Eliot’s account of Wyndham himself. For just as much as he was a critic marked by his status as “Gentry,” Wyndham was also an imperialist aristocrat formed by his education in Romanticism. Just as his country life “riding to hounds” should not be set aside when considering his critical work, Eliot suggests that his Romantic outlook cannot be detached from a consideration of his political career. Here, Eliot clearly suggests that works of art can exert significant influence upon their cultural environment.

According to Eliot’s account, the poem’s role in the cultivation of historical sense is thus overdetermined by the poem’s relationships to a host of other forces. These relationships are themselves complicated by the extent to which Eliot’s poetic and critical practice dissolves the boundaries between their poles. The distinction between text and context blurs through Eliot’s

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use of allusion and textual accretion. The distinction between reader and poem blurs as the poem demands that the reader coordinate those allusions, engaging in the archeological recovery and reorganization of the poetic vision. Through this process, the reader traces the chains of allusions and synthesizes them into a coherent whole. Yet the reader’s own point of view is inevitably woven into this process, and the perspectives of the reader and the text are integrated into each other. Similarly, as a cultural artifact, the poem is a product of specific social conditions. It develops out of these conditions and responds to them. The poem also, however, exhibits effects upon the culture from which it develops. These effects range from the imperceptible reorganizations of tradition that occur with the supervention of novelty to the orientation of cultural movements, as with Eliot’s suggestion of the Romantic influence on the imperial outlook. The dissolution of these borders between text and context, text and reader, and text and culture establishes new formative relations between the poles in these dichotomies. The capacity of the work of art to cultivate historical sense, then, exceeds that of the operation of poetry in any of these individual relationships. The poem might excite historical sense in the reader, who adopts a new perspective on her own culture. Or perhaps the poem, either through its immediate influence on culture at large or through its effect upon individuals, orients that culture to historical sense. The culture then may develop into a social context in which members are instilled with an appreciation for the endurance of the past, and this facilitates the capacity to accommodate multiple points of view. Most importantly, though these processes can be isolated in theory, they are always co-implicating, changes in individuals necessarily effecting changes in culture and changes in culture altering the significance of texts.

These myriad and interconnected textual relations are, in fact, suggested in Eliot’s definition of historical sense. They are contained at the heart of The Sacred Wood. The author who
has labored for historical sense writes with “not merely with his generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.”[170] The vision of this simultaneous order cannot be myopically focused simply on the individual works of literature, for it must also recognize “that the material of art is never quite the same.”[171] The complex web of dissolving relations between past works of art, the conditions that informed them, and contemporary conditions that serve as artistic material all inform a piece of literature imbued with historical sense. The work of the artist is shaped, in part, by the “mind of Europe.”[172] Yet the work of the traditional artist alters this structure. It reorganizes the relations between the components. It shifts the conditions of the society in which it appears. It is integrated into the mind of Europe. And through its integration, it participates in the formation of subsequent generations of individuals and artists. These complementary facets of the relationship between the artist and her environment suggest the mechanism by which *The Waste Land* may ameliorate the alienated condition that it diagnoses. It is, indeed, capable of facilitating in its readers a vision of life animated by historical sense. But its status as a cultural artifact extends the force of its effects beyond the individual relation of reader to text. *The Waste Land* reorganizes the structure of historical elements around their enduring presence. It has the potential to imbue the mind of Europe with a cultural expression of historical sense. According to Eliot, the text that is an expression of historical sense both is animated by a cultural tradition and reorganizes that tradition through its appearance. Because, with its intervention, it is incorporated into the pre-existing traditional order, the historical sense directing the production of the text is incorporated into that order, as well. The

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tradition, itself, becomes invested with a sense of the endurance of the past in the present. *The Waste Land* promises not only to facilitate the integration of perspectives for individual readers. Rather, through the activation of historical sense at a cultural level, it facilitates the integration of perspectives and the recovery of a shared world. By self-consciously thematizing historical sense, by injecting an awareness of the saturation of the past in the present into its culture, *The Waste Land* has the potential to create the environment in which it can be read.
THE TEMPORALITY OF HISTORICAL SENSE AND THE PROMISE OF MEMORY

Introduction

In the preceding chapters, I have argued that *The Waste Land* presents two competing visions of modern life. In one of these visions, the poem identifies a condition of alienation that dominates the cultural landscape, foreclosing the possibility of interpersonal connections. This alienated state manifests in nearly all of the poem’s vignettes, but it also resonates in the poem’s systematic allusions to the Grail legend and the tradition of fertility rituals of which that legend is a part. According to the sympathetic logic enshrined in this tradition, the health of the land reflects the health of the people living on it. The unhealthy condition of the people manifests in the aridity of their world. I have argued that, rather than applying this sympathetic logic literally, *The Waste Land* marshals it poetically to identify the epistemic consequences of the alienated condition diagnosed by the poem. When individuals lose their capacity to engage with each other, their shared world disintegrates. Indeed, within the poem, the failures of communication are often accompanied by the sense that the interlocutors occupy radically divergent perspectives with incommensurable experiences of the world. I have argued that the poem does not merely present this alienated condition as an irremediable state that entails the inevitable dissolution of the social fabric. Rather, the poem also contains a vision of life infused with the historical sense that Eliot appeals to throughout *The Sacred Wood*. Historical sense operates as a capacity to synthesize perspectives and, in so doing, promises to recover the possibility of a shared world. In addition to articulating the synthetic capacity of historical sense, the poem’s use of allusion and repetition engage the reader in the process of cultivating the attention to history that the poem enjoins.
The historical sense to which Eliot appeals in *The Sacred Wood*, the historical sense that animates the poetic vision of the recovery of a shared world, depends upon the capacity to recognize the enduring action of the past within the present. Indeed, by enjoining a recognition of the endurance of the past, Eliot’s notion of historical sense seems to require a reconceptualization of time itself. Eliot does not, however, explicate the nature of the past’s endurance, nor does he argue for the veracity of his appeal to it. The legitimacy of this account of historical sense is not Eliot’s quarry in the essay in which it is introduced. Nor is the poetic form of *The Waste Land* adequate to the analytical explication and justification of this historical sense, as Eliot makes clear in the essay on Dante. The primary evidence that Eliot offers in favor of historical sense is, in fact, the fecundity of its application. Attention to historical sense illuminates the literary tradition, as well as one’s relation to it, and further facilitates the synthesis of perspectives required for intersubjective experience. Yet these promised fruits of historical sense depend upon, rather than justify, the account of temporality assumed by the appeal to the past’s endurance.

If the past does not endure as Eliot suggests in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” then the shared world that *The Waste Land* promises through its application would, in fact, be built upon an illusory foundation. The recovery of a shared reality would amount to a retreat into a collective fantasy. Such a retreat into fantasy is precisely the charge leveled against modernist literature by Georg Lukács. Modernism, he claims, abandons all commitment to the interrogation of objective reality, taking refuge instead in untethered subjective fantasy. According to Lukács, this is the inevitable consequence of modernism’s commitment to alienation as essential to the human condition. Thus, if the account of temporality implicit in Eliot’s appeal to historical sense
is illusory, then *The Waste Land* does not promise to overcome alienation. Instead, it proposes to escape from the experience of radical isolation through the cultivation of a shared fantasy.¹

In order to defend my claim that *The Waste Land* presents a legitimate response to the condition that it diagnoses, I will argue that a coherent temporal framework underwrites Eliot’s account of historical sense. Eliot unfortunately does not himself articulate this framework. Nor indeed does he identify explicitly the radical reorientation to time demanded by his appeal to, and application of, historical sense. In this chapter, I will argue that the account of historical sense presented by Eliot in *The Sacred Wood* implicitly contains the necessary conditions of the temporal account operative in *The Waste Land*. In the first section of this chapter, then, I will identify these conditions. Further, I will investigate Eliot’s juxtaposition of historical sense against approaches to history that he describes as deficient. I will argue that this juxtaposition reveals the challenge that historical sense poses to traditional linear temporal frameworks. Acknowledging that Eliot does not engage with particularly compelling examples of linear temporality in his development of historical sense in *The Sacred Wood*, in the second section of the chapter I will consider the possibility that a more robust linear temporality could meet the conditions of historical sense. In particular, I will consider the account of history presented by F.H. Bradley, whose work significantly influenced Eliot. Though a Bradleyan temporal framework seems capable of meeting the necessary conditions of Eliot’s appeal to tradition, the operation of historical sense in *The Waste Land* reveals that even a robust linear model cannot fully account for the endurance of the past as demanded by Eliot. Thus, I claim, Eliot’s account of historical sense demands a complete

¹ One may initially be inclined to argue that such a collective fantasy would, at least, be preferable to the experience of radical alienation diagnosed in *The Waste Land*. I maintain, however, that the admission that this shared perspective is won through the rejection of reality renders the position untenable. For once veracity is abandoned as a condition for the success of an account, any shared perspective becomes legitimate so long as it is powerful enough to warrant assent. I take the ramifications of this condition to be self-evidently problematic and, further, implicitly identified in the argument of the second chapter.
reconceptualization of temporality. In the third section, I will argue that Henri Bergson, by whom Eliot was also profoundly influenced, offers in his investigation of memory an account of time that meets the conditions needed to ground historical sense. I will identify the features of the Bergsonian temporal framework that can provide the theoretical ground for Eliot’s account, and I will locate these features within the larger Bergsonian system. In doing so, I will articulate the breadth of the reorientation demanded by Eliot’s account of historical sense.

I. The Temporal Ground of Historical Sense

In “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot does not articulate the conceptual ramifications of the historical sense that he asserts is “indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year.” Indeed, at the end of the text, he notes that “this essay proposes to halt at the frontier of metaphysics or mysticism, and confine itself to such practical conclusions as can be applied by the responsible person interested in poetry.” Here Eliot self-consciously limits the scope of his analysis to the elements of historical sense that facilitate its application in poetry and criticism. He is not concerned with the demands that this precondition for poetry makes upon our understanding of time itself. Yet the account of historical sense that Eliot develops clearly entails such theoretical conditions, even if the essay’s purview does not extend to their explication. For example, Eliot reformulates his central claim that historical sense involves an awareness “not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence” when he claims that it should come as no surprise that “the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.” This reformulation suggests a mutual causal or directing relation between past and present, though it leaves opaque the precise relation of the terms. Additionally, Eliot deems an argument

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for this suggested relation between past and future unnecessary. For he claims that “whoever has approved of this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature,” will not find the reciprocal interaction of past and present preposterous. Nevertheless, despite this claim that his notion of historical sense should be uncontroversial, Eliot takes care to distinguish his account of tradition from other prevailing uses of the term. This juxtaposition of historical sense against deficient modes of engaging with the past, found both in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” and “Ulysses, Order, Myth,” delineates the contours of the necessary temporal framework. Further, though Eliot does not fully explicate the conceptual ramifications of his appeal to historical sense, the structural elements of his account nevertheless suggest the conditions that must apply for an account of temporality to accommodate the reorientation to time that he endorses.

Eliot identifies two primary features of historical sense that have significant implications for the structure of temporality assumed by this orientation to the past. Each of these features specifies the manner in which the past persists in the present. The first specification appears as part of the explanation of the past’s endurance. According to Eliot, the author possessed of historical sense “writes 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 and composes a simultaneous order.” As I noted in the previous chapter, the appeal to a “feeling” of this simultaneous order suggests that it may depend upon the artist. Eliot clarifies, however, that the “existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves,” and as such, they do not depend

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6 Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 41. Many excellent Eliot scholars emphasize precisely this passage in “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” C.D. Blanton’s account, in *Epic Negation*, of Eliot’s editorial methodology draws upon this idea of an accretive structure. In *T.S. Eliot’s Intellectual and Poetic Development: 1909–1922*, Piers Gray articulates the centrality of this notion of simultaneous order to *The Waste Land*. In the previous chapter, I aligned myself with their accounts in many ways, though I indicated that the accounts were insufficient in their failures to accommodate the specific vision of the poem itself. These deficiencies belie the extent to which these scholars have privileged this structural element of historical sense over the developmental aspect, to which I will turn shortly.
upon any individual’s awareness of this order. The past, then, perpetually endures in an ideal structure of relations that conditions the significance of new material. This structure is in perpetual flux, and thus the past itself is not static but “is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art.” Eliot’s emphasis on the ideality of this structure, and on the labor involved on the part of the artist to attain a vision of it, gives the impression that the past operates as a superstructure. It seems to exist apart from the world of actuality, yet it is accessible as an ideal aesthetic object.

Eliot complicates this impression of pure ideality, however, when he employs the metaphorics of memory to illuminate the persistence of the past. He juxtaposes the private mind of the artist with “the mind of Europe – the mind of his own country.” Eliot seems to prioritize this mind of Europe above the individual mind of the artist. Yet, even in doing so he treats them as analogous entities. Like an individual, the mind of Europe changes, and this change “is a development which abandons nothing en route, which does not superannuate either Shakespeare or Homer or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsmen.” The past is not merely an ideal order over and against the present. Rather, the present is an expression of the “development,

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7 Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 41. I have already established that the ideal order does not depend upon any individual perspective of it. Here I am interested less in the nature of the ideal order than in the present reality with which this order endows the past.
8 Here the intervention in this structure is a new work of art, but I have previously argued that Eliot’s poetic practice disrupts the firm distinction between works of art and historical developments more generally.
10 The Bergsonian account of time that I will appeal to in response to the conditions established in these passages will call into question whether the appeal to memory is, in fact, metaphorical. Ultimately, I will suggest that it is not, and in the final chapter of this dissertation I intend to develop a more expansive account of memory grounded in Eliot’s Bergsonian framework. As these are both points that need to be further developed, I will initially treat this description as metaphorical.
11 Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 42. Despite Eliot’s Eurocentric formulation of this claim, I argued in the first section of the previous chapter that the pressure of his account of historical sense actually necessitates an appeal to increasingly comprehensive wholes. Artificially restricting the account of tradition to “the Mind of Europe” undermines the synthetic power that promises to facilitate shared perspectives and reinscribes the alienated conditions described in *The Waste Land* at a cultural, rather than individual, level. So, while Eliot formulates his account in Eurocentric terms, I maintain his account actually depends upon a more capacious understanding of tradition that is not bound by arbitrary spatial limits.
refinement perhaps, complication certainly” of the ideal structure of the past, identified as the mind of Europe.  

The present is the continuation of this development. Thus, the ideal order of tradition is immanent to, and indeed constitutive of, the present. Eliot does not set the two radically apart. Rather, he claims that the difference “between the present and the past is that that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past’s awareness of itself cannot show.” Thus, Eliot’s account of tradition does not merely demand a temporal framework that permits the endurance of the past as an ideal order that can be reflected upon. It also appeals to the continuity of this ideal order with the present, such that the past develops into and expresses itself through the present.

These paired descriptions of historical sense establish three main conditions that an account of temporality must accommodate if it is to be capable of grounding historical sense as expressed in “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” First, Eliot’s initial description of historical sense straightforwardly establishes that this account of temporality must permit the endurance of the past as an ideal order, as well as the past’s endurance independent of the artists who engage with it. Second, though the existence of this order is independent of the artists who work upon it, the account further specifies that the ideal order and the relations between the terms that constitute it must be affected by the intervention of the present. Finally, Eliot’s subsequent appeal to the developing mind of Europe entails that the account of temporality must accommodate and account for the past’s preservation in and immanence to the present, insofar as the present is the continuing development of the past.

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15 “The *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered” (Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 41).
Though these conditions alone do not provide a particularly robust delineation of the conception of time that underwrites his account, Eliot appeals to deficient models of engaging with tradition in order to illuminate his notion of historical sense more clearly. The juxtaposition of historical sense with these insufficient alternatives brings the temporal conditions of his account into sharper relief. Further, not only does the contrast with these deficient approaches to tradition more clearly illuminate the necessary elements of a framework capable of grounding historical sense, it also reveals the extent to which this framework demands a radical reorientation to temporality. This radical reorientation becomes necessary, I will argue, because at the root of Eliot’s critiques is an implicit rejection of linear models of time along with the assumption of time’s passage that underwrites them.

When Eliot introduces the notion of historical sense, he positions it between a pair of alternative approaches to tradition. Though Eliot caricatures both of these accounts, the ways in which he does so illuminate the contours of his own position. Thus, though I think there may be limited value in reading his critiques with an eye to their argumentative force, I maintain they are nevertheless worth considering because of the elements of historical sense they bring into relief. Eliot first notes a tendency, when praising a poet, to “dwell with satisfaction upon the poet’s difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavor to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed.”\footnote{Eliot, \textit{The Sacred Wood}, 40.} This approach to criticism considers the past only in order to identify the ways in which the artist in question has injected novelty into it. Because this approach identifies “what is individual, what is the particular essence of the man” with “those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else,” it elides the relation between the artist and a tradition of other artists, as well as the artist’s relation to the network of
cultural forces conditioning that tradition. Thus, the contemporary artist becomes an atomic unit, separated from a past that comprises myriad analogous units. Further, because the value of a work of art is identified with its novelty, the introduction of new artistic material renders prior productions obsolete. They become objects to be admired, perhaps, but they are no longer relevant to contemporary circumstances. Eliot does not criticize this fascination with novelty simply for attending to the new dimensions of a literary work or for juxtaposing contemporary works of art against prior productions. Indeed, Eliot clarifies that evaluating an artist requires setting him “for contrast and comparison among the dead.” The deficiency, then, is neither the impulse to compare nor an interest in novelty. Instead, it is the attempt to atomize the work of art into a discrete unit that is detached from networks of historical relations and whose identity is defined exclusively by its novel elements. The failure arises through the elision of the simultaneous order in which the contemporary work participates and through which it attains its significance. The attempt to detach the present work from the past evacuates it of its identity.

The second deficient tendency against which Eliot positions historical sense initially appears antithetical to the first. Eliot claims that, instead of championing the pure novelty of artistic works, this impulse follows “the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes,” and he clarifies that this approach to tradition “should positively be

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18 In this way, the approach to criticism that overemphasizes novelty as a criterion of judgement adopts an orientation to the past analogous to the mode of classicism that, as Eliot claims in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” simply means “turning away from nine-tenths of the material which lies at hand, and selecting only mummified stuff from a museum – like some contemporary writers about whom one could say some nasty things in this connexion” (Eliot, “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” 477–478). The reverence for novelty adopts a similar orientation to the past but makes the opposite evaluative judgment. Rather than turning away from contemporary material, this commitment to novelty dismisses the material of the past. With its reverence for the reified antiquities it has made of the past, this mummified classicism, however, more closely resembles the second deficient mode of critique that Eliot identifies in “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” The similarities shared by the mummified classicism and both deficient modes of critique further establish the continuity between the positions Eliot critiques in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” a continuity to which I will turn momentarily.
discouraged.”

This approach does not reify the past in order to escape it. Rather it pursues the repetition of established forms in order to preserve the present as a mere continuation or repetition of the past. This repetitive engagement with tradition fails because it does not acknowledge that “the material of art is never quite the same.” The repetition of traditional forms, then, necessarily entails ignoring the alteration of the conditions to which art responds. In this way, the mode of tradition that slavishly repeats traditional forms closely resembles the classicism that turns “away from nine-tenths of the material which lies at hand” and selects “only the mummified stuff from a museum” that Eliot derides in “Ulysses, Order, Myth.” In these cases, the approach to past forms reifies them, preserving them as objects detached from or even preferable to present conditions. Rather than dismiss this unchanging past as irrelevant to the present, as Eliot’s imagined interlocutor exclusively concerned with novelty does, this repetitive approach to tradition retreats into an ossified formal structure and elides the perpetual development of cultural conditions. The two deficient approaches to tradition identified by Eliot take opposite evaluative stances towards the past. Yet these opposing critical stances fail to meet the standard of historical sense in complementary ways. The first deficient approach to tradition elides the enduring relevance of the past, focusing instead on the interruption of novelty. The second denies the demands that the

22 Martin Hägglund articulates extensively and convincingly the folly of attempting to preserve an eternal or enduring present in Dying for Time. Indeed, he argues that, insofar as the notion of the present entails its transition into the past, the project of preserving or repeating it is necessarily doomed to fail.
23 Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 42.
25 On this point, Eliot notes he is aligned with the target of his general critique, Richard Aldington, in refusing to juxtapose classicism against romanticism in the way that people speak “of political parties, Conservative and Liberal, Republican and Democrat, on a ‘turn the rascals out’ platform” (Eliot, “Ulysses, Order, Myth,” 477). This contrast, however, does seem to characterize precisely the opposition between the classicism of the museum and the obsession with novelty.
26 Though Eliot articulates these unsatisfactory approaches to the past through a description of modes of literary criticism, the attitudes that he identifies saturate contemporary discourse. The obsession with disruption as a category of social development manifests the appeal to novelty as a primary criterion of value. Conversely, the endurance of nationalistic populist discourse has illuminated the force of a promise to re-install anachronistic formal conditions.
present makes upon the past and the perpetual development of the conditions to which art responds, retreating instead into ossified conventions. The former attempts to escape from a past that it deems static and decrepit, while the latter attempts to render the past static in order to evade the ever-changing demands of the shifting present.

Though these two attitudes appear contradictory, with one disparaging the past and the other attempting to preserve it, they are nevertheless grounded in the same orientation to history as unchanging and removed from the present. The excessive concern for novelty appeals to precisely this sense of the past’s irrelevance to justify its elision. The mummified classicism reveres ossified historical forms and attempts to retreat into them as a static refuge from the demands of a dynamic present. This shared orientation, further, reveals a more fundamental commitment to the operation of time as passage from present into past. The present moment passes away, ceases to exist, and becomes past. The past is unchanging precisely because it has ceased to be and is fixed in a linear sequence of moments. This sense of passage amplifies the impulse to detach the past from the present by emphasizing the moment’s extinction as time progresses. Thus, distance comes to characterize the relationship between past and present, and this sense of distance facilitates the reification of history. The first deficient approach to tradition attempts to hasten the passage of time, identifying passage with progress. Not only does the present moment recede into the past, but as soon as it has done so it is deemed deficient in comparison to the new present. The second approach implicitly endorses the notion of passage first insofar as it treats tradition as a collection of relics to be preserved or objects to be inherited and then again insofar as it identifies passage as an enemy to be resisted. The past recedes, but its relics remain as bulwarks against the chaos of change.
These deficient approaches to history fail precisely because of their shared commitment to the passage of time, and the insufficiency of the notion of temporal passage reveals the extent to which Eliot’s account of historical sense demands a radical reorientation to temporality. With his explication of historical sense, Eliot does not merely identify the necessary conditions for a satisfactory understanding of tradition. The implications of Eliot’s rejection of time as passage extend well beyond the approaches to tradition that Eliot caricatures and juxtaposes with historical sense, for the notion of time as passage is fundamental to linear models of temporal progress. The representation of the present moment as a point on a line depends upon a conception of present as perpetually passing away. In order for a new moment to become actual, in order for change to occur, the present must fade into the past and cease to exist. Indeed, the linear spatialization of time requires conceiving of the past as left behind in order to represent the present moment as making way for the future.\(^{27}\) Thus, if one of the necessary conditions of historical sense entails the rejection of accounts of time dependent upon its passage, then the conditions of historical sense also demand the adoption of a nonlinear temporal framework. The temporal framework that grounds Eliot’s account of historical sense must, then, account for the endurance of the past as an independent ideal order. It must accommodate the intervention of the present into this ideal order. And it must also recognize the immanence of the past in the present, insofar as the present is conditioned by and an expression of the past from which it develops. Further, this account of temporality cannot be grounded in a commitment to the passage of time, and thus it must exhibit a non-linear structure.

\(^{27}\) Alia al-Saji provides a helpful primer on this model of time, which she refers to as the “standard” account (Al-Saji, “The memory of another past,” 204). She describes the structure I have referred to as passage as “the chronological succession of instants,” and this description grounds her distinction between the standard account and a model capable of accommodating “the actual passage of time” (Al-Saji, “The memory of another past,” 204, 205). Despite these differences in vocabulary, the model she develops as standard aligns with what I present here and supplements my somewhat more cursory account.
II. F.H. Bradley as a Possible Guarantor of Tradition

Eliot does not, of course, present historical sense as an explicit rejection of linear temporality. Rather, he positions historical sense between two alternative approaches to tradition which, I have argued, fail precisely because of their assumptions about the nature of time as passage. Eliot does not present these alternatives as particularly nuanced positions, and they are clearly adduced in order to be rejected. Because Eliot presents these alternatives as straw men, one might object that Eliot’s critique engages rhetorically with accounts of tradition grounded in a naïve approach to linear temporality. They endorse a false dichotomy between a present that exists and a past that has simply expired. They do not acknowledge the enduring impact that elements of the past can have upon subsequent moments. Nor do they fully recognize the endurance of entities through time. Instead, they isolate artifacts from historical moments, ossifying them and fixing their significance in the no-longer present. One might suggest that the conditions of Eliot’s historical sense may still be satisfied by a linear account of temporality if this linear temporality exhibited more nuance in its engagement with the persistence of objects through time. According to such an account, the past may indeed recede out of existence, but the effects of the past persist beyond the moment of their instantiation. These effects may be concrete objects, such as the works of art with which Eliot concerns himself in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” or they may be ideal frameworks, such as political or cultural structures. Events may be consigned to the past, but they retain their significance for the present through the endurance of the effects they have produced. Thus, the literary tradition may be said to persist as an ideal order insofar as the works that comprise that tradition are accessible. Further, the production of new literary artifacts adjusts this order, and the significance of each object comprising it is adjusted accordingly. F.H. Bradley offers an account of history that seems to endorse precisely such a linear model of temporality in *The
Presuppositions of Critical History, but this model is grounded in a more robust ontological structure. This structure, in turn, bolsters elements of the account capable of underwriting the temporality of historical sense, especially given Eliot’s indebtedness to Bradley’s epistemological framework. Bradley’s account of history thus promises to illuminate the extent to which a linear account of temporality might meet the conditions of historical sense.

In The Presuppositions of Critical History, Bradley endeavors to determine the status of a historical fact and the conditions under which a historian can appeal to the testimony of a historical witness. Bradley’s assumptions about the nature of time dictate the necessity of this investigation, for the difficulty of establishing a historical fact arises precisely because of the inaccessibility of the past. Throughout The Presuppositions of Critical History, Bradley refers to the past as dead. An event “perishes as soon as it arises.”28 It recedes into the past, becoming inaccessible such that, as an original fact, it “can never be recalled…cannot repeat itself, and we are powerless to repeat it.”29 The event passes and dies. The task of history, he claims, is “to breathe the life of the present into the death of the past” by attending to the testimony of witnesses to that past.30 This testimony can only truly be brought into contact with the present if an identity or analogy between the perspectives of the witness and the critic can be established. Only, that is, when the world of the historical witness can be established as commensurate with the world of the critic can the account of the witness become the material for a critical history. So, while the event itself dies as soon as it occurs, with the present ever receding into the past, traces of this event are recorded as historical testimony. When this testimony can be reconciled to the perspective of the present, it is brought into present consciousness and synthesized into the order of historical facts. The past continues to

28 Bradley, The Presuppositions of Critical History, 35
29 Bradley, The Presuppositions of Critical History, 35.
30 Bradley, The Presuppositions of Critical History, 32.
exist in the present insofar as a record of it persists, assuming that the record is commensurable with the perspective of the critical historian. The historian is charged with evaluating this testimony, identifying what is reliable, and synthesizing it into a “continuous whole” by filling in the gaps left in the record. The past, then, only seems to endure in the present through its persistence in objects, testimony and artifacts, and the ideal order created from these relics depends entirely upon the perspective of the present minds who work upon them.

Bradley adopts the limited vantage of the historian in *The Presuppositions of Critical History*, but his discussions of time elsewhere in his corpus establish that this is an incomplete perspective. From the view of the present, the past is dead except to the extent that its relics can be accommodated to present awareness. In *Appearance and Reality*, however, Bradley explicates the reality of time as manifesting in a multitude of temporal series contemporaneous with each other in the Absolute. Though the former account depends upon a temporality of passage according to which the present flows into the past and is annihilated, Bradley suggests in *Appearance and Reality* that “the direction, and the distinction between past and future, entirely depends on our experience.” From an Absolute perspective, all possible temporal series are co-actual, which ultimately entails the coexistence of all events. Bradley appeals in the *Principles of Logic* to the ubiquitous metaphor of a river to articulate the relationship between the limited perspective of passage and the Absolute perspective of coexistence. According to this metaphor, time flows like a stream, and we are “in total darkness hung over…and looking down on it.”

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32 Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 214. Bradley’s ultimate ontological structure is not my quarry here, and the arguments that he adduces for the necessary coexistence in the Absolute of all possible temporal sequences is beyond the purview of this chapter. I merely mean to establish that, within the Bradleyan framework, the account of the past as dead stands in contrast to the vantage of the Absolute from which all events exist simultaneously. This limited account of passage reinforces the framework’s compatibility with the first criterion of historical sense. Ultimately, however, I will argue that it remains insufficient as a temporal ground.
illuminated “right under our faces,” and this illuminated portion “ceaselessly widens and narrows its area, and shows us what passes away on the current.”\(^{34}\) The illuminated water represents the current moment, but the stream carries this water into the darkness and out of view. Because we are suspended above the stream, anything that passes through our field of vision is irrecoverable once it enters the “utter darkness” beyond the light of the now and the comparably dimmer light of the immediate past and future.\(^{35}\) Though only a miniscule portion of the stream is visible to us at any given time, the stream itself does not cease to exist when it passes beyond the illuminated area. It becomes imperceptible, but it continues to flow. With this metaphor, Bradley appeals to a temporality of passage while simultaneously affirming the endurance of the past. Time passes. The present recedes into the past and eventually becomes inaccessible to us as experiencing subjects. Yet the past continues to persist from a totalizing Absolute perspective, which perceives at once the continuity of the whole of existence.

Taken together, Bradley’s articulations of a linear temporality seem to approach satisfying Eliot’s necessary conditions for historical sense. The appeal to an Absolute perspective affirms the endurance of the past, while the stable flow of the river suggests that the past persists in an ideal order. The account of testimony from *The Presuppositions of Critical History* supplements this account by affirming the limitations of the individual perspective, for which the present is rendered extinct as soon as it becomes past, while also explaining how we can continue to access a past that appears dead. Though we cannot adopt the Absolute perspective for which all of time exists simultaneously, we do have access to the past through the testimony of its contemporaries as preserved in artifacts. This testimony provides us with a more expansive view of the order of the past than we have access to alone. Further, though the artifacts themselves do not change, their


place within the ideal structure is perpetually modified by the intervention of new events and through their accommodation to the perspectives of subsequent historians.\textsuperscript{36} Thus, this linear account of temporality accommodates the first two conditions of historical sense. It can account for the endurance of the past for our limited perspectives by appealing to the preservation of historical artifacts while also affirming the continued existence of the past within an Absolute perspective. From the limited perspective, these artifacts can be understood as constituting an ideal order. Further, this ideal order would, of course, be altered by the intervention of new material. The limited account of critical history cannot accommodate the criterion that the present manifests as the continued development of the past and that this development leaves nothing behind, for this account explicitly entails the radical separation of the past from the present in the past’s extinction. The Absolute perspective, however, is compatible with this condition. For the entire stream of time is continuous, and no part of it can be left out of the totalizing point of view. Though gaps are inevitable with respect to historical testimony, this Absolute point of view, which cannot in fact be adopted by the individual, does not contain gaps. The present, then, is the development of the past, but even as the present itself passes it is not left behind. Thus, a linear temporal framework grounded in a Bradleyan idealism appears capable of satisfying the conditions of historical sense as Eliot outlines it in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” and it seems Eliot does not necessarily enjoin a complete rejection of linear temporality.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{36} The shift in emphasis from the past itself to the events or artifacts of the past marks a departure from Eliot’s claim that, according to his account of historical sense, “the past is altered by the present as the present is directed by the past” (Eliot, \textit{The Sacred Wood}, 41). The proponent of a linear temporal grounding for historical sense may respond that “past” is being used loosely in this context and includes its enduring effects. I propose, however, that the systematic attribution to Eliot of a conflation between the past and its effects is a necessary consequence of this linear model. The past must be reified in order for endurance to be ascribed to it. Thus, Eliot’s appeals to the past must be re-interpreted as referring to its substantive effects.

\textsuperscript{37} In response to the difficulties posed by the criterion that the past remains immanent to the present through its continued development, one may argue that this criterion may actually be dismissed as metaphorical residue. This criterion was derived from the analogy between European culture and a mind. If the significance of this analogy is
While Eliot leaves opaque the precise contours of the past’s enduring effect upon the present, *The Waste Land* articulates a number of ways in which history persists. Historical material appears in the speech of personages throughout the poem as these various speakers give voice to a past preserved in individual memory. Historical voices also speak into the poem of their own accord, interrupting the pattern of vignettes. Further, the voice of the poem’s abstract speaker, distinct from any contextualized personage, registers its own historical perspective by coordinating various passages throughout the poem with historical events long past. The poem’s incorporation of these various modes of historical intervention offers insight into the operation of the ideal order to which historical sense appeals. For if, as I have argued, *The Waste Land* is a poem animated by historical sense, and indeed designed to activate this sense in the reader, then that historical sense should support the operation of the past that manifests in the poem. If, then, a linear account of temporality promises to ground historical sense, it must also be capable of underwriting the poem’s deployment of historical material. I have suggested that a roughly Bradelyan account of time may be able to accommodate the conditions of historical sense. I maintain, however, that it is incapable of accounting for the breadth of the past’s effects in *The Waste Land*. The appearance of historical material in the poetic setting or in appeals made by individual personages may be generally commensurable with linear temporal frameworks, and the voice of the abstract poetic speaker may be taken to represent something approaching an Absolute perspective, as articulated in Bradley’s account. Yet the irruption of historical voices into the fabric of the poem itself resists the limitations of this linear temporal framework.

One example of the poem’s incorporation of the past appears in the stanzas of “The Fire Sermon” spoken by the Thames sisters. Here, the personages of the poem give voice to the past.

minimized, Eliot’s claim that tradition “abandons nothing en route” becomes less demanding (Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 42). It simply becomes a statement of Eliot’s commitment to new works of art not invalidating their predecessors.
This incorporation of the past in the voice of a character seems commensurate with linear temporality. Eliot notes that the first Thames sister’s lament that “Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew / Undid me” echoes La Pia’s address to Dante in Purgatorio. Here, the sister recontextualizes her own situation by appealing to the past. With this appeal, the sister imbues her lament of seduction and loss with the spiritual aimlessness of purgatory. A speaker in “The Burial of the Dead” analogously gives voice to the past when he addresses a compatriot. The speaker calls out to an acquaintance, addressing him as “‘Stetson! / ‘You who were with me in the ships at Mylae.” With its references to Austrian nobility and appeals to blooming corpses, “The Burial of the Dead” invokes the context of the First World War throughout the section. Yet here, the speaker elicits the weight of a history of conflicts between world powers by appealing to the First Punic War. Just as the Thames sister does with her invocation of Dante in “The Fire Sermon,” the speaker here actively incorporates the past into a description of the present. By substituting Mylae for the Somme, the speaker burdens the exchange with an extensive history of war. The substitution invests the unsettling reference to the “corpse you planted in your garden last year” not only with the significance of the casualties of the contemporary conflict but also with a millennia-long history of war dead. In this passage, a personage in the poem draws the relation between past and present. The substitution seems to be effected by the memory of an individual character, and the relation does not need to have preceded its identification by a speaker. These appeals to the endurance of the past seem reconcilable with a linear temporality. Individuals draw

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connections between the present and a past that exists as a written record. The present relates to the past only insofar as the individual draws upon relics of the past to make the connection.

The appeal to historical events as analogous to, or even continuous with, contemporary events also appears at the level of the poetic abstract in “What the Thunder Said.” Here, an individual personage in the poem does not give voice to the relation in a specific context. Rather, a disembodied speaker establishes an identity between “Falling towers / Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London / Unreal.”\textsuperscript{43} The description of these collapsing cities as “unreal” hearkens back to the “The Burial of the Dead,” with its reference to Mylae and its description of London as an “Unreal city.”\textsuperscript{44} Drawing the connection between these episodes of collapse from the vantage of the abstract poetic speaker establishes the connection as independent of the individual perspectives that give voice to it elsewhere. Further, Tiresias’ appearance in “The Fire Sermon” firmly establishes that the enduring connection of the past to the present is independent of any individual perspective that cognizes that connection. Tiresias presents his vision of the violet hour from a position outside of the action of the poem itself. Tiresias experiences the action of the poem, but he does so from a historical perspective. He “foresuffers” the events of “The Fire Sermon” just as he “sat by Thebes below the wall / And walked among the lowest of the dead.”\textsuperscript{45} With Tiresias’ intervention, the past is given its own perspective on the present. The past does not merely persist in the present as an order of connections to be intuited. The appearance of Tiresias grants this ideal order its own relation to the present along with a capacity to facilitate connections between the present and the past.

\textsuperscript{44} Eliot, \textit{The Waste Land}, 376, 60.
Philomel appears twice in *The Waste Land*, and the contrast between these appearances reveals the dimension of the past’s endurance in the poem that cannot be accounted for according to a linear temporal framework. I have argued that her repeated appearance reveals connections between characters in the poem who are violently silenced. By revealing these connections, Philomel illuminates the capacity of historical sense to integrate perspectives and restore the possibility of empathy. The figures whose voices are excised from the poem attain a shared voice in the song of Philomel, and this shared voice connects them across contexts. Philomel’s appearance in the poem is not uniform, however, and the discrepancy in the form of her appearance suggests an endurance of the past that is not tethered to objective representation. When Philomel first appears in “A Game of Chess,” she participates in the scene as a decorative fixture of the environment. A representation of Philomel’s transformation is displayed “Above the mantel... / As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene.” The depiction of Philomel is just one of many adorning the room, as “other withered stumps of time / Were told upon the walls.” The connection between Philomel and the scene in which she intervenes arises from the graphic representation of Philomel within the setting of the scene itself. Here, the past is preserved through the visual reproduction of a literary tradition. Further, the poem presents the representation of Philomel in terms analogous to those used to describe the deficient approach to classicism in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth.” Philomel appears among “other withered stumps of time” that adorn the room, and these various scenes mingle discordantly with “standards wrought with fruited vines / From which golden Cupidon peeped out” and a “colored stone / In which sad light a carved

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46 This argument appears in the second section of Chapter 3.
dolphin swam.\textsuperscript{49} The room displays a collection of reified moments, preserving them in and for the present. And though the characters in the scene are inattentive to these vestiges of the past, Philomel still cries “‘Jug, Jug’ to dirty ears.”\textsuperscript{50} The artistic reproduction of these scenes invests the poetic present with historical significance. Were the characters in the scene possessed of historical sense, they would perhaps be attentive to the enduring relevance of Philomel’s song, which echoes into the space because it is artistically reproduced.

While Philomel’s appearance in “A Game of Chess” is commensurate with the linear temporal framework’s dependence upon the preservation of the past in objects, her intervention in “The Fire Sermon” departs radically from this model. In “The Fire Sermon,” Philomel does not appear as an artificial feature of the environment. Instead, Philomel intervenes directly into the poem. “A Game of Chess” appeals to a visual reproduction of Philomel’s transformation, which necessarily leaves her song assumed. In “The Fire Sermon,” Philomel’s song, “Twit twit twit / Jug jug jug jug jug / So rudely forc’d / Tereu,” occupies its own stanza.\textsuperscript{51} It interrupts the sequence of vignettes, commenting upon them but not as an object in the scene. The voice of Philomel, operating as a vehicle for the ideal order of tradition, reveals that the past persists in the present as an active force. Philomel does not merely exist in representations. Her song interrupts the poem, intervening in the poetic present. The poem seems to suggest, then, that tradition persists alongside the present, engaged with it but not immediately part of it. Philomel’s continued activity, free of a dependence upon her objective representation, resists the limitations of the linear temporal

\textsuperscript{49} Eliot, \textit{The Waste Land}, 105, 78–79, 95–96. This description of the room as a repository of discordant moments amplifies the ambivalence of the participants in the scene to the echoes of the past that surround them. The past appears to be severed from the present and exhibits an atomized existence.

\textsuperscript{50} Eliot, \textit{The Waste Land}, 103.

\textsuperscript{51} Eliot, \textit{The Waste Land}, 203–206. I am indebted to Jeanne Bovet for highlighting the importance of the distinction between Philomel’s voiceless appearance in “A Game of Chess” and her vocal interruption of the poem in “The Fire Sermon.” Without the active intervention of Philomel in “The Fire Sermon,” her appearance in the poem would amount to yet another silencing.
framework. The contrast between Philomel’s active intervention and passive representation in the poem disrupts the attempt to accommodate Eliot’s account of tradition to a linear temporality. Instead, it entails the need for a non-linear temporal framework capable of grounding the possibility of interaction between past and present that does not depend upon representation or production.

Philomel’s intervention in the poem marks an irruption of the past into the present that does not depend upon the reification of the past in artifacts. Indeed, such irruptions occur throughout The Waste Land, and they are presented at diverse vocal registers. For example, in “The Fire Sermon,” the “Weialala leia / Wallala leialala” of Wagner’s Rhine-maidens punctuates the song of the three Thames sisters.52 As the song of Philomel connects women who are silenced in the poem, the song of the Rhine-maidens establishes connections between figures who are undone along the river Thames.53 As Philomel does in her second appearance, the Rhine-maidens sing directly into the poem. They are neither represented in the environment nor is their song put in the mouth of a speaking figure. Indeed, only the song itself appears.

The poem describes the intervention of the past in the present, then, in at least five different ways. The past is represented in the environment of the poem itself through artifacts as “withered stumps of time” that are “told upon the walls.”54 The voices of the past intervene directly into the

52 Eliot identifies the three speaking figures as the Thames sisters in his notes (The Waste Land: Norton Critical Edition, 24). Though the sisters only speak between lines 292 and 306, Eliot identifies the beginning of their song at 266. Thus, Eliot suggests that the song of the Rhine-maidens, the story of Elizabeth and Leicester, and the verses of the Thames sisters themselves cohere into a unified whole.

53 Eliot, The Waste Land, 294. Though I focus here on the three verses of the Thames sisters themselves, the appearance of Elizabeth and Leicester adds a complicating dimension to this passage. Again, the past intervenes in the poem. In this case, the historical material does not clearly inform the poetic characters that it accompanies. Rather, the stories of the Thames sisters, in conjunction with the song of the Rhine-maidens, suggest that Elizabeth, too, lost a treasure on the Thames. The appearance of Elizabeth and Leicester amplifies the importance of the Thames, but the banal stories of seduction and loss effect a reciprocal transformation of the incorporation of history into the poem. Here, “the past is altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past” (“Tradition and the Individual Talent,” 41).

poem, as Philomel and the Rhine-maidens do in “The Fire Sermon.” Personages in the poem invoke the past, either consciously or unconsciously establishing a continuity between their circumstances and historical events. These connections are also drawn in the abstract realm of the disembodied poetic voice. Finally, the poem grants tradition itself a perspective, establishing that the connection between past and present is not merely a function of the present’s relation to the past. The account of the past’s endurance in products that is supported by a linear approach to time can account for the depiction of Philomel and the individual awareness of the past. The poem juxtaposes these straightforward modes of the past’s endurance, however, with the assertion of historical relations in the ideal space of the poem’s disembodied speaker, the perspective of tradition itself in the character of Tiresias, and the direct irruption of traditional voices into the poem. A Bradleyan account of linear temporality can perhaps accommodate the first two of these alternative modes of the past’s endurance by attributing them to the totalizing perspective of the Absolute. Time passes linearly for each individual perspective, but from the perspective of the Absolute, all moments are contemporaneous. Thus, Tiresias or the abstract poetic speaker can appeal to the copresence of historically disparate events. However, the irruption of historical voices, such as those of Philomel and the Rhine-maidens, into the poem itself is incommensurate with even a Bradleyan account of linear time. As such, these manifestations of the past reveal that Eliot’s historical sense demands a significant reorientation to time. The promise of historical sense as capable of grounding the synthesis of a shared world thus depends upon a nonlinear conceptualization time. Eliot does not, however, provide an account of the temporal framework that The Waste Land enjoins a reorientation to. The poem suggests that a linear account of temporality is insufficient, but it does not offer an alternative. Similarly, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” identifies the criteria that an account of temporality would need to meet in order
to accommodate Eliot’s appeal to tradition, but it does not explicate the contours of this account. The response to the condition of alienation suggested by *The Waste Land* thus contains a lacuna that must be filled, or else it risks falling into incoherence.

### III. Memory as the Foundation for Historical Sense

Henri Bergson develops an account of temporality in *Matter and Memory* that satisfies all three conditions necessitated by Eliot’s notion of historical sense. Through an investigation of memory, Bergson develops an account of the relationship between the past and the present that illuminates the structure of the past’s endurance. The articulation of this relationship depends first upon Bergson’s rejection of the temporality of passage, which identifies being present with existence. Bergson highlights the contradictions inherent in temporalities of presence, and in doing so he facilitates the disruption of the identity upon which they depend. This argument offers grounds for the rejection of the temporality of passage, making explicit an argument that Eliot provides only obliquely. To bolster his critique, Bergson develops a distinction between the virtual and the actual. This distinction illuminates the continued operation of the past even after it has ceased to be active in the material present. Thus, by articulating a capacious account of existence that includes both the virtual and the actual, Bergson lays the groundwork for an account of temporality that satisfies the first criterion required by Eliot’s account of historical sense. Bergson marshals this account of the relationship between the virtual and actual to investigate the operation of memory. Memory, according to Bergson, preserves the entirety of an individual’s past in myriad configurations. In experience, these organizations of memory rally to accommodate memory to the present circumstances. In doing so, they render the present meaningful, but they also incorporate the present into the structure of memory itself, effecting a reorganization of the planes of memory. Thus, the account satisfies the second condition of historical sense, which demands the recognition
of the effect of the present on the structure of the past. Finally, with its emphasis on individual character as the synthesis of one’s entire past, Bergson’s account of memory emphasizes the perpetual intervention of the past in the present. The past continues to act, and it does so through us. With this, the account satisfies the third condition of historical sense.

III.1. The Existence of the Past and the Deficiencies of Linear Temporality

A basic tenet of Bergson’s account in *Matter and Memory* is that perception, as we experience it, does not occur without the intervention of memory. He claims that “perception is never a mere contact of the mind with the object present; it is impregnated with memory-images which complete it as they interpret it.”\(^{55}\) In order for a perception to elicit choice, we must bring it into relation with similar experiences.\(^{56}\) And, indeed, Bergson claims that “complete perception is only defined and distinguished by its coalescence with a memory-image.”\(^{57}\) Without the contribution of memory, perception would amount to immediate nervous responses to an undifferentiated sensory field. The memory-images that complete the perception are, themselves, implicated in the structure of pure memory, which preserves virtually all our conscious states. The preservation of these states allows them to participate in perception by becoming the memory-images that complete sensory experience. Pure memory, then, at once is the condition for the possibility of perception and never available to perception. For in order to be brought into consciousness, the memory must become actual. It must leave the plane of pure memory. Jay Lampert captures the tension implicit in this account of the role of memory in perception nicely when he claims that “while the availability of pure memory means it exists simultaneously with present perception, the two forms of engagement with events are not on a commensurable time scale. Memories are virtually available, but do not

\(^{56}\) Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 69–70.
\(^{57}\) Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 163.
exactly exist in actual time.”58 The virtuality of memory means that it “still exists in the present, but not in the way the actual is present.”59 Bergson appeals to an attempted recollection to illuminate this appeal to the virtual existence of memory. He claims that, when we try to recollect something, we “detach ourselves from the present in order to replace ourselves, first in the past in general, then in a certain region of the past.”60 At this point, he claims, “our recollection still remains virtual; we simply prepare ourselves to receive it by adopting the appropriate attitude.”61 But the recollection comes into focus, and as it does, it begins to “imitate perception” and “passes into the actual”.62 The virtual plane of pure memory is always present but never actual. This appeal to the unconscious presence of the past, however, is counterintuitive. Denying Bergson’s appeal to a virtual plane that, by definition, can never enter conscious experience, one might object that if the past is no longer actual, it cannot exist. Bergson endeavors to defend his appeal to a virtual plane of memory that safeguards his account of perception by illuminating the misconception concerning the notion of existence at the heart of this objection. In doing so, he dispels confusion concerning what existence entails and justifies the share of the virtual in it.

In the third chapter of *Matter and Memory*, Bergson identifies what he claims to be a common misconception regarding the definition of existence. Existence, he maintains, depends upon two conditions that manifest “both at the same time but in different degrees.”63 These conditions are often taken to apply exclusively to mental or material entities, which results, Bergson argues, in an artificial circumscription of the category of existents. By recovering the appropriate relation between these two conditions, Bergson offers justification for his appeals to

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60 Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 171.
unconscious psychic material, thereby providing a theoretical grounding for the appeals to the endurance of the past that he makes throughout Matter and Memory. Furthermore, his critique of this misunderstanding regarding existence illuminates the general framework against which Bergson positions his account of memory. Though Bergson addresses various positions throughout the text that he argues are problematic, he does not consistently unify these positions into a single framework. His discussion of existence, however, reveals a misunderstanding shared by many of these isolated and seemingly antagonistic positions. It also suggests a problematic temporal framework central to them, a temporality of presence, and in so doing promotes a synthesis of the positions to which Bergson responds. This temporality of presence resembles the linear temporality that I have argued Eliot implicitly critiques in “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” While this alignment does not entail a transmission of ideas between Bergson and Eliot, Bergson’s illumination of the contradiction inherent in these deficient positions provides the theoretical grounds for dismissal that Eliot leaves latent. I further maintain that this alignment also suggests the possibility for Bergson’s positive account of memory to fill the lacunae left by Eliot’s reluctance to entertain metaphysical questions in his development of historical sense.

Throughout Matter and Memory, Bergson appeals to the unconscious endurance of the past. In the first chapter, for example, Bergson introduces the notion of pure memory, which never

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64 This treatment of existence is paradigmatic of Bergson’s method of revealing how misleading antinomies result from problematic formulations of questions. In Matter and Memory, the antinomy between realism and idealism features most prominently in this respect, though it is certainly not unique. Bergson also returns to the dichotomy between mechanism and dynamism, which receives significant treatment in Time and Free Will. In Bergsonism, Gilles Deleuze offers a useful explication of Bergson’s method, which illuminates the productive possibilities of the extent to which Bergson positions his account in relation to what he argues are false problems (Deleuze, Bergsonism, 13–37). By highlighting the problematic frame to which these antinomies respond, Bergson reveals the fundamental unity of the reality that each side of the antinomies can only capture a part of (Deleuze, Bergsonism, 33–35).

65 Deleuze provides a synthesized account of this problematic framework in Bergsonism, and Alia Al-Saji articulates the breadth of its applicability in “The memory of another past: Deleuze, Bergson, and a new theory of time” (Deleuze, Bergsonism, 61. Al-Saji, “The memory of another past,” 204-205.).

66 Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 49. The thorny question of Eliot’s theoretical indebtedness to Bergson will be the subject of the next chapter. Here, I mean only to argue that a Bergsonian framework can supply the theoretical tools capable of meeting the necessary conditions established in Eliot’s explication of historical sense.
appears in consciousness, and in the beginning of the third chapter he further develops this theme. Yet, in his account of recollection in the second chapter, Bergson specifies that “the whole of memory…passes over into each of these circuits” which join perception to memory images. Yet, the whole of memory is not consciously activated in each act of recollection. Thus, memory must endure unconsciously. Bergson acknowledges the controversial status of his appeal to unconscious existence, however, and he endeavors to clarify the notion of existence in order to bolster his account. Existence, he claims, “appears to imply two conditions taken together: (1) presentation in consciousness ; and (2) the logical or causal connection of that which is so presented with what precedes and with what follows.” These conditions always appear together, but they appear in varying proportions. Thus, when “we are dealing with external objects it is the connection which is perfect, since these objects obey necessary laws; but then the other condition, presentation in consciousness, is never more than partially fulfilled.” Conversely, while for an internal state the “presentation of consciousness is perfect,” the “connection is less close, and the determination of the present by the past…has not the character of a mathematical derivation.”

Despite the attribution of both conditions to external and internal existents alike, Bergson identifies the temptation to treat existence as an equivocal term that attributes “to external objects on the one hand, and to internal states on the other, two radically different modes of existence, each

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67 Bergson, Matter and Memory. 72, 171–176.
68 Bergson, Matter and Memory. 128.
69 Len Lawlor argues in The Challenges of Bergsonism that the central role played by the unconscious in Bergson’s investigation of experience is the primary factor distinguishing Bergson from phenomenologists. Though the engagement, or lack thereof, with the unconscious is an important point of difference, I maintain that their divergent attitudes towards the conceptualization of time as a river marks a more fundamental divergence. Alia Al-Saji gestures towards the irreconcilability of the positions in “The memory of another past: Bergson, Deleuze and a new conception of time.”
70 Bergson addresses various skeptical positions regarding the unconscious and the existence of memory outside of conscious awareness in the discussion immediately preceding his argument concerning existence (Bergson, Matter and Memory, 180–185).
71 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 189.
72 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 190.
73 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 189–190.
characterized by the exclusive presence of the condition which should be regarded as merely preponderating.”74 Thus, the existence of an external object depends solely upon the spatial series that conditions it, while the existence of an internal state is reduced to one’s conscious awareness of it. When the existence of internal states is taken to depend exclusively upon their presentation in consciousness, then their departure from conscious awareness effectively obviates their existence. According to such an account, unconscious memory would lose its claim to reality as a result of the bifurcation of the notion of existence. Because of this flawed appeal to the bifurcation of existence, unconscious memory seems not to partake of the series of causal connections. And, by definition, it seems not to appear in consciousness. Bergson claims that this illusion “vitiates our conception of mind by casting over the idea of the unconscious an artificial obscurity,” and thus he suggests it must be dispelled for a more comprehensive account that acknowledges the universal co-occurrence of both conditions of existence.75

Bergson’s argument in this passage appears damningly question begging.76 Bergson introduces his discussion of existence in order to clarify his account of the preservation of memory in an unconscious state. He defines existence according to two conditions and argues that the two

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74 Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 190. Though Bergson does not acknowledge it, his account of the two conditions of existence, which never appear in isolation, complements his account of pure memory and pure perception as regulative concepts. Like the two conditions of existence, pure perception and pure memory can be conceptually analyzed, though they always co-occur. This parallel structure invites the temptation to read pure matter as a manifestation of the condition of causal connection and pure memory as a manifestation of conscious awareness, but the unconscious status of pure memory forecloses this extension of the structural similarities in the accounts.


76 Suzanne Guerlac, who offers a comprehensive explication of *Matter and Memory* in *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson*, glosses this passage as an appeal to experience, which Bergson does offer. In doing so, she circumvents the charge of begging the question by weakening the force of the argument. She claims Bergson “argues that we need to pay more attention to the structural similarities between domain of objects that present themselves to us simultaneously in space and series of successive states that develop in time” (Guerlac, *Thinking in Time*, 147). Bergson, she suggests, adduces the structure of character as a temporal order analogous to the order of space. By appealing to a single example, however, Guerlac elides the extent to which Bergson attributes some degree of causal connection to all internal states. This formulation of the argument, furthermore, does not sufficiently address the contradictions that, according to Bergson, result from a denial of the dual character of existence. Nor does it do justice to the role that this argument regarding existence plays in establishing the legitimacy of the unconscious and in rejecting the attempt to locate memory in the brain.
conditions must co-occur despite the temptation of intellect to erect a barrier between them. He argues that this temptation must be resisted, and the co-occurrence must be acknowledged, because treating the two conditions in isolation undermines the nascent account of memory by denying the possibility of unconscious existence. Thus, Bergson appeals to the unconscious in order to justify the definition of existence that is adduced as evidence of the unconscious.\textsuperscript{77} This argument does not appear in isolation, however. Rather it functions as a pivot which reveals the connection between two fundamentally flawed accounts of memory that depend upon this mistaken definition of existence. Considered together, these arguments absolve Bergson of the charge of question begging. They also illuminate the contradictions inherent to accounts of temporality that deny the existence of the past, such as linear temporal frameworks.

Prior to offering his definition of existence, Bergson discusses the problems that arise from the denial of the unconscious existence of memory. When we “imagine ourselves unencumbered” by our memories, which “inasmuch as they are past, are so much dead weight that we carry with us,” we “shut off time behind us as it flows.”\textsuperscript{78} In so doing, we deny existence to our memories except for when they affect us in the present. When a memory comes to affect us, according to this account, it “produces on us the effect of a ghost whose mysterious apparition must be explained by special causes.”\textsuperscript{79} Bergson thus argues that, if the existence of an internal state depends upon its presentation in consciousness, the disappearance and reappearance of memories in consciousness entails their destruction and subsequent generation \textit{ex nihilo}. Assuming that

\textsuperscript{77} Bergson does, to be fair, appeal to an argument “at the beginning of \textit{[Matter and Memory]}” to further bolster his definition (Bergson, \textit{Matter and Memory}, 191). This argument concludes that the first illusion, which denies to “material objects, existing but unperceived, the smallest share in consciousness,” results in a falsification “of our representation of matter” (Bergson, \textit{Matter and Memory}, 191). Though this argument identifies a contradiction that results from the division of the components of existence, it addresses the material side of the problem, which is not particularly relevant to the matter at hand.

\textsuperscript{78} Bergson, \textit{Matter and Memory}, 186.

\textsuperscript{79} Bergson, \textit{Matter and Memory}, 187.
generation without cause is impossible, such an account cannot stand. Bergson’s definition of existence suggests another way in which memories can persist, however, even according to an account that posits the radical separation of the two components of existence. If memories are located in physical space, they would participate the series of causal connections.\(^{80}\) Thus Bergson notes that “we are so strongly obsessed by images drawn from space, that we cannot hinder ourselves from asking where memories are stored up.”\(^{81}\) The popular response to this question involves locating memories in the brain, but Bergson argues that this response is insufficient and ultimately self-contradictory. Given the assumption that “the past survives in the form of a memory located in the brain, it is then necessary that the brain, in order to preserve the memory, should preserve itself.”\(^{82}\) This result, Bergson argues, entails that the brain, and by extension material reality in general, participates in duration in precisely the capacity that was denied to memory. For, if memories are located in the brain, and if the brain is part of material reality and “constitutes, with all the rest of the material universe, an ever renewed section of universal becoming,” then Bergson claims it follows “that the universe dies and is born again miraculously at each moment of duration, or you must attribute to it that continuity of existence which you deny to consciousness, and make of its past a reality which endures and is prolonged into the present.”\(^{83}\) Attempting to situate memories in brain matter results in universalizing the problem that Bergson identified with associationism. For the memory to persist in order to be actualized, either the past must endure into the present or the past is reinstatiated \textit{ex nihilo}.\(^{84}\) The latter option, as before, is

\(^{80}\) This account restricts the series of causal connections to the simultaneous series of relations in physical space. Bergson admits another series, a temporal series of causal connections of which internal states partake. That is, however, the series that Bergson endeavors to justify in this collection of arguments.

\(^{81}\) Bergson, \textit{Matter and Memory}, 191.

\(^{82}\) Bergson, \textit{Matter and Memory}, 192.

\(^{83}\) Bergson, \textit{Matter and Memory}, 192.

\(^{84}\) Bergson is, I think, somewhat hasty in his presentation of this argument. He does not adequately address the fact that, by locating the memory in matter, he has reinserted it into the chain of causal relations. Bergson has already attributed to spatial reality some degree of permanence, though this permanence is tenuous. According to the set of
taken to be intolerable. Thus, even if memories are located in the brain, the past must continue to exist. In this case, however, the past endures for “the totality of the states of the material world,” rather than just for individual psychical states. Positioned between these two arguments, the account of existence appears somewhat less question begging. When the existence of internal states depends exclusively on their presence in consciousness, then the phenomenon of memory seems to demand spontaneous generation and destruction. The attempt to preserve memory by locating it in matter results either in the same spontaneous generation or in the re-inscription of the past’s endurance at a universal level. The alternative accounts of existence that Bergson entertains, which both identify a divide between the characteristics of existence, cannot account for our capacity to recall past experiences. Indeed, even if these competing accounts are not exhaustive of the alternative positions, Bergson’s analysis reveals how the radical division is responsible for the failure to account for memory. So long as internal states only exist insofar as they are present to consciousness, memory will necessarily be relegated to the sphere of the miraculous. Thus, in order to accommodate the experience of memory, existence must be taken to entail both conditions in all cases, “though they may be unequally fulfilled.”

Because of its function as a premise in his arguments rejecting both associationist and materialist accounts of memory, Bergson’s account of existence has both an affirmative and a negative aspect. The affirmative component of Bergson’s definition is that establishes a framework

assumptions that he addresses with this series of arguments, space appears “to preserve indefinitely the things which are there juxtaposed” (Bergson, Matter and Memory, 184). If the brain is preserved by virtue of its material existence, the universe need not be destroyed and recreated miraculously. Bergson seems to be positing that a special form of endurance is necessary for the brain to preserve in such a way that the memory, too, is preserved. And this special mode of persistence entails duration.

Bergson, Matter and Memory, 193. Though Bergson here presents this as a conclusion that is not preferable to the supposition of the endurance of the past in psychic states, thereby suggesting the inevitability of the latter position, he will ultimately endorse both formulations of the past’s endurance. I will treat this universal persistence of the past at the end of this section.

Bergson, Matter and Memory, 192.

Bergson, Matter and Memory, 189.
for existence that can accommodate the capacity of memory to manifest previous internal states. It does so by affording those internal states a share of existence even when they are not present to consciousness. Thus, Bergson’s development of this account of existence establishes not only continued existence of the past but also the legitimacy of unconscious existence, which is a necessary condition for the past’s endurance. These arguments also have the negative effect of bringing into relief the general temporal framework to which Bergson responds throughout *Matter and Memory*. Bergson identifies a pair of confusions that condition this problematic approach to time. One is the failure to recognize the co-occurrence of both conditions of existence, thereby restricting subjective experience to what appears in consciousness at any given moment. The other, which complements the first, is the failure of “emphasizing the differences and, on the contrary, of slurring over the resemblances, between the series of *objects* simultaneously set out in space and that of *states* successively developed in time.”88 The obfuscation of this similarity promotes the exclusive recognition of the series of physical objects. Space appears to “preserve indefinitely the *things* which are there juxtaposed, while time in its advance devours the *states* which succeed each other within it.”89 The conjunction of these positions begins to illuminate the temporal framework that Bergson rejects in this discussion. In “The memory of another past: Bergson, Deleuze and a new theory of time,” Alia al-Saji neatly captures this deficient “standard account” of “time as the chronological succession of instants in consciousness, as an irreversible and linear progression of psychological states.”90 This account appeals to a “longitudinal or flat temporality, one composed of threads that run horizontally between its successive points – time becomes a

90 Al-Saji, “The memory of another past,” 204. Al-Saji particularly emphasizes the commitment of this standard account to an instantaneous present and appeals to the Bergson’s discussion of the paradoxes of motion to articulate the deficiency of this standard account (Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 250-253). A discussion of these paradoxes, and Deleuze’s development of them, is beyond the purview of this chapter. I mention them, however, as evidence that Bergson’s argument concerning existence does not exhaust his engagement with this standard account of temporality.
Time, according to this framework, proceeds along a linear trajectory. It flows as series of discrete moments, and the passage into each new moment destroys the previous one.

Bergson’s argument for a more comprehensive definition of existence, then, entails a rejection of this standard account of time. Bergson offers various other arguments against facets of this standard account. His engagement with Zeno’s paradoxes, for example, reveal the errors that develop from the attempt to identify the moment as the fundamental unit of time. Bergson also argues against the standard account by identifying that account’s intolerable consequence that “the present, under different aspects and in different degrees of intensity, takes over the whole of time.” Thus, memories appear within the framework as a diminished form of sensory experience, the past seeming to be merely a diminished present, eliding the difference in kind between memory and perception. The arguments concerning existence, moreover, also illuminate a number of crucial points of alignment between Bergson’s account of memory and Eliot’s account of historical sense. Indeed, these arguments provide a conceptual groundwork for the critiques that Eliot leaves implicit in “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” By affirming that the past continues to exist even after it has faded from consciousness, Bergson satisfies the first of the necessary conditions of historical sense derived from “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” Bergson supplements the account, however, by articulating why the past must endure and suggesting the manner in which it does. The arguments clarifying this definition furthermore reveal the incompatibility of the past’s existence with a linear account of time. Thus, like Eliot, Bergson marshals his arguments for the past’s endurance against a linear temporal model. These arguments also illuminate the extent to which the deficient accounts of tradition against which Eliot juxtaposes historical sense

91 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 204.
92 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 250–253.
93 Al-Saji, “The memory of another past,” 205.
94 The next portion of this chapter will be devoted to precisely this question of the operation of the enduring past.
are in fact implicated in the failures of linear temporality. The impulse to uphold novelty as the sole arbiter of value reifies as an aesthetic criterion the vision of time that “in its advance devours the states which succeed each other within it.” Conversely, the account of tradition that prescribes the repetition of tired literary forms attempts, like the materialist seeking memories in the brain, to preserve the past by locating it in objects, “the mummified stuff from a museum.” Bergson’s arguments, in fact, strengthen Eliot’s critical position. These arguments do not simply reveal that the deficient modes of temporality identified by Eliot are grounded in a linear temporality. They present the stronger case that these deficient accounts of tradition fail because, like linear models of temporality, they are fundamentally incoherent. The account of existence developed by Bergson thus satisfies the first condition of historical sense, illuminates the extent to which Eliot’s deficient accounts of tradition depend upon a linear temporal framework, and bolsters Eliot’s critical stance by revealing the incoherence of these accounts, necessitating their rejection.

III.2. Bergson’s Cone of Memory and the Ideal Order of the Past

With his articulation of a more capacious definition of existence than the standard account of temporality can accommodate, Bergson establishes a theoretical foundation for the claim that the past endures with the present. His argument does not clarify the mode of the past’s existence, however. Nor does it explicate the precise relation between the present and the past. In a subsequent discussion in the third chapter of *Matter and Memory*, Bergson develops the figure of the cone of memory. This model specifies the operation of memory and articulates its interaction with the present. This account of memory suggests that the past endures in myriad, simultaneous configurations. Each configuration is represented as a plane of memory, and these planes of memory organize the past according to different degrees of expansion and contraction, facilitating

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constellations of relations that can be called upon in perception to clarify one’s present experience. Not only does the figure of the cone appeal to the past’s manifestation in planes of ideal order, it further figures the ceaseless introduction of the present into the structure of the past. This perpetual introduction of the present into the structure of the past effects the reorganization of the planes of memory. Though prominent accounts of Bergson’s analysis of the cone of memory emphasize his appeals to an intentional leap made by the subject between planes of experience, thereby encouraging a sense of discontinuity between past and present and between different planes of memory, Bergson’s account of the circuitous investment of the past into the present reveals the extent to which present experience is always conditioned by the past. Furthermore, Bergson’s appeal to the structure of character suggests a stability of the ideal order of the past that is elided by an overemphasis on discontinuous subjective leaps. A synthesis of these elements of Bergson’s framework reveals the extent to which his account of memory satisfies the necessary conditions of a temporality capable of grounding Eliot’s historical sense. The cone of memory figures an ordered existence of the past simultaneous with the present, while the appeal to character suggests an underlying stability and uniformity to this order. These accounts, further, articulate the ways in which the present is perpetually incorporated into the past. Finally, the analogy of the circuit establishes that the present is always invested with memory. The present and past do not exist in separate hermetically sealed realms. Rather, they interpenetrate, mutually determining one another.
Figure 1 – Bergson’s Cone of Memory

Bergson uses the figure of the cone to schematize the relationship between the past and present in the third chapter of *Matter and Memory*. According to this figure, “my actual representation of the universe” is depicted as a plane, P. This plane not only corresponds to the world of relations between external objects, but it also represents the present configuration of that world of external relations. The “shifting plane of experience” is in perpetual flux, constantly moving into the future. Because this shifting plane represents the universe of external relations, I, the subject, am included among the points on this plane. Thus, the point S “indicates at all times my present” as it “moves forward unceasingly, and unceasingly also touches the moving plane P of my actual representation of the universe.” This point is a “connecting link between the things which act upon me and the things upon which I act – the seat, in a word, of the sensory motor

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97 Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 221.
99 Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 197. Bergson here uses the language of moving forward to describe the movement from present into the future. This directional language threatens to disrupt Bergson’s rejection of a linear representation of time, and it calls attention to the difficulties of schematizing relationships that are fundamentally non-spatial. Bergson addresses the limitations of using spatial language to try to capture temporal relations in *Time and Free Will*. The description of the cone also highlights the dangers of spatializing the representation of temporal relations by mixing the directional language of forward progress with the image of the vertical cone. This description suggests that the plane of experience shifts vertically, while the notion of forward movement suggests linear progression into a future. The dissonance between these descriptions emphasizes the limitations of treating either as definitive.
100 Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 196.
phenomena.””101 It is also the connecting point between the plane of external relations and the “totality of the recollections accumulated in my memory,” which is represented by the inverted cone SAB.

The base of this cone represents the plane of true memory, which “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.”102 This form of memory persists at a remove from the plane of material actuality, and the distance renders the plane of true memory purely virtual.103 The virtuality of the plane of true memory does not entail a diminished existence. Rather, it establishes the endurance of true memory beyond the scope of conscious awareness or material presence. For a memory located on the plane of true memory to become conscious, “it is necessary that it should descend from the heights of pure memory down to the precise point where action is taking place.”104 The cone of memory, then, is a dynamic psychic structure. The entirety of one’s past is preserved virtually and arranged in an ideal order. These memories traverse the vertical dimension of the cone, descending to the point, S, of subjective awareness. The image of the body at S thus presents “to ineffective, that is, unconscious, memories, the means of taking on a body, of materializing themselves, in short of becoming present.”105 Bergson claims that memories

101 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 196.
102 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 195. Just as the juxtaposition between the vertical orientation of the cone and the appeal to its forward movement disrupts the spatial integrity of the metaphor of the cone, the contrast between the image of true memory as a circular base and the appeal to its chronological preservation of memories complicates the account of the organization of true memory. Bergson does not explicate the organization of the plane of true memory itself. Indeed, insofar as true memory is purely virtual, such an investigation would be impossible by definition. This tension suggests, however, the limitations of attempting to represent spatially the overdetermined relations of memory. A fuller investigation of the ways in which Bergson’s spatial schema include the elements that disrupt their spatial integrity would be an interesting project in its own right.
103 The distinction between the virtual and the actual aligns closely with the distinction between conscious and unconscious that Bergson develops in his account of existence. The former distinction is more capacious, however, as it does not entail psychologizing language. This more capacious dichotomy facilitates the application of Bergson’s account of memory beyond the limits of the individual experience.
104 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 197.
105 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 197.
typically do not enter at random into conscious experience.\textsuperscript{106} Rather, present experience issues an “appeal to which memory responds, and it is from the sensory-motor elements of present action that a memory borrows the warmth which gives it life.”\textsuperscript{107}

In his analysis of Bergson’s account of the cone of memory in \textit{Simultaneity and Delay}, Jay Lampert adopts a skeptical stance regarding the felicity of the image Bergson adopts and raises concerns about the clarity of Bergson’s use of the diagram. He presents Bergson’s cone of memory as a figure of volume. According to Lampert, “the cone represents an overall volume of memories, to which new present growths add.”\textsuperscript{108} The point of the cone extends downward in space, stretching the cone out and creating the sense of an increase in volume. This sense of increasing volume in the memory cone is particularly pronounced in Bergson’s initial presentation of the image, which only includes SAB without A’B’ and A’’B’’. There Bergson speaks of the “summit S” moving “forward unceasingly” while the cone SAB itself represents “the totality of recollections accumulated in my memory.”\textsuperscript{109} This presentation of the model emphasizes the sense of voluminal increase which Lampert appeals to as problematic. It also invites the confusion that Lampert highlights regarding whether “AB represents our first infant memories, or instead represents the broadest range of all our memories.”\textsuperscript{110} Lampert leaves this question to discuss the operations by which virtual memories are brought into the present, but I maintain that these initial points of confusion are integral to the ultimate challenges Lampert brings against Bergson’s account of memory.

\textsuperscript{106} It is necessary to specify that this is typically the case because Bergson proceeds to consider instances in which the link between memory and one’s present context is more tenuous, principally the state of dreaming (Bergson, \textit{Matter and Memory}, 198-202). In “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” and “The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock,” Eliot interrogates the pathological capacity of memory to disrupt action, thereby inducing a sort of conscious dream state. Eliot’s poetic engagement with the Bergsonian account of memory will feature prominently in the third section of this chapter.

\textsuperscript{107} Bergson, \textit{Matter and Memory}, 197.
\textsuperscript{108} Lampert, \textit{Simultaneity and Delay}, 142.
\textsuperscript{109} Bergson, \textit{Matter and Memory}, 196.
\textsuperscript{110} Lampert, \textit{Simultaneity and Delay}, 142.
According to Lampert’s reading of Bergson, memories are brought into contact with the plane of actuality through three related operations. The first he describes is oscillation, through which “the memory cone vibrates and items slide down through the interstices, the way a treat filters through a gumball machine to the chute.”111 The second function is generalization, the operations of which “organize past events into structures relevant for the present.”112 Through this process of generalization, an individual memory loses “its original specificity and regain[s] a different specificity by moving through the memory cone, circulating through other memories while we are not paying attention.”113 According to the third function, “the whole cone is pressed down onto the present, like a Bodum coffeemaker.”114 I am ultimately less concerned with Lampert’s treatment of this third method, as I maintain that the problems he raises result from misunderstandings revealed in the first two functions of memory. Lampert claims that Bergson’s account of the actualization of memory fails to sufficiently account for “how particular pasts can be picked out at particular present moments” and “how a single specific memory can play a larger role in the present than others.”115 Specifying this concern, he appeals to a series of questions, such as “if memories circulate in a convection oven, how could I keep straight which memories were formed simultaneously with others, that is, which events happened when I was twenty years old and which when I was thirty?” and “When I drive a car, how do I follow the highway rather than reminisce about childhood toys?”116

I maintain that Bergson provides a more satisfying answer to these questions that Lampert gives him credit for. Indeed, these points of confusion seem to me to arise from a shortcoming in

111 Lampert, Simultaneity and Delay, 143.
112 Lampert, Simultaneity and Delay, 143.
113 Lampert, Simultaneity and Delay, 143.
114 Lampert, Simultaneity and Delay, 144.
115 Lampert, Simultaneity and Delay, 145.
116 Lampert, Simultaneity and Delay, 145.
Lampert’s reconstruction of the cone of memory. While there does seem to be some ambiguity regarding the precise contours of the metaphor when Bergson initially presents the image, his further specifications of the model clarify the points of confusion that Lampert raises. These clarifications, further, complicate Lampert’s account of the operations through which memories are actualized, mitigating some of the concerns with which he concludes the chapter. Lampert highlights an ambiguity regarding the status of the base of the cone, AB. He suggests that it could “represent our first infant memories, or…our broadest range of memories.”\(^{117}\) The suggestion that it could represent our baby memories seems to follow both from Bergson’s claim that the whole cone SAB represents “the totality of recollections accumulated in memory” and from the appeal to the forward motion of the summit, S.\(^{118}\) This would suggest that more recent memories are closer to the summit while the distant plane AB contains ones earliest memories. Treating the cone in this way leads naturally to the claim that generalization occurs through memories floating through each other as through a convection oven. And, further, if the sequence of memories is preserved vertically in the cone, this floating required for generalization would result in the possibility that one could no longer distinguish between memories from their twenties and memories from their thirties, as they would all be dislocated and jumbled about.

When Bergson further develops the image of the cone by adding the intermediate planes A’B’ and A’’B’’, he clarifies the articulation of the cone and eliminates the ground of this confusion. The plane AB does not simply represent one’s earliest memories. Rather, at the base of the memory cone, “all the events of our past life are set out in their smallest details.”\(^{119}\) If I am correct when I maintain above that this plane represents the plane of true memory, then not only

\(^{117}\) Lampert, *Simultaneity and Delay*, 142.

\(^{118}\) Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 196.

\(^{119}\) Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 218.
does it contain all of the events of our lives, but it arranges them in chronological order. If this is the case, it resolves Lampert’s problem regarding how we keep track of memories that happened in our twenties and memories that happened in our thirties. The operation of generalization does not, in fact, disrupt the order of one’s memories, as this order is preserved in AB. According to this account, the intermediate planes of memory do not contain distinct memories more or less proximate to the summit of action. Rather, they contain “so many repetitions of the whole of our past life,” and “each section is larger or smaller according to its nearness to the base or to the summit.” Again, Bergson invites confusion by appealing to the planes’ proximity to the seat of action, but he clarifies that this proximity is actually a matter of generalization. The infinite planes of the past “take a more common form when memory shrinks most, more personal when it widens out.” He offers the example of hearing a word in a foreign language to illuminate this point. When I hear a word in another language, I may think “of that language in general or of a voice which once pronounced it in a certain way.” Thinking of the language in general is more proximate to the summit because attending to the word with a concern for the language prepares my response. My memory of the voice which once pronounced it a certain way is, of course, included in this more condensed plane, but it is not identifiable because it is suffused with many other experiences of the language. Conversely, if I attend to the memory of the voice of the person, I adopt a “mental disposition” nearer to the pure image.

120 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 195.
121 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 220. This appeal to the infinite planes of memory obviates somewhat Lampert’s concern about the metaphors of volume. If the cone of memory has an infinite number of planes, we may wonder whether the movement of S actually increases its volume. New experiences are surely added to the plane AB, and in this sense the volume seems to increase. But new planes cannot be added to the cone itself. I think this is actually a case in which Bergson pushes his metaphor to its limit case and, in doing so, disrupts the problematic spatialization that it includes. I discuss a number of similar cases of this explosive metaphors in the final chapter of this project.
122 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 220.
123 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 221.
124 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 221.
These infinite planes do not just repeat the whole of memory according to different levels of generality or specificity, they can also be “cut up, in [their] own way[es], into definite parts…each of them being characterized by the particular kind of dominant memories on which the other memories lean as on supporting points.”125 Two planes may be nearly identical, or perhaps identical, with respect to their degree of tension, but they may be organized around different key memories. Finally, Bergson claims that the selection of which memory is actualized at any given point occurs through a process of translation and rotation. Memory itself “responds to the appeal of the present state” by “contracting more or less, though without dividing, with a view to action” and by turning “towards the situation of the moment, presenting that side of itself which may prove most useful.”126

Bergson’s claim that memory itself selects how to present itself to the point of action may, ultimately, leave his account embroiled in the problem of “how particular pasts can be picked out at particular present moments,” particularly with respect to the mechanism of selection.127 I think an example, however, may help illuminate this operation by clarifying the dynamic interaction between my present character, itself the synthesis of my entire past, and the cone of memory.128 I imagine I am an athlete preparing in the moments before a competition against a rival in an elimination tournament. Thinking reflectively and tactically, I try to prepare for specific situations. As I do, a relatively expansive plane of memory, in which specific game situations are identifiable, approaches the summit of actualization, and game situations organized around the nexus of the rival I am facing rotate to enter my field of awareness. I lose focus, however, and begin to worry about my response under pressure. Now a more contracted, general plane comes into view, and

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125 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 223.
126 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 220.
127 Lampert, Simultaneity and Delay, 145.
128 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 188.
the memories that come into focus are organized around important games. Perhaps I believe that I choke in high-pressure situations, and so a similarly general plane now appears with a slightly different organizational field, one in which my failures in important moments operate as the foci. Finally, the game starts, and I rely upon the most contracted plane of my general skills, built up over years of training, joins the summit. In these cases, memory responds to my lived state, whether that state involves discrete action, like playing the game, or a more reflective activity like preparing or worrying. There is a dynamic exchange between my conscious awareness and the operation of memory that responds to the needs of the present. This account may not eliminate the problem entirely, as memory is still afforded a degree of agency that it may not be able to theoretically sustain. But it does seem to helpfully complicate and, I think, alleviate some of Lampert’s concerns which, I have argued, result from a faulty representation of Bergson’s memory cone.

In his explication of the cone of memory, Bergson emphasizes the perpetual alteration of the network of external relations. The plane of actuality “moves forward unceasingly,” and carries the present experience of the individual along with it. Bergson appeals to this incessant development of the present to challenge temporal frameworks that prioritize presence. Reversing the central tenet of temporalities of presence, Bergson suggests that “nothing is less than the present.” The present, according to Bergson, is always in flux. It is “the invisible progress of the past gnawing into the future.” The point of actuality in the cone of memory is, then, a point of perpetual change. Crucially, Bergson argues that the present is fundamentally inaccessible as this point of flux. Only as experience is integrated into the structure of memory does the present enter

129 Bergson, Matter and Memory. 196.
130 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 193. This claim follows from Bergson’s investigation of the theoretical posits of pure memory and pure perception. With his conclusion that pure perception cannot manifest in experience and must rather be treated merely as a theoretical construction for the sake of illumination, Bergson already establishes that the experienced present is inextricable from memory.
131 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 194.
perception. Thus, Bergson claims, “every perception is already memory.” ¹³² In experience, the past provides the context that renders the present legible. Because of this, the present is already past as soon as we become conscious of it. ¹³³ Through this process by which the present is contextualized by the past and integrated into the structure of it, the present effects a perpetual reorganization of the plane of memory. Thus, the temporal framework that Bergson synthesizes in the cone of memory fulfills the second condition demanded by historical sense. For the past does not simply exist alongside the present, the two operating along parallel trajectories. Rather, the present as experienced is always already part of the structure of the past, and in becoming part of this structure, the present alters that past, “even if imperceptibly.” ¹³⁴

III.3. The Operation of the Past in the Present

With the representation of memory as a cone with myriad planes of contraction and expansion, Bergson gives the impression that memory is preserved at a remove from present experience. Indeed, Alia al-Saji identifies the relationship between past and present under this schema as that of “different planes of being, related and articulated in coexistence.” ¹³⁵ These planes of being coexist, but they do not bleed together as past and present do according to a linear temporal framework. ¹³⁶ Rather, their coexistence manifests a continuity “that holds within itself the seeds of its own discontinuity and differentiation.” ¹³⁷ The past and the present coexist, but they do so at distinct ontological registers. The present may be integrated into the structure of memory. Indeed, as Bergson argues, present experience is impossible without this integration already having taken place. But the planes of memory themselves are represented in the image of the cone as being

¹³² Bergson, Matter and Memory, 194.
¹³³ This claim will receive further elaboration below.
¹³⁴ Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 42.
¹³⁵ Al-Saji, “The memory of another past,” 208.
¹³⁶ Al-Saji, “The memory of another past,” 208.
¹³⁷ Al-Saji, “The memory of another past,” 209.
separate from the experienced present. This representation risks reinscribing the sense that the past that is removed from the present, even as Bergson employs the metaphor to articulate the simultaneous endurance of the past in multiple configurations. Bergson’s use of the cone of memory to explain active recollection reinforces this sense of separation, which manifests most clearly in one of Bergson’s early descriptions of recollection, presented before his argument for the existence of the past and the introduction of the cone of memory.\(^\text{138}\)

When trying to “recover a recollection,” Bergson claims, “we become conscious of an act *sui generis* by which we detach ourselves from the present in order to replace ourselves first in the past in general, then in a certain region of the past.”\(^\text{139}\) Bergson’s claim that recollection entails detachment and replacement suggests a degree of separation of the past from the present. Deleuze amplifies this sense of separation when he identifies this passage as the foundation of his analysis of the leap. Emphasizing Bergson’s appeal to recollection as a relocation that occurs “at once,” Deleuze explicates this passage as suggesting that, in recollection we “leap into the past as into a proper element.”\(^\text{140}\) Deleuze heightens the sense of spatial discontinuity by drawing an analogy to Bergson’s account of perception. He claims, “in the same way that we do not perceive things in ourselves, but at the place where they are, we only grasp the past at the place where it is in itself, and not in our present.”\(^\text{141}\) In order to recollect, on this account, we must remove ourselves from our present experience and leap into the past. When attempting to recall something, in fact, we make multiple leaps, into different planes of the past. Each is separate from the others, and all are

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\(^{138}\) I will argue that Bergson ultimately does not compromise the subsequent account with this description, and indeed that he offers a very useful metaphor for illuminating his subsequent position. However, because this passage precedes the argument for the existence of the past, any apparent inconsistency may also be due to the absence of the theoretical tools necessary for this explanation. Indeed, Bergson offers a more thorough and technical explanation later in the chapter, and this account shifts the locus of activity from the recollecting subject to the operation of the past in memory itself.


\(^{140}\) Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 56.

\(^{141}\) Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 56.
separate from the present. The past, under the auspices of the leap, seems to resemble a pool that contains recollections and into which one dives, “as into a proper element,” to recover them.142 This emphasis on the leap into different configurations of the past suggests a sense of separation that renders the past inert. The subject jumps into various planes of the past, but the past itself seems not to intervene in the present. If Bergson’s account of the existence of the past in memory were restricted simply to this model of recollective memory, the articulation of the cone of memory and the leap into planes of the past would suggest that the Bergsonian framework cannot accommodate Eliot’s third temporal criterion for historical sense. Though the past endures in an ideal, or virtual, order, and though the present becomes part of this order, effecting its reorganization, the past remains at a remove from and fails to intervene actively in the present. Rather, if the past is to be activated, the subject must leap into it.

With his appeal to the leap as a model for understanding recollective memory, Deleuze obscures the metaphorics that Bergson himself uses to illuminate his appeal to detachment and replacement. Rather than frame the recollective moment of replacement as a leap, Bergson claims, and Deleuze acknowledges, that it is “a work of adjustment, something like the focusing of a camera.”143 Focusing a camera does not result in the abandonment complete abandonment of one element of the picture in the photograph for another, as the metaphorics of the leap suggest. Instead, when we focus a camera, we bring various elements contained in the frame into relief and we let others fade into obscurity, though they do not disappear from view.144 Similarly, when we attempt to recall something specific, we do not abandon the present entirely but instead shift our

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142 Deleuze, Bergsonism, 56.
143 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 171. Deleuze, Bergsonism, 56.
144 I am indebted to Jay Lampert, and particularly his treatment in Simultaneity and Delay of Deleuze’s account of “sheets of the past” in Citizen Kane, for highlighting the fecundity of the metaphor of the camera as a framework for engaging with the simultaneous existence of past and present (Lampert, Jay. Simultaneity and Delay. 164–166).
focus to the operation of memory. This operation, further, does not begin with the attempt to recall but is, rather, ongoing. The moment of recall simply permits material from the past to enter into conscious awareness. The focus shifts, and the material comes into view. According to this photographic model of recollection, we do not leap out of the present, “leaving psychology altogether,” and leap into the “proper element,” the “ontological element,” of the past.¹⁴⁵ We cannot make this leap because we are already in that element. It already surrounds us, just as background details are already captured in the frame of the camera before the focus is adjusted to clarify them.¹⁴⁶

In his essay “Do Sheets of Past Exist,” Jay Lampert offers an analysis of Deleuze’s appeals to sheets of the past in his reading of the film Citizen Kane. Though this investigation does not engage explicitly with Bergson’s appeal to the metaphor of the camera, I think it nevertheless offers insight into the operation of that metaphor within the account he develops.¹⁴⁷ In his essay, Lampert interrogates Deleuze’s claim that “the flashbacks in Citizen Kane (1941) are the world’s first ‘sheets of past,’ the first cinematic pure-past direct time-images,” which are “images of time independent of action, in which the past is not merely a former present but also the whole past co-exists contemporaneously with the present.”¹⁴⁸ Lampert identifies three ways Deleuze locates sheets of past in Citizen Kane. I am only interested here in the third, in which the film employs “a

¹⁴⁵ Deleuze, Gilles. Bergsonism. 57.
¹⁴⁶ Bergson offers another useful distinction that reinforces his preference for the language of focus to metaphors of leaping or plunging when he discusses the dual movements of translation and rotation, which allow memory to “respond to the appeal of the present state” (Bergson, Matter and Memory, 220). He notes that “localizing a recollection in the past, for instance, cannot at all consist, as has been said in plunging into the mass of our memories as into a bag” (Bergson, Matter and Memory, 223). Instead he claims that memory, “always present in its entirety to itself, spreads out its recollection over an ever wider surface and so ends by distinguishing, in what was till then a confused mass, the remembrance which could not find its proper place” (Bergson, Matter and Memory, 224). As with the elaboration on his appeal to detachment and replacement, Bergson prefers the metaphoric of expansion and contraction, of shifting focus, to those that appeal to a change in place.
¹⁴⁷ Lampert does acknowledge the connection between Deleuze’s metaphor of sheets of past and “the planes of Bergson’s memory cone,” but this connection does not receive extensive treatment (Lampert, “Do Sheets of Past Exist,” 36).
deep-focus image” with “different planes of depth on view at the same time, each of which could represent a different time period.” Lampert explicates “the ‘Susan’s suicide attempt’ scene” as the “very best example of depth of field in relation sheets of past.” When Kane enters the room in which Susan has attempted suicide, he does so “still thinking that Susan will be his opera star, but he arrives in a foreground where that has already not been the case for some time.” In the scene, according to Deleuze, “a succession of [Susan’s] failed performances collapses simultaneously into one result.” So, when Kane crosses the room from the door to Susan’s body, he moves simultaneously through space but also through sheets of time. The scene supposedly captures movement, in the present, through a variety of experiences, “the succession of failed performances,” that lead to her attempted suicide. Thus, the scene is meant to capture the contemporaneity of the past as a conditioning field of a present image.

Lampert, it should be noted, argues that the scene ultimately does not achieve the effect that Deleuze appeals to. Though, he claims the theory is great, he fails to see it operating in the scene as Deleuze claims. For the purposes of my argument here, I am not particularly concerned with whether *Citizen Kane* makes use of sheets of the past. The point I am interested in is way in which the notion of sheets of the past can be used to explicate the temporally conditioning effect of focus. For Bergson’s metaphor of the photograph seems to employ metaphors that resonate

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153 Lampert, “Do Sheets of Past Exist,” 43. I think there are promising avenues for pushing back against this negative conclusion by considering repeated uses of the depth effect. Though Lampert identifies the suicide attempt scene as the most evocative example, he does appeal to others that actually incorporate elements of the past more explicitly, such as the scene in which Kane walks “through the objects he has accumulated in Xanadu (Lampert, “Do Sheets of Past Exist,” 40).” If scenes throughout the film deploy depth photography and implicate the past more explicitly, then there may be a stronger case for considering the appeal to sheets of past in this scene. In treating the scenes that allegedly invoke sheets of past in isolation, Lampert seems not to consider that they may have a combined effect. Pursuing this line of inquiry would, I fear, take me too far afield from my quarry in this chapter.

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with the analysis Deleuze develops.\textsuperscript{154} The past accompanies the present virtually, out of focus, so to say. It is, on the one hand, accessible through the operation of memory, figured as a refocusing of the lens to a different depth. On the other, however, that past is also present as a force that conditions the present, similarly to how the past Kane traverses from the door, where he “enters still thinking that Susan will be his opera star,” to the foreground “where that has already not been the case for some time,” contains the series of failures that led to this moment.\textsuperscript{155}

Bergson’s analysis of the experienced present, introduced in the midst of his argument for the endurance of the past, clarifies why the metaphor of the camera is more appropriate to his account of detachment and replacement than the more radical appeal to an ontological leap. As it appears to us in experience, the present is always already integrated into the structure of the past. Bergson employs a circuit analogy to illuminate this point. The pure present, he claims, is merely “the invisible progress of the past gnawing into the future.”\textsuperscript{156} The present is a state of perpetual flux, and as soon as it can be cognized, “it is already past.”\textsuperscript{157} Instead, what we experience as the cognized present “consists in an incalculable multitude of remembered elements.”\textsuperscript{158} These elements, further, are supplemented by memory as soon as we perceive them. Memory “reflects upon the object [of reflective perception] a growing number of suggested images – sometimes the details of the object itself, sometimes concomitant details which may throw light upon it.”\textsuperscript{159} To

\textsuperscript{154} Lampert notes that “Deleuze is not interested in metaphors; he is interested in encounters between language and reality, between expression and content,” which may make the application of his account to Bergson’s example here somewhat uncomfortable (Lampert, “Do Sheets of Past Exist,” 35). I do not, however, think this appeal is illicit. It merely raises a different set of questions.
\textsuperscript{155} Lampert, “Do Sheets of Past Exist,” 42.
\textsuperscript{156} Bergson, \textit{Matter and Memory}, 194.
\textsuperscript{157} Bergson, \textit{Matter and Memory}, 194.
\textsuperscript{158} Bergson, \textit{Matter and Memory}, 194.
\textsuperscript{159} Bergson, \textit{Matter and Memory}, 128. Al-Saji elucidates the process by which memory-images are formed and integrated into the structure of the past in “Memory of another past.” By analyzing this feature of Bergsonism, and Deleuze’s interpretation of it, she reveals the extent to which Deleuze, too, acknowledges the pastness of the present even as he appeals to the ontological difference between present and past.
synthesize the myriad sensory data, memory supplements that data with similar images. The present, then, is already integrated into the structure of memory, and by necessity this entails that the whole of memory is implicated because “it is the whole of memory…that passes into each of these circuits” that supplement the image. Thus, the present from which we detach in the act of recollection is not distinct from the past. Though the planes of memory may be ontologically discontinuous from each other, and from the experienced present, they are nevertheless all simultaneously woven into the present moment, a moment which is itself already integrated into the structure of the past. Analogously, though the view through a camera lens delineates different depths more or less clearly, the elements at those various depths all condition whatever is in focus. Deleuze’s “leap into being” emphasizes the ontological discontinuity of past and present, virtual and actual, and in so doing it suggests a separation between the two foreclosed by Bergson’s metaphorics.

The past does not merely intervene in the present through the process by which memory conditions present experience and the objects that appear in it. The past also intervenes through the action of the subject, for Bergson describes the character of the individual as “the synthesis of all our past states.” When confronted with a decision, we approach it with the entirety of our past, and this synthesis manifests not only in the way that memory employs the past to illuminate the situation at hand but also in the personality that comes to bear upon it. In this case, the mind organizes “the totality of its experience in what we call its character…[and] causes it to converge

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161 Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 188. Bergson does not specify how he takes this account of character to relate to the distinction in *Time and Free Will* between the fundamental self and the superficial self. There, the fundamental self exhibits durational temporality, manifesting as the continuous blending of heterogeneous states, while the superficial self articulates that continuous heterogeneity into “distinct moments, whose states are separated from one another and easily expressed in words” (Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 140, cited by Massey, *The Origin of Time*. 67). Heath Massey offers a useful analysis of this distinction and its role in grounding Bergson’s account of freedom. The rarity of our access to the fundamental self in *Time and Free Will* suggests that Bergson’s account of character as “present in all of our decisions” appeals to a separate phenomenon (Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 188).
upon actions in which we shall afterwards find, together with the past, which is their matter, the unforeseen form which is stamped upon them by personality.”\textsuperscript{162} We can recognize our decisions as our own because they originate in the entirety of our past.\textsuperscript{163} With each of our choices, then, our past accompanies us. It intervenes actively in our present through us, for at a fundamental level we are this past.\textsuperscript{164}

**Conclusion: The Ontological Ground of Memory**

With his account of memory, Bergson articulates a model of temporality that satisfies the criteria of Eliot’s historical sense. This framework, further, draws distinctions that bolster Eliot’s account of historical sense by filling lacunae left by Eliot’s reluctance to follow his inquiry into the territory of metaphysics in “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” Not only does Bergson’s account of memory accommodate the existence of the past, but Bergson argues for the necessity of the past’s endurance and further draws the distinction between virtual and actual existence that explains how this endurance is possible. With this, Bergson provides a theoretical edifice capable of underwriting the first condition of Eliot’s historical sense. The past endures. Further, Bergson argues that the present is integrated into the structure of this enduring past, meeting the second of Eliot’s criteria, while also explaining that the present must be synthesized into the past in this way in order for experience to occur at all. Because consciousness cannot experience the pure present as it passes, experience can only become conscious as it is integrated into the framework of

\textsuperscript{162} Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 225–226.

\textsuperscript{163} In “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” and “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” Eliot interrogates the potential in this account for a pernicious feedback loop, according to which our decisions not to act may integrate paralysis into our character, thereby conditioning us to remain paralyzed.

\textsuperscript{164} This move to recognize identity as, in part at least, determined by the synthesis of one’s past has broad ontological ramifications. For, the synthesis of all of one’s past in character entails that the relations that one participates in contribute to the formation of their identity. As these relations contribute simultaneously to the character of the individual, the individual comes to be delimited by these relations. Identity develops through the accretion of one’s relations to others over time. Indeed, Eliot translates this result of the account of character into the Bradleyan language of internal relations, a point that, I will argue in the next chapter, conditions the account of identity that develops from the temporality of historical sense.
memory. As it is integrated, however, this new experience reorganizes the structure of memory, which rotates and expands to answer the call of the present moment. Thus, Bergson’s account of memory clarifies that Eliot’s second condition of historical sense, which holds that the present alters the structure of the past, is in fact a transcendental necessity. Finally, in addition to articulating the structure by which the past endures while the present is integrated into it, Bergson further illuminates the effect that the past has upon the present. The past intervenes in the present as memory rallies to supplement perception, creating the context that renders perception meaningful, while it also manifests through the choices we make. For these choices arise from character, which is, itself, a synthesis of the entirety of our past experiences.

Though it satisfies the conditions necessary for grounding Eliot’s appeal to historical sense, the applicability of Bergson’s account of memory to the operation of the past in The Waste Land is less obvious. Much of Matter and Memory is devoted to the operation of the memory of an individual. In the account of the cone of memory, for example, memory organizes an individual’s experiences into structures of the past maintained at varying levels of tension. Bergson adduces the figure of the cone of memory to account for how an individual can recall specific memories given the virtual existence of the past. The past may endure, but so far it seems to do so only for discrete individuals. An account of individual memory may promise to illuminate passages in The Waste Land in which particular characters give voice to allusive material, though employing Bergson’s account of memory in this way would risk simply psychologizing the personages of the poem. That the first Thames sister appeals to Dante’s Purgatorio may offer insight into the character of the Thames sister, but this alone does not entail the synthetic perspective promised by historical sense. Attending to the endurance of the past for individual figures instead threatens to re-inscribe the sense of isolation, as within this framework the world of each individual may be
considered the product of their own specific experience, radically distinct from any other’s.\textsuperscript{165} Further, if the past is understood as enduring only for the one who remembers, this framework ceases to account for the irruption of historical voices directly into the poem. The songs of Philomel and the Rhine-maidens appear illegible except as instantiations of authorial memory.\textsuperscript{166} Thus, though Bergson’s account of memory in the third chapter of \textit{Matter and Memory} satisfies the temporal conditions of historical sense that Eliot outlines in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” its interrogation of the individual seems to render it inadequate as a grounding framework. When applied to the poem, this emphasis on the individual obscures rather than illuminates, because it promotes a degree of psychological characterization that the poem thoroughly resists.

Though Bergson argues for the enduring existence of the past and develops his account of memory through investigations of functional or pathological individual mental processes, he does not circumscribe his account within the realm of personal experience. In the final chapter of \textit{Matter and Memory}, Bergson adduces his account of memory to address the relationship between mind and body presented in the introduction as the central problem of the book.\textsuperscript{167} In doing so, Bergson’s investigation shifts from its primarily psychological scope and addresses distinctly ontological concerns. This ontological turn in Bergson’s argument reveals that Bergson’s conclusions concerning the continued existence of the past do not merely hold for an experiencing human subject. Rather, the persistence of the past is a shared feature of all things, though they exhibit

\textsuperscript{165} In the next chapter, I will consider two poems that Eliot composed prior to \textit{The Waste Land}, “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” and “Gerontion.” In these poems, individual memory operates as a force that divorces the subject from a shared reality. I will there argue that Eliot conceives of an enduring past as insufficient for producing the synthetic perspective promised by historical sense if that past endures only for the individual. I will argue, further, that \textit{The Waste Land} attributes the durational account of memory to cultures. The past endures independently of specific individuals who remember.

\textsuperscript{166} Considered in this light, the cultivation of historical sense seems merely capable of developing the type of perspective that makes the composition of poems like \textit{The Waste Land} possible. It becomes necessary for anybody that wants to “continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year,” but appears irrelevant for anybody who is not interested in writing a particular sort of poem (Eliot, \textit{The Sacred Wood}, 40).

\textsuperscript{167} Bergson, \textit{Matter and Memory}, vii.
infinitely varied relations to the enduring past. Bergson anticipates this variety of relations in his discussion of character, for the notion of the “synthesis of all our past states” in character develops to account for the identity of all things, even mere material objects. The endurance of the past, then, is a universal phenomenon. Further, this articulation of identity according to a temporal framework establishes connections between the durations of individual entities, eliminating the threat of a myopically insular account of memory and offering a more robust foundation for historical sense.

Though Bergson delimits his account of memory as a function exclusive to humans, he does not restrict the endurance of the past in the same way. He highlights this distinction in his discussion of dogs’ capacity for recognition. He notes, “it is possible that vague images of the past overflow into the present perception” or even “that its entire past is virtually indicated in its consciousness.” Despite the past potentially being preserved in the dog’s consciousness virtually, however, Bergson denies that the dog detaches itself “from the fascinating present,” which he suggests is a precondition for an act of recall memory. The past continues to exist for the dog, but this past is “rather lived than thought.” Bergson further develops this distinction between a lived synthesis of the past and the specific access to the past offered by memory in the fourth chapter of *Matter and Memory*, where he discusses the relation of material objects to memory. Matter does not exhibit memory. Indeed, Bergson identifies pure perception, which is “the lowest part of memory – mind without memory” as “part of matter.” Nevertheless, he

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168 Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 93. Bergson here only hesitantly suggests the preservation of the dog’s entire past in its consciousness, identifying it as a possibility. His affirmation of the endurance of the past for non-human entities becomes more definitive in the final chapter of the book.
171 Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 297. This does not necessarily attribute mind to matter, but definitively denies matter’s participation in memory.
suggests that matter imitates memory “in its own way.” Matter “repeats the past unceasingly, because, subject to necessity, it unfolds a series of moments each of which is the equivalent of the preceding moment and can be deduced from it.” Thus, he claims, “the past is truly given in the present” and it is necessary “that the past should be acted by matter.” Just as “the whole of our past psychic life…reveals itself in our character,” the past of material objects manifests in their present existence.

An infinite variety of degrees of tension exists between the repetition of the past in the present characteristic of the “infinitely relaxed duration of extension” and the preservation of the entirety of the past in memory. Indeed, according to this account, each entity exhibits its complete past according to its own rhythm of duration, its own degree of tension. By identifying the past of an individual as fundamental to its identity, however, Bergson radically expands the scope of that individual’s past. For the past of any individual includes relations to others whose identities are conditioned by their own pasts. This incorporation of relation into the construction of identity establishes connections to other pasts within the being of an individual. Thus, as al-Saji notes, “durations are mutually implicating for Bergson,” each expanding out to include all others in a unified whole. This mutually implicating character of duration illuminates Deleuze’s claim that, for Bergson, “the idea of a virtual coexistence of all levels of the past, of all levels of tension,

172 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 297.
173 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 297.
174 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 297.
175 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 191.
176 Al-Saji, “The memory of another past,” 223.
177 Al-Saji, “The memory of another past,” 223. Al-Saji arrives at this conclusion along a different trajectory than the ontological account I have developed here. She argues that the “memory of the present is a world-memory” by developing the implications of Bergson’s account of the memory circuit. She relies heavily on Deleuze’s reading of Bergson to develop this account, but by tracing this connection between the memory circuit and memory as world-memory, al-Saji illuminates the theoretical conditions necessitating that an individual perspective open onto the whole world. This theoretical necessity remains underdeveloped in Deleuze’s account. Eliot will highlight the importance of this mutually implicating aspect of Bergsonian duration, though he translates it into the Bradleyan framework of internal relations. Indeed, Eliot’s engagement with the significance of internal relations within both Bergson’s and Bradley’s philosophies will be a central concern of the final chapter of this dissertation.
is thus extended to the whole of the universe…everything happens as if the universe were a tremendous memory.”\(^{178}\) Just as each plane of memory contains the whole of one’s past at a specific degree of tension and oriented around specific “dominant memories on which other memories lean as on supporting points,” the duration of each individual opens out to include the entirety of the past at its own degree of tension and oriented around defining relations.\(^{179}\)

Rather than delimit the endurance of the past as the private persistence of the history of an individual, Bergson appeals to his account of duration as foundational to identity. In doing so, he reveals that the past of any individual exhibits connections to the pasts of others insofar as those others appear in the past of the individual and are, themselves, instantiations of their pasts. This interconnection of durations entails that the enduring past of any individual is, in fact, the past of the world organized around a particular perspective. Within this past hum the rhythms of the durations of other entities, each exhibiting their own degrees of tension and their own organizations of the past.\(^{180}\) This ontological dimension of Bergson’s account of memory reveals that it is, in fact, capable of underwriting historical sense as a force for the synthesis of perspectives. The historical connections drawn in the poem need not be reduced to acts of memory effected by characters within the poem or by the author, for the existence of the past is not restricted to the history of a given individual. Instead, the entire past endures, and it is instantiated at varying degrees of durational tension. The irruptions of the songs of Philomel and the Rhine-maidens appear, in light of this account, as traces of the past available to all characters in the poem as parts of their own histories. Philomel and the Rhine-maidens are, then, parts of those characters. Their

\(^{178}\) Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 77.
\(^{179}\) Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 223.
\(^{180}\) Drawing on Deleuze, Al-Saji identifies these various configurations of the past as “world memories,” which captures nicely the completeness of the re-inscription of the past from each perspective (Al-Saji, “Memory of another past,” 226).
voices persist as elements preserved in each personage’s history, even if these voices are elided. Similarly, the totalizing perspectives of the abstract poetic speaker and Tiresias become legible as articulations of a Bergsonian universal memory.181

Bergson’s account of memory, then, fulfills all the conditions of historical sense and can accommodate the various modes in which The Waste Land depicts the enduring operation of the past. According to this framework, the past continues to exist beyond the moment of its presence. Not only is each present moment integrated into this enduring past, but this integration is necessary for experience to be possible at all. The past conditions the appearance of the present. Furthermore, the past intervenes in the present through the operation of individuals, who are, through their character, “the totality of their past experience.”182 Yet the past does not merely persist as an expression of personal history. It also opens onto the myriad pasts of other individuals, human and non-human, each with their own memory and durational rhythm. The past that is preserved for each is, in fact, the past of the whole world oriented around a particular set of relations. Thus, this account of memory can account not only for specific characters’ articulation of historical awareness in The Waste Land, but it can also accommodate the intervention of historical voices that transcend any individual perspective. The ability of this account to do so, however, depends upon the ontological turn that establishes the mutually implicating character of durational identities. Without this aspect of duration, memory ceases to promise the synthesis of perspectives. Despite being heavily indebted to Bergson, however, Eliot rejects precisely this ontological structure of the Bergsonian framework. Eliot himself seems to indicate the inadequacy of Bergsonian memory as a ground for historical sense, potentially damning his own account.

181 My intention here is not to offer a reading of these figures through a Bergsonian lens. Rather, I merely mean to suggest that the ontological turn in Bergson’s account overcomes the challenge that memory is too individual to provide a conceptual foundation for the operation of historical sense.
182 Bergson, Henri. Matter and Memory. 226.
ELIOT’S CRITIQUE AND THE RESITUATION OF DURATION

Introduction

I have argued that Bergson’s treatment of memory can serve as a theoretical ground for Eliot’s notion of historical sense. A crucial component of Bergson’s explication of memory involves the investigation and critique of the impulse to represent time as linear. Further, this critique itself offers a theoretical framework that illuminates the responses to deficient modes of history that Eliot presents throughout his corpus. Eliot’s intellectual relation to Bergson, however, is characterized neither by happy coincidence nor straightforward adherence. Despite a period of intense engagement with Bergson, Eliot comes to adopt an increasingly critical stance toward the philosopher, particularly in the years preceding the composition of The Waste Land. For example, Eliot explicitly pans Bergson in “The Possibility of a Poetic Drama,” the essay that follows “Tradition and the Individual Talent” in The Sacred Wood. The criticisms of Bergson that Eliot raises in his prose do not present a comprehensive account of Eliot’s grounds for dismissing Bergson, and in some cases his barbs fail almost entirely to hit their mark. Though his prose critique of Bergson does not substantially address the issue of temporality, a sequence of poems written between 1910 and 1920 reveal a far more nuanced engagement with a roughly Bergsonian account of memory. I maintain that this sequence of poems chronicles Eliot’s examination of the subjective experience of duration as a force for personal transformation. The series of poems suggests the contours of an argument that illuminates the precise grounds on which Eliot seems to reject the productive possibilities of durational memory. Because these poems articulate the contours of Eliot’s quarrel with Bergson, they also illuminate the possibility that Eliot does not

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1 The argument against Bergson presented in “The Possibility of a Poetic Drama,” for example, more or less simply an *ad hominem* attack that belies an uncharitably disdainful stance.
endorse a total rejection of the Bergsonian framework. Ultimately, in fact, I will argue that *The Waste Land* presents a further stage in the development of Eliot’s poetic engagement with Bergsonian duration. With this step, Eliot does not abandon Bergson’s account of temporality entirely. Rather, he provides duration with a new ontological ground that preserves the priority of space, to which Eliot is committed, while also locating the foundation of memory beyond the individual consciousness. In marshalling historical sense, *The Waste Land* identifies culture itself as a durational structure. Thus Eliot seems to develop a duration that transcends the individual but does not structure all of reality. He mediates between the materialism and idealism that, he claims, are the only recourse for Bergsonian philosophy. In doing so, he develops an account of individual identity that simultaneously preserves the integrity of the subject while also establishing an essential connection between that subject and all others.

I. Eliot’s Challenge to Bergson and the Priority of Quantity

Eliot’s most extensive prose engagement with Bergson’s thought survives in a paper prepared for presentation before the Harvard Philosophical Club during the 1913–1914 school year. At the beginning of the paper, Eliot identifies three lines of critique that he intends to pursue in his appraisal of Bergson. Each challenge identifies a problematic aspect of a single text in isolation, though Eliot’s pursuit of these challenges involves comparing the conclusions of *Time and Free Will*, *Matter and Memory*, and *Creative Evolution* and highlighting apparent contradictions between them. With respect to *Time and Free Will*, Eliot challenges “the antithesis of extrinsic and intrinsic multiplicity.” Subsequently, Eliot argues that the attempt “to occupy a middle ground

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2 Eliot, “Some Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism.” In their editorial notes, Schuchard and Spears Brooker argue convincingly that that the paper was composed for presentation during the 1913–1914 school year rather than the 1910-1911 year anonymously assigned to the archival copy (Eliot, “Some Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 89).

3 Eliot, “Some Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 67. More frequently throughout the essay, Eliot uses the terms quantitative and qualitative multiplicity to capture this dichotomy.
between idealism and realism” in *Matter and Memory* ultimately fails.\(^4\) The final avenue of critique challenges “the nature of matter in *Creative Evolution*” and “its relation to consciousness.”\(^5\) Though Eliot initially pursues these challenges as separate lines of inquiry, he clarifies that they all participate in a single argument. For the attempt “to mediate between idealism and realism” fails, Eliot claims, precisely because Bergson fails to recognize his own commitment to the priority of quantity.\(^6\) Further, the unfulfilled promise of a position mediating realism and idealism results, according to Eliot, in a fundamentally incoherent account of material existence. Thus, the appeal to a mediating position is central to Eliot’s critique, and Eliot argues that Bergson’s failure on this front embroils him in a dilemma. Because, Eliot claims, the middle ground between realism and idealism cannot be maintained, either the realist or idealist tendencies must prevail. Though he expresses some sympathy with the possibilities latent in the realist thrust in Bergson’s philosophy, Eliot dismisses it rather summarily, arguing that it is untenable due to the insufficiency of Bergson’s attempt “to deduce consciousness from motion” and to account for the relation between those two elements of his account.\(^7\) He claims that, if Bergson intends to maintain an ontological pluralism, duration cannot operate as the final reality in his framework.\(^8\) He argues that quantity is

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\(^6\) Eliot, “Some Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 74. In “Eliot’s Philosophical Studies: Bergson, Frazer, Bradley,” Jewel Spears Brooker frames her investigation of Eliot’s philosophical development around precisely this problem of the antinomy between realism and idealism. According to her account, Eliot’s rejection of Bergson’s attempt to mediate between the two positions precipitates his embrace of Bradleyan idealism. An analogous disappointment with Bradleyan idealism, she argues, results in Eliot’s decision to abandon philosophy. The tension between idealism and realism, then, appears to be the preeminent concern driving Eliot’s intellectual development. In this account of Eliot’s development, however, Brooker overemphasizes the extent to which Eliot abandons one thinker for the next. She presents the disappointment as total and, in doing so, fails to recognize the synthetic operation of Eliot’s poetic development.
\(^7\) Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 77. Eliot’s sympathy towards this realist possibility in Bergson’s philosophy guides his poetic investigation of Bergsonian memory in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night.” In that poem, Eliot explores the effects of a submersion in memory when the durational structure memory is not grounded in a durational external reality. Thus, I will argue, “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” interrogates one side of the dilemma Eliot establishes in “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism.”
\(^8\) Eliot, “Some Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 79.
prior to quality, even in Bergson’s appeals to the contrary, and thus the Bergsonian duration, which
depends on pure qualitative motion, must be grounded in a foundational reality of external relations
if he is to maintain a commitment to a pluralist realism. Eliot sees another avenue open to Bergson,
the embrace of an account of duration grounded in an idealism that appeals to absolute identity.
Eliot’s arguments throughout this article are uneven in quality. They illuminate, however, the
problem that Eliot perceives in the Bergsonian philosophical framework. More importantly, they
highlight the tension that, I will argue, motivates Eliot’s poetic engagement with Bergson. Indeed,
an attentiveness to the role of this tension illuminates the intervention signaled by The Waste Land,
an intervention which promises to resolve the antinomy that Eliot constructs.

I.1. Space as Equiprimordial

In the first part of his argument, Eliot critiques Bergson’s essential distinction between qualitative
and quantitative multiplicities. Bergson appeals to this distinction to ground his argument in Time
and Free Will that spatialized representations of time do not accurately reflect the lived experience
of it. Bergson develops this distinction further in Matter and Memory, appealing to it as an
ontological rather than psychological dichotomy. Quantitative multiplicity is characterized by
discrete elements arranged in space. This space can be a realm of real extension, or it can be the
ideal realm of number.9 When time is represented as a linear progression of discrete moments, it
is conceived of as a quantitative multiplicity. By contrast, a qualitative multiplicity is continuous,
lacking discrete parts. Bergson argues that we experience time fundamentally as a qualitative
multiplicity. Our conscious states are not isolable. Instead, they bleed into each other.10 Bergson
appeals to the hypnotic effect of a ticking clock as an example that illuminates this appeal to the
experience of time as a qualitative multiplicity. When we refer to the passage of a minute, we note

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9 Indeed, Bergson devotes significant attention in Time and Free Will to establishing that number entails space.
10 Heath Massey offers a useful overview of this distinction in The Origin of Time: Heidegger and Bergson, 55–61.
that “a pendulum, beating the seconds, has completed sixty oscillations.”¹¹ When we consider the minute in this way, Bergson argues, we lay the sixty strokes of the pendulum out next to each other in imagined space to count them. But in doing so, we cease to “think of sixty strokes which succeed each other,” considering instead “sixty points on a fixed line.”¹² If we assume this spatialized representation of the minute and attempt to think of the experience of the succeeding seconds, “we will be compelled to think of each oscillation to the exclusion of the recollection of the preceding one” because “space has preserved no trace of it.”¹³ If we grant this model of the experience of time’s passing, however, Bergson claims we encounter difficulty when we try to account for the soporific effect of the ticking clock. Considering each oscillation in isolation, we struggle to explain why the later swings of the pendulum make us increasingly sleepy when the earlier ones did not. This difficulty is resolved, Bergson claims, when we consider the succession without spatializing the passing moments. In this case, we recognize that when we hear each successive stroke of the pendulum, we “hear one in the other, each permeating the other and organizing themselves like the notes of a tune, so as to form what we shall call a continuous or qualitative multiplicity.”¹⁴ Each new stroke alters the experience of the whole series, such that “the increase of stimulation is taken up into the preceding stimulations.”¹⁵ And, further, this “whole produces on us the effect of a musical phrase which is constantly altered in its totality by the addition of some new note.”¹⁶ Each stroke of the pendulum, then, is not experienced as a repetition of the same sound, but rather as a qualitative development of the whole sequence. The series becomes hypnotic because the “sounds combined with one another and acted, not by their quantity as

¹¹ Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 104.
¹² Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 104.
¹³ Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 105.
¹⁵ Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 106.
¹⁶ Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 106. The resemblance between Bergson’s articulation here of the qualitative multiplicity formed by the rhythmic oscillation of a pendulum and Eliot’s definition of tradition is, I think, uncanny.
quantity, but by the quality which their quantity exhibited, i.e. by the rhythmic organization of the whole.”\textsuperscript{17}

In \textit{Matter and Memory}, Bergson expands on this account of qualitative multiplicity, identifying it as the structure of reality itself. The material universe does not comprise organically distinct elements. Rather, a continuous field of images surrounds us on all sides, and we spread out a spatialized network beneath this field, allowing distinctions to be made. We encounter a “moving continuity…in which everything changes and yet remains.”\textsuperscript{18} Crucially, the continuity between the qualitative multiplicity that organizes experience and the qualitative multiplicity of this field of images preserves the connection between the individual, identified as a special image among images within this field, and the world around it. Throughout his work, Bergson identifies these qualitative multiplicities as primary, while quantitative multiplicity appears through the posterior operation of intellect.

In his critique, Eliot analyzes a few of the paradigmatic examples of qualitative multiplicity presented by Bergson. Yet he returns consistently to the same conclusion. Despite Bergson’s claims to identify pure qualitative multiplicities, Eliot argues, his examples always entail number in some capacity.\textsuperscript{19} Because Eliot grants Bergson’s premise that enumeration necessarily entails spatialization, as the objects counted are implicitly set against each other in imagined space for comparison, he argues that Bergson’s attempts to establish pure qualitative multiplicity ultimately import the quantitative multiplicity of space. Eliot first addresses Bergson’s attempt to identify qualitative multiplicity in emotions. For example, Bergson claims that we do not originally recognize desire as a magnitude. Rather, we become aware of a deep passion “by perceiving that

\textsuperscript{17} Bergson, \textit{Time and Free Will}, 106.
\textsuperscript{18} Bergson, \textit{Matter and Memory}, 260.
\textsuperscript{19} Eliot’s failure to wrestle with the significance of the disparate modes in which number manifests in these examples marks one of the greatest weaknesses of his account.
the same objects no longer impress upon [us] in the same manner.”

The desire itself is not greater or lesser. Rather it “permeates a larger number of psychic elements, tingeing them, so to speak with its own color.” Bergson further illuminates the experience of varying intensities of emotion through a discussion of joy. We are inclined, he notes, to attribute to joy a scale of intensity. In doing so, however, we mistake “several characteristic forms of inward joy, all of which are successive stages corresponding to qualitative alterations in the whole of our psychic states.”

Eliot argues that Bergson depends here upon number to make his qualitative distinction. Though we do not necessarily count the psychic states implicated in the different manifestations of joy, “we can tell whether, for example, our joy pervades all the impressions which we receive in the course of the day or whether any escape from its influence.” Thus, Eliot argues, even though Bergson claims to have identified a pure qualitative state, “his means of distinguishing” between the manifestations of joy “is still numerical.” Eliot applies slightly different iterations of this critique to the various examples of pure emotion that Bergson adduces, finding number in each of them. Eliot suggests that Bergson seems “to give away his case” when he notes that “of the two kinds of multiplicity…the first, only contains number en puissance.” Eliot maintains that by admitting that number applies in potential to qualitative multiplicity, Bergson undermines “any essential difference between the nature of the physical world, for science, and the world of

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24 Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 68.
25 M.A.R. Habib offers a helpful explication of Eliot’s application of this argument to Bergson’s more complex example of aesthetic experience in “Bergson Resartus and T.S. Eliot’s Manuscript,” from his *The Early T.S. Eliot and Western Philosophy* (44–45). This analysis also illuminates the enduring continuities between the accounts of aesthetic experience offered by Bergson and Eliot, further suggesting that Eliot’s rejection of Bergson was not complete.
26 Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 70.
introspection.” Eliot then concludes that if number applies to both modes of multiplicity there cannot be an essential distinction between them. There is “only one, the space type.”

Eliot’s claim that the essential distinction between qualitative and quantitative multiplicity ultimately reduces to a single field, a field to which number applies in varying degrees, proves foundational for the ontological argument that he develops through the rest of the article. This claim, however, lacks sufficient explication and defense. Eliot suggests that the identification of number as a potential attribute of qualitative multiplicities necessarily implicates those multiplicities both in number and in space. Yet he does not explain why this should be the case, particularly given Bergson’s acknowledgement that, when we deal with multiplicities whose terms are counted or “are capable of being counted…we think then of the possibility of externalizing them in relation to one another, we set them out in space.” The actualization of a qualitative multiplicity’s potential for enumeration is an act of reflective consciousness. Indeed, in each of the examples in which Eliot identifies an illicit appeal to number, Bergson himself acknowledges the difficulty of engaging theoretically with pure qualitative multiplicities. Following his investigation of desire, for example, Bergson notes that “this wholly dynamic way of looking at things is repugnant to the reflective consciousness, because the latter delights in clean cut distinctions, which are easily presented in words, and in things with well defined outlines, like those which are perceived in space.” Eliot’s argument seems to treat the claim that number is applicable to qualitative multiplicity en puissance as an essential description of the multiplicity itself. Bergson’s own engagement with the potential enumeration of qualitative multiplicity throughout Time and

27 Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 70.
29 Bergson, Time and Free Will, 121.
30 Bergson, Time and Free Will, 9. Bergson leaves implicit here the extent to which his investigation itself is an act of reflective consciousness which, therefore, depends upon clean cut distinctions and enumeration. Still, however, he seems to acknowledge that the investigation of qualitative multiplicity in words already disturbs its purely qualitative character.
Free Will suggests instead that his appeal to this potential enumeration is primarily a description of the activity of reflective consciousness. In itself, qualitative multiplicity is fundamentally pure of number. As the object of reflective investigation, this multiplicity becomes enumerated and spatialized. Where Eliot suggests an essential attribution of the experience, Bergson admits only the subsequent operation of a reflective intellect.

Despite Eliot’s paucity of argumentative justification, M.A.R. Habib manages to illuminate the elided assumptions that ground the objection to the two types of essentially distinct multiplicities. Habib’s analysis reveals how a contradiction between the positions articulated by Bergson in Time and Free Will and Creative Evolution, which Eliot identifies in a previous argument, informs this ultimate rejection. Habib notes that, according to Eliot’s account at this point in the essay, developed almost exclusively through appeals to Time and Free Will, “the difference between the numerical status of material objects and that of conscious states is the difference between immediacy and mediation.” The experience of a spatial, quantitative multiplicity engages with number immediately. This is because, Bergson argues in the second chapter of Time and Free Will, space is “the material with which the mind builds up number, the medium in which the mind places it.” Bergson concludes that, “from the beginning, therefore, we must have thought of number as of a juxtaposition in space,” and this conclusion grounds his further claim that, insofar as matter is treated as extended in space, number applies to it immediately. On this account, when we engage with material objects, we “localize them in space.”

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33 Bergson, Time and Free Will, 84.
34 Bergson, Time and Free Will, 85.
35 Bergson, Time and Free Will, 85.
representation is necessary; we have only to think them, at first separately, and then
simultaneously, within the very medium in which they come under our observation.”

Conversely, “number applies to conscious states only through our artificial refraction of
them through a spatialized language.” Bergson offers the example of listening to the chimes of a
bell. When listening to the bell I may “retain each of these successive sensations in order to
combine it with the others and form a group which reminds me of an air or rhythm which I know.”
In this case the sounds of the bell are experienced but not counted. Counting the chimes, on the
other hand, requires separating them, “and this separation must take place within a homogeneous
medium in which the sounds, stripped of their qualities, and in a manner emptied, leave traces of
their presence which are absolutely alike.” They must, in short, be represented symbolically in
space. This is precisely the sense in which number applies to conscious states in potentiality. Habib
highlights that in the account developed in *Creative Evolution*, however, “it is the same movement
which creates distinct concepts in the mind and distinct objects.” Eliot notes that, in describing
this movement, Bergson appeals to “movements, without things which move.” Yet, Eliot argues,
this is “just the permeation which we are told is the character of the mental, not of external states.”
Habib locates the missing step in Eliot’s argument when he asks “if the separation of concepts on
the one side and of material objects on the other is something that develops simultaneously, how
can Bergson claim that number characterizes only one of these terms.” Number, it seems,
originally applies both to conscious states and material objects *en puissance*. The contrast between

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38 Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 86.
41 Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 69.
42 Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 69.
the experience of material objects as already numerically differentiated and the interpenetrating states of consciousness cannot, for Eliot, reveal an essential difference between quantitative and qualitative multiplicity. Thus, Eliot claims “the numerical way of thinking is at least as original a mental characteristic as the interpenetrative.”\footnote{Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 69. Delueze acknowledges precisely this tension in Bergsonism. Like Eliot, Deleuze traces a development in Bergson’s thought from a more dualistic perspective to a more dominant monism. Rather than settle with identifying the tension, as Eliot does, Deleuze attempts to reconcile the two positions, arguing that “there is no contradiction between this monism and dualism, as moments of the method” (Deleuze, Bergsonism, 93).} Insofar as Bergson grants that the numerical way of thinking depends on spatialization, Eliot’s appeal to the originality of numerical thinking entails an appeal to the cooriginality of spatial thinking. This introduces, for Eliot, the problem of space in Bergson’s framework, and this problem plays a central role in Eliot’s arguments that Bergson fails to offer an account capable of mediating between realism and idealism.

I.2. Eliot’s Ontological Critique: Space That Is Non-Space

Eliot’s arguments here, crucially, do not address the legitimacy of Bergson’s description of qualitative multiplicity or, consequently, his account of duration. Eliot does not challenge, for example, Bergson’s account of the power of aesthetic experience to evoke a series of heterogeneous emotions. Indeed, Habib notes that Eliot’s account of the “objective correlative” closely resembles, and perhaps owes much to, Bergson’s investigation of aesthetic experience.\footnote{Habib, “Bergson Resartus and T.S. Eliot’s Manuscript,” 45. One of the strengths of Habib’s analysis of this essay is his recognition of various elements of Bergsonism that continue to inform Eliot’s work, suggesting a continuity in Eliot’s development rather than a clear break. Habib focuses more extensively on Eliot’s indebtedness to Bergson in his definitions of concepts than his poetic orientation. Thus, Habib emphasizes the kinship between Eliot’s analysis of the poetic deployment of language and Bergson’s account of artistic production. He does not, however, acknowledge the alignment between Bergson’s account of the durational elements of poetic language and Eliot’s poetic engagements with duration (Habib, “Bergson Resartus and T.S. Eliot’s Manuscript,” 56).} Eliot merely contests that the qualitative development of emotional states somehow, if only potentially, entails number and consequently extension. Thus Eliot specifies that, though he grants that Bergson demonstrates “sufficiently that sensation is not measurable,” he doubts that sensation
is “ever pure from extension.” Insofar as he grants that sensation is not measurable, Eliot seems to cede to Bergson that internal sensation may primarily be understood in terms of a qualitative multiplicity. He simply, and crucially, adds the caveat that this qualitative multiplicity entails number. Eliot concludes that in the experience of duration in which moments interpenetrate, “it is only as the moments do not wholly interpenetrate that we can be said to have change at all.”

The interpenetration of states or moments is possible, but it cannot be complete. Similarly, “there can be the passage of states, but there must be real states to pass.” Though he takes it to be definitive, Eliot’s rejection of Bergson in this argument is not complete. He targets a distinction central to Bergson’s ontological account, particularly as it appears in Creative Evolution. In developing this argument, however, Eliot leaves much of Bergson’s investigation into the experience of memory untouched. Insofar as he critiques Bergson’s ontological distinctions without undermining the psychological investigation of memory, Eliot preserves the possibility that a durational account memory could provide the conceptual foundation for his poetic practice. In fact, I will argue in the following sections that a central feature of Eliot’s poetic work in the 1910’s involved an interrogation of a fundamentally Bergsonian account memory in light of the ontological conclusions of this essay. Ultimately, I will conclude that by identifying duration as a feature of cultural history, The Waste Land disrupts the dilemma that Eliot elicits through his critique of Bergson’s prioritization of qualitative difference. The Waste Land, then, responds to

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46 Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 68.
47 Eliot justifies the rejection of an essential distinction between qualitative and quantitative multiplicities while resisting their total assimilation to each other by appealing to Bradley’s logical distinction between internal and external relations (Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 70). As I am concerned in this section with delimiting the elements of Bergson’s philosophy that Eliot explicitly rejects, these distinctions are beyond the purview of my investigation. They will receive further treatment in the final section of this chapter, as this distinction will illuminate the ramifications of locating a durational element in the development of culture.
the arguments adduced in “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism” by identifying an alternative ontological field in which to ground memory.

Eliot’s aim in this argument is not to fully dismantle Bergson’s account of internal experience, including memory. Rather, Eliot marshals the disruption of hierarchical delineation between qualitative and quantitative multiplicity to challenge the ontological framework that this dichotomy serves. Eliot targets in particular the claim that Bergson offers a position capable of mediating between realism and idealism. For Bergson, this claim to provide a mediating position between realism and idealism safeguards the relation between the durational experience of the individual and objective reality. Bergson presents the centrality of this appeal most forcefully in the final chapters of *Matter and Memory*, where he identifies duration as an essential feature of material existence as such. If this mediating position becomes untenable, Eliot suggests that memory turns out to be a force of alienation rather than authenticity. The pair of poems “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” and “Gerontion” present complementary, damning investigations into the effects of a submersion in memory when the accompanying mnemonic framework does not guarantee a connection between the self and external reality. Eliot’s critique of Bergson may not undermine his descriptive account of the experience of memory at all. Insofar as it targets the

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50 Many of Eliot’s arguments to this end are not particularly robust. They find him pitting passages from disparate texts against each other without acknowledging the difficulties of comparing claims that concern distinct levels of existence. Eliot does acknowledge that the descriptions of a “fundamental reality” in *Time and Free Will* consider it according to a psychological framework, while Bergson endeavors in *Matter and Memory* “to define reality in such a way as to admit of the genesis of consciousness from it” (Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 72). He identifies a similar incongruity between *Time and Free Will* and *Creative Evolution* with respect to the question of a fundamental reality, though there he simply suggests that the issue is not of primary importance to him. In neither case does not acknowledge, however, that conclusions drawn in one arena may seem incompatible with those drawn in the other until resolved into a more comprehensive account. Deleuze identifies many of the same tensions as Eliot, but he provides a much more compelling account of them given his attentiveness to the ontological register under consideration at any given point (Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 91–94).

51 This turn in *Matter and Memory* was the subject of the concluding section of the fourth chapter of this dissertation. Indeed, the turn to universalize duration proved crucial for the attempt to ground *The Waste Land’s* deployment of the past in a roughly Bergsonian framework. A central task of the final section of this chapter, then, will be the articulation of Eliot’s modification of the Bergsonian account so as to preserve its synthetic force despite Eliot’s rejection of Bergson’s appeal to a universal durational structure.
ontological feature of Bergson’s framework that guarantees intersubjective experience, however, this critique challenges the viability of appealing to Bergson’s account of duration to ground the temporality of historical sense, which is meant to preserve a shared world by synthesizing perspectives.

Bergson claims to mediate between realism and idealism by appealing to a continuous “extensity prior to space.”\(^{52}\) This continuous extensity includes all material things, including “the center of real action which is represented by our body.”\(^{53}\) Conscious perception “indicates, in the aggregate of things, that which interests my possible action upon them.”\(^{54}\) In order to do so, it artificially renders a homogeneous ground and delineates their contours in space. Bergson claims that this continuous extensity mediates between idealism and realism by positing an external reality that is continuous rather than divisible as we find it in perception. This position departs from realism by denying that concrete extension is “an external reality which is multiple and divided.”\(^{55}\) It aligns with idealism in acknowledging “that every reality has a kinship, an analogy, in short a relation with consciousness,” but it rejects the gulf created by a distinction between appearance and reality.\(^{56}\) Rather, because “images outrun perception on every side,” the relation between ‘phenomenon’ and ‘thing’ is…merely that of the part to the whole”\(^{57}\) Crucially, because this continuous extensity is prior to space, it depends upon the legitimacy of Bergson’s pure qualitative multiplicity. Qualitative multiplicity must be prior to quantitative multiplicity in order for homogenous space to operate “like an infinitely fine network which we stretch beneath material

\(^{52}\) Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory*, 308.
\(^{56}\) Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory*, 304–305
continuity in order to render ourselves masters of it.”  

Without the grounding field of pure qualitative extensity, there is nothing under which consciousness can extend this spatial network. Yet, this is precisely the point that Eliot takes pains to reject in his first series of arguments. Qualitative multiplicity is never pure. “The deeper ego,” he claims, “yet holds external relations en puissance, and…this multiplicity, expressed necessarily in terms of numbers, is meaningless if the terms be not interpreted as to some extent external to each other.” The grounding field, the field of reality that guarantees the continuity between perception and its objects, turns out to be “neither space nor non-space” and, further, Eliot concludes that “it cannot be regarded as selbständig.” In Eliot’s analysis, the theoretical edifice tasked with mediating realism and idealism ultimately falls into contradiction, damning the account.

According to Eliot, the untenability of Bergson’s attempt to mediate realism and idealism embroils him in a dilemma. He must commit to one camp or the other. His account cannot accommodate both, nor can it successfully resolve the antinomy. Eliot captures the centrality of relation to this dilemma when he claims that “the crux of the affaire Bergson” is “his attempt to invest with the title of reality this middle territory which is neither space nor non-space.”

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58 Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory*, 308. The priority of qualitative multiplicity, in conjunction with Bergson’s appeal to the consciousness of extensity, ultimately facilitates a mystical return in Bergson’s methodology. Submersion in pure qualitative experience promises contact with the real because the qualitative heterogeneity of extensity is continuous with the duration of the individual.

59 Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 78. Habib’s analysis of this point strikes me as off the mark. Habib emphasizes Eliot’s appeal to the “deeper ego,” taking it to mean “the inner world of the deeper self” in contrast to “the conventional self which is part of the external world” (Habib, “Bergson Resartus and T.S. Eliot’s Manuscript,” 51). In doing so, he elides the ontological ramifications of Eliot’s complaint by translating them into psychological terms. The deeper ego at stake in this argument is, rather, the “absolute consciousness” identified by Eliot in his preceding argument. It is the consciousness that Bergson refers to when he concludes that “the material universe, defined as the totality of images, is a kind of consciousness…a consciousness of which all the potential parts, balancing each other by a reaction which is always equal to the action, reciprocally hinder each other from standing out” (Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 313). The psychological implications of this deeper consciousness should not be denied, of course, but Habib’s focus obscures the more fundamental point at stake in the argument. Spears Brooker does not address this argument in detail, but by framing her analysis around Eliot’s disruption of Bergson’s mediation of idealism and realism, she seems to me to capture the more profound implications of Eliot’s position.

60 Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 78

61 Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 78.
the rejection of Bergson’s mediating concept of tension, Eliot argues that the account must commit to the ultimate reality of space, resulting in the priority of quantitative multiplicity and external relations, or it must fall back on a thoroughgoing idealism that instantiates a commitment to internal relations. If, in the latter case, all entities are actually unified in an all-embracing absolute perspective, then their identities are conditioned through their relations to each other within it. If, on the other hand, the tension is resolved by grounding the system in a realist framework that prioritizes space, then the structure of the physical world ceases to exhibit a durational quality. Under this account, duration becomes primarily a structure of individual consciousness. With his argument that Bergson is ultimately caught in this dilemma between realism and idealism, internal and external relation, Eliot does not dispute the psychological legitimacy of Bergson’s account of individual experience. Rather he problematizes Bergson’s attempt to situate that account of experience within a framework committed to motion as an ontological principle.

In this essay, Eliot betrays a proclivity for engaging with dichotomies, particularly the dichotomy between realism and idealism, as reified positions. By this I mean that he seems to accept the legitimacy of the antinomy between realism and idealism, and this leads him to frame Bergson’s appeal to a mediating position as offering a “middle ground” between the two. In one sense, this is not entirely inaccurate. When Bergson summarizes his conclusions he notes the points that he “concede[s] to idealism” and the points where “we seem to return to realism.” But I maintain that suggesting that Bergson balances realism and idealism in this way does not capture the full fecundity of the position he develops in Matter and Memory. Though Bergson does, in his

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62 Eliot draws this language of internal and external relations from his engagement with Bradley. This notion of internal relations will prove integral to Eliot’s investigation of absolute idealism in “Gerontion.”
63 Eliot draws the connection between internal relations and absolute idealism, as well as the connection between external relations and realism, on page 72.
64 Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 67.
65 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 305–306.
conclusion, identify the elements of his account that align with the various tenets of realism and idealism, he does not merely carve out a position by cherry-picking from both camps or by positioning his account between them. Instead he presents his project as a much more fundamental intervention that resolves the dispute by disrupting the problem that frames it. As Heath Massey succinctly captures it, Bergson’s “strategy is to show, as he did with the free will debate, that the opposing sides—realism (or materialism) and idealism—share common assumptions and habits of thinking that are the source of the debate over the relationship between mind and body.”

Bergson does not, then, simply locate a middle ground between the two oppositional frameworks. Rather he disputes the problematic assumption “common to both sides of the debate, namely that ‘perception has a wholly speculative interest,’” and in doing so claims to undermine the foundation of the debate itself.

When Eliot engages with Bergson’s claims to mediation, however, he does not seem to take seriously this negative, ground clearing aspect of Bergson’s project. He instead grants the legitimacy of the dichotomy between realism and idealism, and then appraises Bergson’s account in light of these contrasting positions. Thus, as a result of the inconsistencies or difficulties he identifies in Bergson’s framework, Eliot claims Bergson must retreat to one of these alternatives. This argumentative structure is anticipated already in the title of the essay, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” which risks begging the question by framing Eliot’s investigation as a treatment of Bergson as an idealist. Eliot’s proclivity to operate with fixed categories manifests, too, in his concern with ultimate realities, as when he claims that the necessary result of the discussions in Matter and Memory is that “homogeneous space can be only an extrinsic relation set up inside an intrinsic relation. It is perfectly real; and in another aspect an inferior grade of

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reality.”

Eliot’s tacit commitment to the dichotomy between realism and idealism further shines through when he challenges “where again, is the reality—in the consciousness or in that which is perceived? Where is the one reality to subsume both of these, and can we or can we not know it?”

Eliot returns to the question of where to locate reality, seeming to suggest it must be fixed somewhere, and he commits to locating it in one side of the antinomy, a problem that Bergson suggests arises precisely from the desire to treat consciousness as speculative. In doing so, he ignores Bergson’s warning from the opening chapter of *Matter and Memory*, that “to ask whether the universe exists only in our thought, or outside our thought, is to put the problem in terms that are insoluble, even if we suppose them to be intelligible.”

Eliot may surely contest Bergson’s claim that this way of framing the problem is insoluble. Yet an argument that endeavors to reveal the inconsistencies in Bergson’s thought should, presumably, attempt to do so with a sensitivity to the theoretical landscape articulated by Bergson himself. This lack of sensitivity leads Eliot, I think, to underappreciate the full force of Bergson’s philosophical approach.

The endorsement in “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism” of the dichotomy between realism and idealism, a dichotomy Bergson rejects the foundation of, reinforces the impression of an absolutizing tendency in Eliot’s thought which has appeared throughout this dissertation. Indeed, Eliot’s pressure to embrace absolutes will become a force motivating the poetic interrogation of memory in the second part of this chapter. Like Bergson, Eliot does attempt to mediate this tendency. But unlike Bergson, who articulates the mediating position by dissolving the dichotomy into which it intervenes, Eliot more consistently attempts to hold his oppositions in a state of productive tension. He develops this attempt at mediation through tension most

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69 Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 77.
powerfully in his image of the “still point of the turning world” in *Four Quartets*. In the third section of this chapter, I will argue along these lines that *The Waste Land* intervenes in the problematic that Eliot derives from his engagement with Bergson by establishing tradition as the field that maintains this productive tension between his absolutizing realist and idealist sympathies.

In discussing the alternatives he proposes as theoretical redoubts for the Bergsonian system in light of its failure fulfill its mediating promise, Eliot suggests that Bergson’s account has “latent possibilities for a materialism.” He seems to see potential in appealing to a field of external relation. Yet he ultimately positions himself against “the realistic side of the doctrine” finding it both “(1) inconsistent with [Bergson’s] view of space and (2) unsatisfactory in its account of consciousness.” Instead, Eliot suggests that a defense of Bergsonism must resolve the dilemma by committing fully to the idealist horn. He proposes a reformulation of the Bergsonian framework that develops the “suggestions – more than suggestions, of leading toward the absolute” into a “Bergson Resartus.” Rather than posit this absolute as a dynamic force, regardless of whether that dynamism is identified with motion, life, or duration, this “Bergson Resartus” appeals to “a duration of pure identity.” In this identity, “which is the point of completely internalized relation,” matter, as the “externalization of consciousness,” would cease to be. Thus, the absolute

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71 Eliot, *Four Quartets*. 65. A full articulation of Eliot’s cultivation of tensions that hold competing absolutizing impulses in check is worthy of a far more extended treatment than I can give it here, particularly because Eliot’s deployment of this method takes different forms in different contexts. In a philosophical engagement with monadism, for example, Eliot posits that “from the ‘pluralism’ of Leibniz, there is only one step to the ‘absolute zero’ of Bradley,” while “Bradley’s Absolute dissolves at a touch into its constituents” (Eliot, “Leibniz’s Monads and Bradley’s Finite Centres,” 462). After establishing these two poles, Eliot develops his treatment of Bradley and Leibniz by inhabiting the space of this one step that, Eliot claims, separates the two frameworks from collapsing into an identity. By contrast *The Waste Land*, to take a familiar poetic example, exhibits a tension between the fracturing of social reality into a panoply of irreconcilable and atomistic perspectives, on the one hand, and a collapse into identity represented by character of Tiresias on the other.

72 Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 75.

73 Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 75.

74 Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 79.

75 Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 80.

76 Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 80.
identity would provide a grounding field that makes a world of external relations possible by rendering them, “from the point of view of reality, intrinsic as well.” Just as the reification of external relation divorces the duration of the individual from a similarly durational objective reality, this reformulation of the absolute threatens to sever the connection between the individual experience of duration in memory and the durational identity of the ultimate reality. In this reformulation, memory retains “that power of using everything that is apposite in one’s past experience to bear on the present moment” but it loses the promise of connecting the individual to the all-encompassing perspective because the absolute outstrips the perspective of any individual. Individual experience continues to be characterized by heterogeneous, qualitative difference, but reality no longer is. Rather, from the perspective of the absolute, “nothing essentially new can ever happen,” because in it “A is so completely B, and B so completely A, that there is nothing to say about either.” Internal relation collapses into absolute identity, and this absolute identity is divorced from individual experience. With his appeal to a Bergsonism reformulated to embrace identity, an appeal couched in Bradleyan terms, Eliot anticipates the commitment to Bradleyan idealism that orients the rest of his philosophical career. Nevertheless, Eliot’s early poetic corpus thematizes the problem of identifying the ontological ground of an individual existence steeped in memory that is outlined in “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism.”

78 Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 80–81. This connection is severed because the ultimate reality entails a comprehensive perspective, a perspective that, by definition, cannot be achieved by the individual.
80 Eliot’s appeal here to Bradley in this final paragraph signals the philosophical interest that would occupy him for the remainder of his graduate career. The remove at which Eliot locates this Bradleyan Absolute, detached from psychological experience or material existence, contains the germ of Eliot’s ultimate dissatisfaction with Bradley’s idealism. The trajectory of this development is beyond the purview of my investigation here. Charles Altieri, however, convincingly articulates theoretical steps leading to Eliot’s abandoning the Bradleyan Absolute and, crucially, the ramifications of this rejection for his engagement with the problem of solipsism (Altieri, “Reading Bradley after Reading Laforgue”).
II: The Failure of Memory Without Mediation

In his prose work composed after “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” Eliot adopts an increasingly acerbic and casually dismissive stance towards Bergson that suggests a rather flippant engagement with his position. In a review of G.W. Cunningham’s *A Study in the Philosophy of Bergson* from 1916, Eliot excoriates Bergson for his “neglect of previous philosophers,” claiming that “if, as Bergson says, consciousness is directed towards the past, then Bergson is the most unconscious of philosophers.”\(^8\)

This critique is hardly defensible to say the least. In *The Sacred Wood*, Eliot’s derision is in full view. He attributes the popularity of Bergson’s philosophy to “precisely what is not clear, but to what is an emotional stimulus.”\(^9\) Eliot’s dismissive tone in these comments has encouraged scholars to treat Eliot’s break with Bergson in the “Inconsistencies” essay as final. Jewel Spears Brooker, for example, suggests that Eliot’s conclusion that Bergson fails to make good on his promise to “resolve these antinomies” between “intellect and feeling and between mind and body” precipitates his rejection of Bergson for the more robust idealism of Bradley.\(^10\)

Indeed, Spears Brooker describes this turn from Bergson as a “collapse of Eliot’s enthusiasm,” and a “dialectical swing from enchantment to disillusionment.”\(^11\) Though he acknowledges a number of Bergsonian elements that Eliot incorporates into his prose work, M.A.R. Habib also reads “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism” as the inauguration of a thoroughly antagonistic relationship. Rather than organize this antagonism around the dichotomy of realism and idealism, as Spears Brooker does, Habib suggests that Eliot comes to identify Bergson with a strain of Romanticism, which he disdains.\(^12\)

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adopts in this essay develops in his later work into a comprehensive rejection of Bergsonism grounded in a “Catholicism whose intellectual affiliations went back to Aristotle and Aquinas.”

With their emphasis on conversions, these accounts present Eliot’s intellectual development as a series of discontinuous leaps. Frustrated with Bergson, Eliot throws himself into the absolute idealism of Bradley. Disillusioned with the irreconcilable distance of the absolute, Eliot adopts the stance of a skeptical relativist. Finally, Eliot makes his final conversion to Anglicanism.

The emphasis that these scholars place on Eliot’s conversions, however, elides the continuity of the problematic relationship between self and world that organizes a pair of poems composed in the decade preceding the composition of *The Waste Land*. More crucially, by casting the rejection of Bergson as total, these accounts of Eliot’s periodic development obscure the response that *The Waste Land* presents to this enduring problematic. These poems, “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” and “Gerontion,” present stages in a psychological investigation that complement the progression of Eliot’s critique of Bergson. The former interrogates the experience that results from a Bergsonism that fails, as Eliot argues, to mediate between realism and idealism and lands instead in a materialism. “Gerontion” subsequently presents a perspective grounded in an absolute idealism akin to Eliot’s proposal of a Bergson Resartus, one heavily inflected by Eliot’s engagement with Bradley. These poems trace the ramifications of Eliot’s theoretical critique of Bergson for the individual. According to the account of experience developed through these

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87 Eliot accounts for his embrace of the skeptical position in his essay “The Relativity of Moral Judgement.” Despite enduring sympathies for elements of the idealist position, particularly insofar as it recognizes “the continuity of all reality,” Eliot claims he consistently returns to the feeling that “what we call the physical universe represents something much more real and permanent than all our structures of thought” (Eliot, “The Relativity of Moral Judgement,” 198, 199).
88 Other poems, including “The Lovesong of J. Alfred Proofrock” and the minor poem “He said: this universe is very clever,” offer further insight into the investigations I explicate here, but reckoning with their contributions would, I fear, result in a multiplication of voices that would muddy the account. For the sake of clarity, I have opted to focus solely on “Gerontion” and “Rhapsody on a Windy Night.”
poems, the individual perspective within a Bergsonian framework does not discover a world characterized by increasing richness through the conscious submersion in the life of memory. Rather, these poems suggest that the Bergsonian play of memory at best throws an enchanting veil of fantasy over reality, inhibiting action. At worst, the investigation of the individual consciousness viewed within the framework of a Bergson Resartus in “Gerontion” reveals a perspective fully detached from the world and evacuated of content. Despite differences in tone and scope, these poems present the past as a force that erects a barrier between the self and external reality. In doing so, they develop poetically an argument left open in “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism.” That essay concluded with a disjunction. If space is not, as Bergson claims, posterior to duration, and if the attempt to mediate between realism and idealism by appealing to a qualitative tension consequently fails, then the durational account of memory must be grounded in either a materialist realism or an absolute idealism. The poems argue that in either case, the past operates as a force of isolation. Regardless of whether one grounds duration in a realism or an idealism, the poems suggest, the result is the same. The past divorces us from the world around us, foreclosing the possibility of genuine connection. Thus, “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” and “Gerontion” seem to develop a deeply pessimistic perspective. Either memory does not operate according to the account of duration explicated by Bergson, which is an account of memory, I have suggested, that Eliot is reluctant to abandon, or the individual experience conditioned by memory is fundamentally alienated.

I will conclude, however, that Eliot does not ultimately endorse this pessimistic antinomy. Instead, in the final section of this chapter, I argue that The Waste Land presents an alternative to the dichotomy Eliot establishes in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” and “Gerontion,” and that this

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89 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 308.
alternative suggests a response to the problems that Eliot claims disqualify Bergson’s theoretical framework. To briefly forecast my argument, *The Waste Land* depicts the isolation of individual consciousness as a ubiquitous modern characteristic. As I have noted throughout this project, the personages of the poem are evacuated of identity and paralysed by inaction. In this, they closely resemble the characters of these poetic responses to Bergson’s philosophy. As I have also argued, however, *The Waste Land* does not merely rearticulate this account of alienated perspectives at a social level. Rather it appeals to historical sense as a response to this condition. And despite the continuity, for example, of the representations of the speaker in “Gerontion” and the characters in *The Waste Land*, the two poems present radically different accounts of the operation of history. For, while history operates as an isolating force in “Gerontion,” *The Waste Land*, I will argue, posits it as a durational field that guarantees the possibility of intersubjectivity.

The argument I am constructing, then, traces the development of Eliot’s engagement with a specific problem arising from his critique of Bergson. I do not maintain that the poetic visions Eliot presents in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night,” “Gerontion,” and *The Waste Land* all exhibit a single unified account. Nor do I claim that the first two supply a solution to the problems raised in the “Inconsistencies” essay, though I will argue that *The Waste Land* does. I maintain instead that the poems explore the consequences of Eliot’s seeming acceptance of Bergson’s psychological account of duration, on the one hand, and simultaneous rejection his ontological framework on the other. In “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” I have noted, Eliot suggests two possible theoretical redoubts to retreat to in light of what he takes to be the failure of Bergson’s mediating position between realism and idealism. In that essay, however, Eliot does not fully interrogate either of these positions. “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” and “Gerontion,” composed at opposite ends of the 1910’s, each explore one side of this dichotomy between materialism and absolute
idealism. Each, further, finds its side of the dichotomy lacking. I argue that the sequence amounts to a destructive dilemma. Eliot proposes two possible ways to ground durational experience given his conclusions in “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism.” The two poems under consideration determine that both alternatives result in alienation. Thus, Eliot seems provisionally to be left with the conclusion that alienation is inescapable. Finally, I argue that *The Waste Land* offers another step in this diachronic argument by offering a poetic vision that promises to resolve the problem that unites “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” and “Gerontion.”

II.1. “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” and the Enchantments of Memory

Eliot’s most explicit poetic engagement with the Bergson’s philosophical framework occurs in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night,” which Eliot wrote before “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism” and arguably while he still identified as being committed to a Bergsonian perspective. The poem follows the path of a single speaker walking home through a city between the hours of midnight and four o’clock. The twisting alleys invite the speaker to lose himself, and the journey through the city doubles as an investigation of the free play of the speaker’s consciousness. A Bergsonian attentiveness to the fluidity of conscious experience and the interplay of past and present characterizes the speaker’s meandering. The environment itself participates in the speaker’s submersion into memory, as “whispering lunar incantations / dissolve the floors of memory / and all its clear relations.” Piers Gray suggests that “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” straightforwardly endorses Bergson’s account of memory. The poem, he claims, suggests “an ironical triumph of human consciousness that its richest life thus appears in a state of apparent inactivity,” pure

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90 In “Reading Bradley After Reading LaForgue: How Eliot Transformed Symbolist Poetics into a Paradigmatic Modernism,” Charles Altieri cites evidence that Eliot was fully indebted to Bergson when he composed “The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock,” which, like “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” was written during Eliot’s time in Paris (Altieri, “Reading Bradley After Reading LaForgue,” 227). Spears Brooker, conversely, reads “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” as an attempt to wrestle with Bergson and, ultimately, as a rejection.

memory being identified in Gray’s reading with the unconscious. Gray does, however, note the suspicions expressed in the poem towards this richness of unconscious life. For, though Bergson suggests that memory serves to prepare action, the poem presents memory inhibiting the speaker. Ultimately, on Gray’s reading, the speaker resolves this tension between perception and memory, between action and the inhibiting force of the unconscious, by “seeking the ultimate escape into solitude.” The speaker ascends the stair, brushes his teeth, and goes to sleep. He willingly submits to the domination of the unconscious.

Though Gray’s reading of the poem helpfully emphasizes the continuity between “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” and “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” in which the inhibition precipitated by memory is amplified into paralysis, its characterization of the relation between the speaker and his environment is not entirely successful. Gray accepts too readily that the speaker actually engages with the world as it is rather than with the world of his own imagination. In Gray’s reading, memory throws up confused reminiscences, it disorients the speaker, inhibiting action. Gray does not, however, question the speaker’s engagement with the world itself. In his reading, the speaker continuously reconfigures his environment through the operation of memory. Despite this reconfiguration, the speaker remains embedded in the world. He simply fails to interact with the entities in it, observing instead the free play his imagination engages in with respect to them. To the extent that this presents an account of ironic success, it does so within a purely idealist framework. The characters of these poems engage with a reality that is filtered through their

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94 Gray, T.S. Eliot’s Intellectual and Poetic Development 1909–1922, 47.
experience of it, an experience that is invariably colored by memory. Yet, the things in themselves remain elusive. In “Eliot’s First Conversion: ‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night’ and Eliot’s Critique of Bergson,” Jewel Spears Brooker convincingly argues that memory does not merely function in the poem to inhibit action. To make this argument, she draws on the distinction between realism and idealism that dominates Eliot’s engagement with Bergson. In contrast to Gray, who reads the poem as presenting a single coherent narrative, Spears Brooker argues that the poem presents the same night’s stroll according to two different perspectives, “one that is dialogic and prioritizes space, and one that is narrative and prioritizes time.”

By following the trajectory of these juxtaposed perspectives, the speaker of the poem “tests the Bergsonian hypothesis for overcoming psychological and metaphysical dualism.” Spears Brooker formulates this hypothesis as claiming that, by “conceiving of matter…as neither a thing nor an idea, but rather as a series of overlapping images…the intellect will melt into consciousness, leading to a transcendence of the divided self.” While Eliot tests the plausibility of Bergson’s claim to mediate problematic dualisms abstractly in “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism” by drawing Bergson into contradictions regarding the logical priority of his terms, in “Rhapsody on Windy Night,” Eliot tests Bergson’s method for resolving the dichotomy by applying it in experience. Tracing the two interpretive tracks, Spears Brooker argues that the final line of the poem determines its ultimately pessimistic conclusion. Despite the speaker’s attempt to bring the quantitative and qualitative, intellect and feeling, into alignment, “the discontinuities remain painfully intact, and the ‘last twist’ is the

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recognition that this is necessarily so.”

Thus, the poem seems to conclude that, in experience, the method articulated by Bergson fails to fulfill its promise of resolution.

The poem deploys repetition to evoke the sense that memory throws up a barrier between the speaker’s internal life and the world around him. Midnight’s dissolution of “the floors of memory / and all its clear relations” replaces the “clear relations” of space with the associative connection of images across time. In doing so, it establishes the quantitative and qualitative series that Spears Brooker uses to guide her reading of the poem. While the poem tracks the speaker’s progress through the city on his way home, a progress marked by the “clear relations” of a body in space measured by the regular tolling of the clock, the speaker’s reverie disrupts the spatialized continuity of his perceived reality. Thus, at half past two, the speaker’s eye alights upon a cat that “Slips out its tongue / And devours a morsel of rancid butter.” Mnemonic association drives the rest of the stanza. The slipping of the cat’s tongue conjures the image of “the hand of a child, automatic” that “Slipped out and pocketed a toy that was running along the quay.” Though the speaker “could see nothing behind the child’s eye,” the image of the eye transports him again, first to the memory of seeing “eyes in the street / Trying to peer through lighted shutters” and then to the eye of a crab “one afternoon in a pool / An old crab with barnacles on his back.” The poem signals the transports of memory through the repetition of images.

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101 Spears Brooker offers a helpful corrective to Gray’s suggestion that “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” offers an embrace of Bergsonism, even if he claims that embrace is ironic. By focusing on the distinction between the quantitative and qualitative descriptive elements in “Rhapsody,” Brooker highlights the continuity between its poetic investigation of Bergson’s promise and Eliot’s theoretical critique of that promise presented the following year. I maintain that Spears Brooker overemphasizes the finality of “the last twist of the knife” in “Rhapsody,” however, and this overemphasis leads her to read the essay as marking a definitive end to Eliot’s intellectual engagement with Bergson. More importantly, this emphasis on finality elides the continuities of both method and problem between “Rhapsody,” “Prufrock,” and “Gerontion.”
slipping of the tongue evokes the slipping of the hand, drawing the speaker out of his immediate environment, and the blankness of the eye conjures the opacity of the eyes peering through shutters, transporting him between realms of memory.

The series of associations distracts the speaker from the occasion that evokes them, and the poem signals this distraction through the repetition of the image that memory seizes upon. This distraction could perhaps be understood as a synthesis of the speaker’s perception of the world with the relevant memories that interpret that perception. However, rather than interpret the world, leaving the speaker engaged with it, or even simply distracting the speaker from the perceptual catalysts for reminiscing, memory in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” effects a potentially pernicious transformation of the speaker’s world. As Spears Brooker notes, the series of images associated with the woman in the second and third stanzas, which both occur at half past one, suggest that she is “diminished and dehumanized” through the speaker’s perception. Upon regarding a woman standing in a doorway, memory enjoins the speaker to focus on “the border of her dress,” which is “torn and stained with sand,” and “the corner of her eye,” which twists like a crooked pin. In order to facilitate the association of images, memory calls the speaker to reduce the woman to parts of her body or her attire. These synechdocal images conjure memories of “a twisted branch upon the beach,” synthesizing the sand from the dress with the twisted eye, and “a broken spring in a factory yard.” The speaker reifies the woman, reducing her first into pieces of herself and then transfiguring those pieces through the operation of memory into skeletal images of decay and enervation. Conversely, in the sixth stanza at half past three, memory transforms

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the moon into one of the most active figures in the poem. The moon “winks a feeble eye, / She
smiles into corners. / She smoothes the hair of the grass.” It attains this active force through
the activity of memory, which invests the image of the moon with significance and personality. One
might object that the attribution of a winking eye to the moon does not suggest an appeal to
memory at all, but rather merely suggests the operation of the imagination. Perhaps fantasy is at
play in this passage untethered from the activity of memory with which it is associated throughout
the poem generally. I think Spears Brooker is correct, however, in identifying the operation of
memory even in this description that does not appeal to it explicitly. The speaker’s description that
anthropomorphizes the moon, arguably attributing more intentional agency to the moon than
attributed to any individual in the poem, participates in a poetic tradition of lunar personification.
As Brooker notes, “both the sullied wench in stanza two and the cosmic cocotte in stanza five are
images mediated by literature, the former in large part by novels Eliot was reading at the time…the
latter by nineteenth century poems and songs.” The speaker’s description of the moon exhibits
an appeal to remembered literature that shapes his perception. Within the poetic context, this
mediating appeal to nineteenth century literature should be read as an engagement with memory
because that literary context is not on hand to the speaker in the poem. To the extent that the
speaker draws upon it, he must do so through some operation of memory.

Memory, then, exhibits seemingly converse effects upon the speaker in the poem, though
these effects elicit the same result. First, memory calls the speaker to reify his perceptions so that
they serve as the catalysts for reverie. It removes the speaker from an intersubjective reality by
converting other subjects in the world into objects. Subsequently, memory imbues the physical

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112 Spear Brooker draws this contrast most starkly. For, she says, “whereas the woman is diminished and
dehumanized, the moon is humanized and enlarged” (38).
114 Spear Brooker, T.S. Eliot’s Dialectical Imagination, 38.
world with fantasy, investing objects with their own degree of subjectivity. Brooker forcefully captures this second move in the poem when she draws a distinction between the internal and external object. “The external moon,” she claims, “is a discrete material object; the moon within, by contrast, is an aging prostitute who ‘winks a feeble eye’ and ‘twists a paper rose.’”115 In both cases, the poem presents memory as a barrier between the individual and his surroundings. It does not illuminate the relation of the speaker to a world with which he is continuous. Rather, it throws up illusions and distractions, either by calling the speaker’s attention to chains of remembered associations that pull him from the immediate context of the poem or by drawing upon a poetic tradition to imbue the environment with a personality. In the poem, these activities of memory seem to inhibit action and render the speaker’s world private.

While Gray suggests that the investigation of a submersion in Bergsonian memory developed in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” is successful, Spears Brooker more convincingly argues that the “last twist of the knife” of the poem’s final line is an admission of defeat.116 Given the critique that Eliot develops in “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” the failure of the speaker’s interrogation of memory to yield access to an intersubjective reality in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” appears entirely predictable. Already in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night,” the Bergsonian continuity between self and world established by an ontologically privileged field of images prior to space seems to break down. Instead, the realm of quantitative difference, represented in the poem by the streetlamps that measure the streets and count the hours, persists alongside the mnemonic field of qualitative multiplicity. The poem’s preservation of the dichotomy between these two multiplicities, and its investigation of the effects of memory when the dichotomy is preserved, anticipates one horn of the dilemma that concludes “Inconsistencies

115 Spears Brooker, T.S. Eliot’s Dialectical Imagination, 38.
in Bergson’s Idealism.” The poem investigates the operation of memory under conditions in which quantitative multiplicity is treated as ontologically prior to qualitative multiplicity. When the operation of memory is grounded in a materialism, submersion in the qualitative multiplicity of memory fails to bring the subject into contact with a world beyond the self. The poem suggests that under these conditions, memory serves as a barrier to interaction with an objective reality instead of providing the grounds for connection. The speaker of “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” engages more extensively with his personification of the moon, an image conditioned by a mnemonic experience of literary history, than he does with the people who appear momentarily in the poem, people who are immediately reified and serve as the catalysts for further reveries. The first horn of Eliot’s dilemma, namely the possibility of a durational account of memory combined with a commitment to a materialist reality, results in memory functioning as a disruptive force. It erects a barrier between the subject and the world, inhibiting action, dehumanizing other subjects, and cultivating a world of fantasy.

II.2. “Gerontion” and the Seductions of History

“Gerontion” exhibits a philosophical outlook that is vastly different from the one explored in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night.” It engages with a thoroughly idealist perspective, one that draws significantly on the philosophy of F.H. Bradley and that resembles the vision of a Bergson Resartus articulated in “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism.” Nevertheless, it presents an account of the operation of history that is strikingly similar to the conclusions concerning memory suggested by “Rhapsody on a Windy Night.” Just as memory establishes a barrier between the poetic speaker and the world in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night,” the past draws the speaker of “Gerontion” out of his environment and into ideal realms of increasing abstraction and isolation. The attitude towards the past shared by these two poems establishes an argumentative continuity between them, though
this continuity is generally overlooked. While “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” offers a poetic investigation of the effects of an embrace of a durational account of memory tethered to a spatialized external reality, “Gerontion” traces the psychological ramifications of an appeal to a durational absolute. The results are the same in both cases, and together the poems suggest an argument that further develops the disjunction established in “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism.” If qualitative multiplicity is not ontologically fundamental, and thus, Eliot argues, the ontological field mediating between realism and idealism fails, then the psychological experience of duration must be grounded in the materialist or idealist elements of Bergson’s thought. “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” suggests that the embrace of memory from within ontological perspective that prioritizes space results in isolation and paralysis. “Gerontion” addresses the other horn of the dilemma, but it comes to the same conclusion. From within the perspective of an absolute idealism, memory effects a similar seduction. Thus, the poems develop the argument of “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism” to its conclusion.

Like “Rhapsody on a Windy Night,” “Gerontion” presents the internal monologue of a single speaker. This monologue, however, does not develop with narrative coherence. The hours do not toll, calling the speaker back to his surroundings. The speaker does not mark lampposts to track his procession through memory and the empty streets. The speaker merely ruminates, following the patterns of thought to increasing levels of abstraction. Though the poem lacks a unifying narrative thread, Jewel Spears Brooker argues convincingly in “The Structure of Eliot’s Gerontion: An Interpretation Based on Bradley’s Doctrine of the Systematic Nature of Truth” that

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117 Jewel Spears Brooker, for example, suggests that “Gerontion” is more closely aligned with The Waste Land. Though I agree with some elements of the affinity that she identifies, I will argue in the next section that The Waste Land actually marks a significant departure from the perspective presented in “Gerontion.”

118 In this way, the form of the poem is much more aligned with The Waste Land than “Rhapsody on a Windy Night,” as Spears Brooker highlights.
the poem embraces a unifying logic. According to Spears Brooker’s account, a principle of interior relations guides the poem. This principle entails that “all fragments of reality, all appearances, are related to one another simply because they are all part, in the final analysis, of one thing that is the Absolute or experience; and because experience is all-inclusive, all relations are internal.” Because the identity of any object refers to the system of increasingly comprehensive wholes of which it is a part, terminating in the Absolute, an understanding of any individual requires an understanding of the complete system. The poem instantiates this doctrine through the figure of nested houses. The speaker of “Gerontion” sits in “a decayed house” and is “read to by a boy, waiting for rain.” The speaker is, himself, figured as a house, with his “thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season” identified as the tenants. Tracing the poem’s telescoping logic, Spears Brooker identifies this complex network of houses, the whole network, “Gerontion’s thoughts, his brain, his body, his house, his yard, the field, the knob or hill, Europe,” as already latent in the first stanza of the poem. Each individual is located within a greater house until the house expands to contain all of European history and even, through the poem’s fractal pressure to include increasingly capacious wholes, all of experience. For, on Brooker’s reading, “each of these houses is self-transcendent until the all-embracing Absolute, i.e., reality or experience, is reached.” Further, just as the figure of the house expands to contain the entirety of experience, the decayed state of the house in which the speaker sits conditions the meaning of

120 Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, 87. Here, I believe Spears Brooker mistakes a consequence of the commitment to internal relations for the definition of internal relations themselves. I will treat the account of internal relations more extensively in the final section of this chapter. The substitution of the consequence for the definition, however, does not undermine the value of the account, as Spears Brooker’s definition remains a necessary aspect of the doctrine.
all the poem’s houses. Each layer of the nested houses contains indications of its deterioration. As Spears Brooker notes, “all of the houses are owned by a diseased and depraved predator; all of the occupants are transients.” Each element of the poem attains its significance through a relation to a larger context. Without fail throughout the poem, this larger context manifests the same sense of decay as the part through which it is introduced.

Though she acknowledges the poem’s pressure toward increasingly expansive perspectives, Spears Brooker does not fully grapple with the extremely troubling implications of figuring the predatory landlord as a Jew, especially given the metonymic structure of the poem. Spears Brooker draws complex connections between the figure of the Jew and the historical elements woven throughout the poem, but she fails to reckon with the glaring antisemitism of a poetic logic which suggests that “London, Antwerp, Brussels, Athens…are likewise decayed houses owned by degraded Jews.” Throughout her explication, Spears Brooker frequently identifies the terminus of this expansion of housing relations as either Europe or the Christian church. The former context is established in the first stanza of the poem with the speaker’s admission that he “did not fight at the hot gates,” a reference the battle of Thermopylae, and with the stanza’s subsequent references to Antwerp, Brussels, and London. Thus the poem appeals to Europe not only as a geographical entity but also as a historical inheritance, one Brooker suggests Gerontion “immediately dissociates himself from.” The second stanza introduces the Christian context with its claims that “Signs are taken for wonders,” and that “In the juvescence of the year / Came Christ the tiger.” Because the nested structure of the poem reinscribes the

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125 Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, 93. The force of the claim that each house includes depraved predators and transient tenants extends to include Gerontion himself and the whole of Europe as both predator and transient
127 Eliot, “Gerontion,” 3, 9–10
relations presented in the description of the house in the first stanza of the poem in each increasingly capacious frame, the antisemitic caricature of the Jewish landlord who “squats on the windowsill” conditions the account of these ultimate historical houses. The logic of the poem suggests that Europe is beholden to and undermined by sickly Jews, committing it to a reprehensible and indefensible mythical narrative. “Gerontion,” then, is fundamentally tainted by antisemitism. The same expansive pressure that radicalizes the poem’s xenophobic elements also, however, ultimately annihilates the identities that render those elements legible. This annihilation does not, of course, absolve the poem of its abhorrent features. It does not even significantly complicate the poem’s appeals to antisemitic tropes. It does, however, more directly relate to my quarry in this chapter. For the speaker’s relation to the past operates as the force that effects this annihilation of identity, and this appeal to the destructive power of the past illuminates the poetic critique of the attempt to ground the experience of duration in an absolute perspective.

Wind operates as the image of decay in the poem, cultivating a sense of the destructive emptiness that characterizes each structure, while history appears as the force that precipitates such destruction. “History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors / And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions / Guides us by vanities.”\textsuperscript{130} It is not merely another house in the poem, though it does figure as one of the most comprehensive structures. It is also an agent that seduces the speaker with “supple confusions” whose “giving famishes the craving.”\textsuperscript{131} Like the wind, which suggests a nothingness that is active through its invisible movements, history excites a desire unfulfilled. Eliot’s appeals in the poem to the Bradleyan structure of knowledge here proves illuminative once again. As Eliot summarizes the position in his dissertation, when “the only truth is the whole truth,” that truth “which includes both knower and known, is of course

\textsuperscript{130} Eliot, “Gerontion,” 34–35.
unattainable.” History promises knowledge by offering the expansive context according to which a datum may be understood. That context, however, expands to an absolute perspective that cannot be inhabited by the individual, as it includes not only the individual but also a future that individual does not have access to. History promises understanding, but it gives only further fragments. In doing so, it lures us into a labyrinth of our own construction. It guides us down “contrived corridors” and “cunning passages,” and it “Gives too late / What’s not believed in, or if still believed / In memory only, reconsidered passion.” Thus, the poem unites history, the most capacious structure identified in the poem, with the mind of the old man by presenting historical memory as the force that guides him in his ruminations.

Spears Brooker locates a deep irony in the construction of the poem. On the one hand, the poem articulates a pessimistic view of history as a force that promises understanding while only teasing, leading us into winding corridors of abstraction and isolation. On the other, “though discursive knowledge is the destroyer in ‘Gerontion,’” the poem is “soaked in history, philosophy, science, anthropology, and theology,” from its opening appeal to the battle of Thermopylae to the extended engagement with a Lancelot Andrewes’ sermon on the Incarnation. Spears Brooker attempts to resolve this tension by noting that “it takes an intelligent and learned person to perceive that abstract knowledge is a malignancy consuming Western culture.” This claim softens the tension by extracting Eliot’s poetic hyperliteracy from the operation of the poem itself. It seems to suggest that the poem’s allusiveness, its incorporation of history, primarily functions as a challenge to the reader rather than a force internal to the poem. The poem makes derisive claims about

134 Spears Brooker, Mastery and Escape, 92.
135 Spears Brooker, Mastery and Escape, 108. Brooker offers a much more thorough explication of the poem’s engagement with Andrewes than I can develop here.
history, but the poem includes history as an element facing the reader. This attempt to account for
the irony of Eliot’s erudition fails to fully address that the content of the poem is coextensive with
the internal monologue of the old man. The allusions are, in fact, the operation of his mind
retreating from his immediate context into realms of increasing abstraction. As the old man traces
the logic of containment to greater levels of generality, he grows increasingly detached from his
surroundings. At the beginning of the poem, he is “being read to by a boy.”137 By the
antepenultimate stanza, however, he has “lost [his] sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch.”138 He
has “not reached conclusion, when [he] / Stiffens in a rented house.”139 The meditation on history
results in an evacuation of sense. He concludes the poem dead before his death. The other tenants
become inaccessible to him except in thought. They seem to him untethered, like dispersed
atoms.140 The integration of historical material does not simply offer the reader the key to
discerning the poem’s message regarding the dangers of abstract knowledge.141 Nor does it merely
decry the decrepit state of western culture through its metonymic logic, re-inscribing the decayed
state of the house at every level of containment in the poem, as Brooker argues. The poem
represents the effects of an attempt to use history to gain the absolute perspective that promises
knowledge. The process of drawing connections between his proximate condition and the world-
historical situation, his structure of a “thousand small deliberations,” proves to be precisely the
force that isolates him.142

141 Spears Brooker, Mastery and Escape, 109.
142 Eliot, “Gerontion,” 62. Spears Brooker frames the irony of the tension between the hyperliteracy of “Gerontion”
and its pessimistic account of history by appealing to the figure of Eliot himself. She locates the irony in the claim
that “next to Milton, Eliot is probably our most learned poet” (Spears Brooker, Mastery and Escape, 108). Presenting
the tension in this way raises the question of why Eliot commits to a hyperallusive poetics if he endorses a “refined
anti-intellectualism” (Spears Brooker, 109). I maintain that framing the problem biographically renders it insoluble
and distracts from the internal coherence of the poem’s deployment of allusion.
The lack of emphasis on the effect that the old man’s musings have upon the elision of his own identity in the poem facilitates what I take to be the major failing of Spears Brooker’s otherwise incisive explication of the poem. Throughout her explication, Spears Brooker takes pains to distinguish the “concrete universal that comprehends many-in-one and is arrived at by including differences,” the concrete universal that she identifies as central to Bradleyan idealism, from an abstract universal, which dissolves all difference into a homogeneous unity.\(^{143}\) She adduces ample evidence from Eliot’s dissertation to suggest that he endorses a position that aligns with the idealism grounded in a concrete universal, which she attributes to Bradley, but the logic she traces in the poem seems rather to exert a pressure towards abstract unity. According to a system that comprehends multiplicity by including difference, the individual perspectives of the poem should retain their identity even when considered from the perspective of the Absolute. The old man may only become fully comprehensible once the totality of internal relations that determines his identity, and thus the universal system of relations, is brought into view, but the old man should nevertheless remain identifiable as the distinct perspective that instantiates those relations.\(^{144}\) The poetic vision expands to include increasingly capacious houses, moving from the dry brain of the old man to the decayed house of Christ. With its pressure toward the maximally capacious house of Bradley’s Absolute experience, the poem shifts to incorporate the whole of human history. In doing so, it elides the distinctions between the intermediate levels. Spears Brooker herself notes that “all of the houses are old, brittle, decayed, wind-filled, windswept; all of the tenants, being houses also, are the same.”\(^{145}\) The poem further subsumes the individual parts into the comprehensive whole through the operation of wind in the poem. Wind appears throughout

\(^{143}\) Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, 108.

\(^{144}\) Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, 87.

\(^{145}\) Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, 93.
the poem as a force of annihilation, and as each increasingly comprehensive house reveals itself to be windswept, the elements comprising that house seem to evaporate. By the end of the poem, the tenants who share the old man’s house, “De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel, whirled / Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear / In fractured atoms.” They are blown to the wind, reduced to minimal points of identity. In the mind of the old man, simultaneously the most and least expansive house in the poem, the variety that is multiplied by “a thousand small deliberations” amounts to “a wilderness of mirrors.” Apparent diversity merely reflects identity. The poem does, as Spears Brooker maintains, exhibit a pressure towards an absolute perspective. Rather than preserve a totality of difference, however, this absolutizing logic disintegrates its constituents, effecting universal identity through annihilation.

Though “Gerontion” clearly draws upon elements of Bradley’s theoretical framework, the poem’s ultimate appeal to an absolute perspective that annihilates distinction instead of preserving it suggests a continuity with the position that Eliot describes as a “Bergson Resartus” in his critique of Bergson. With his appeal in “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism” to the position of a “Bergson Resartus” grounded in “the duration of pure identity” which makes “time the child of space,” Eliot concludes that “in the Absolute, A is already so completely B, and B so completely A, that there is nothing to say about either.” The Absolute is the ground of truth, the perspective

148 A thorny question appears regarding the Bergsonian and Bradleyan elements addressed in “Gerontion.” Already in “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” Eliot suggests a parallel between the two philosophical frameworks by appealing to Bradleyan terms to articulate his account of Bergson’s position. Nevertheless, the distinction between concrete and abstract universals drawn by Spears Brooker remains relevant to Eliot’s engagement with these thinkers. Further, Eliot voices his appeal to identity in the Absolute through the voice of Bradley, complicating Spears Brooker’s claim that Eliot sees Bradley as endorsing a concrete rather than abstract universal. Eliot again complicates the matter in “The Relativity of Moral Judgement,” where he expresses frustrations with a pressure towards abstraction that he identifies with idealism in general. The project of untangling these distinct philosophical threads in Eliot’s thought is unfortunately beyond the purview of this chapter. Instead, I will content myself to ground my argument upon the resonances between Eliot’s description of the position he describes as “Bergson Resartus” and the dissolution into identity effected in “Gerontion.”
149 Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 81.
without which knowledge is impossible, but from this perspective “nothing essentially new can ever happen” because the universe resolves into pure identity. “Gerontion” follows an individual’s pursuit of that Absolute perspective. History guides the speaker in this pursuit, cajoling him down the path of increasing abstraction. Instead of providing the promised knowledge, however, history takes in the act of giving. The old man’s retreat into history, his pursuit the totalizing abstract, leaves him insensate and evacuated of identity. The poem explores the ramifications of a commitment to the absolute identity of Bergson Resartus and suggests that this framework extracts a high price. Within an absolute idealism grounded in the “the duration of pure identity,” memory becomes a force that seduces and destroys, leaving only a “dry brain in a dry season.”

With its interrogation of the effects of memory within the framework of an absolute idealism, “Gerontion” concludes an argument that begins in “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism” and continues through Eliot’s more explicit poetic investigation of Bergsonian memory in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night.” Eliot argues in “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism” that Bergson’s account of tension, which locates the individual experience of memory within a more expansive durational ontology, runs aground because of his failure to justify appeals to the ontological priority of quality over quantity. Memory may indeed, for Eliot, function in the individual as a continuous, qualitative multiplicity, and I have suggested that Eliot never explicitly

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150 Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 81. When I explicated Eliot’s definition of historical sense in the previous chapter, I noted the significance of his juxtaposition of this account against a deficient approach to literature that prioritizes novelty as the locus of value. While I argued that Eliot rejects this excessive commitment to the inherent value of novelty, this rejection does not amount to a rejection of the possibility of novelty. The account of historical sense in fact emphasizes the intervention that novel works of art make into the tradition of which they are a part. Insofar as this is the case, Eliot’s account of historical sense demands an ontological framework that can accommodate the appearance of new things or events. It merely insists on appraising them within a more inclusive context and recognizing their own historical embeddedness.


takes issue with the Bergsonian account of memory. However, with his rejection of the priority of quality over quantity and the attendant rejection of a durational objective reality, Eliot severs the connection between the individual, whose experience is fundamentally temporal, from an objective reality in which space is prior to time.153 If the Bergsonian psychological framework is to be maintained, then the essay results in a dilemma. Either Bergsonian duration conditions individual experience but does not characterize extramental reality, or the account of memory is situated within a rehabilitated Bergsonian idealism grounded in a “duration of pure identity.”154 Eliot concludes “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism” without resolving this dilemma. “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” and “Gerontion,” however, present a poetic completion of the argument that develops a constructive dilemma with thoroughly negative consequences. Memory in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” inserts itself between the individual and the external world, acting as barrier to authentic engagement with others. This has the simultaneous effects of investing the physical world with illusory meaning and reducing other agents into objects. Without something to guarantee the continuity between perception and its object, without a field that grounds experience, individual memory throws up a barrier between the self and others. In “Gerontion,” the past similarly isolates the speaker by drawing him into increasingly capacious realms of abstraction. Abstraction, in this context, elides the distinctions that connect the speaker to a particular place, such that “A is so completely B, and B so completely A, that there is nothing to say about either.”155 It renders him insensate. Thus, the poems resolve the dilemma that results from the rejection of

153 Alia al-Saji argues for the importance of a durational account of external reality to Bergson’s framework in “Memory of another past: Bergson, Deleuze and a new theory of time.” There, she argues for an account of empathy grounded in the capacity to leap between sheets of memory. Crucially, these sheets of memory are not exclusively internal to the individual but are rather the frequencies of an objective durational reality. If, as Eliot argues, quantity is prior to quality and duration does not characterize the material world, then the ground for this account of empathy erodes. The individual remains detached from other perspectives rather than integrated into a network of temporal experiences.


qualitative multiplicity’s priority in “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism.” If individual memory appears within a material universe that is not itself durational, and if duration therefore manifests purely at an individual level, then memory comes to operate as a destructive, paralyzing force. If memory is grounded in an absolute durational identity, such as a Bergson Resartus, then memory manifests as a destructive impulse towards abstraction. In either case, the past appears to operate as the impetus for a descent into isolation and the evacuation of self. To the extent that Eliot employs a Bergsonian account of memory, the past, either personal or world-historic, becomes a force of inescapable destruction.

III. The Ontological Intervention of Historical Sense

Throughout “The Structure of Eliot’s Gerontion,” Jewel Spears Brooker suggests a continuity between “Gerontion” and The Waste Land. She identifies a structural continuity between the poems, as both present fragmentary passages that must be synthesized into a more comprehensive vision by the reader. Citing Joseph Frank, she claims that his account of The Waste Land “is also true of ‘Gerontion’ – it cannot be read; it can only be reread, because the whole, of which the last lines are a part, must be in readers’ minds throughout.”¹⁵⁶ The continuity of form identified by Spears Brooker is, in fact, emblematic of a deeper agreement between the poems. The agreement that Spears Brooker articulates is not merely formal but rather tonal and philosophical, as well. She locates a “general grimness in ‘Gerontion’” that is “directly related to a despondency regarding the history of Western civilization.”¹⁵⁷ And she claims that this despondency, a response to dissolution of the “intellectual structures that had undergirded the Western mind for centuries,” found “consummate expression in The Waste Land.”¹⁵⁸ In many respects, The Waste Land does

¹⁵⁷ Spears Brooker, Mastery and Escape, 101.
¹⁵⁸ Spears Brooker, Mastery and Escape, 101–102.
amplify the poetic vision expressed in “Gerontion.” In addition to its more extensive deployment of a formal method that marshals allusive fragments to implicate the poem in a contextual superstructure, *The Waste Land* further develops the image of atomistic dissolution contained in the final stanzas of “Gerontion.” The isolation suggested by the image of “De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel” whirling “Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear / In fractured atoms” manifests throughout the interactions of *The Waste Land*.\(^\text{159}\) The world of *The Waste Land* is populated by gerontions who are blind to each other and incapable of connection. Each of us is the old man, *The Waste Land* seems to suggest. Having lost our capacity for “sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch,” we are fundamentally unable to “use them for…closer contact.”\(^\text{160}\) Where “Gerontion” merely suggests through analogy that the evacuation of the old man is a shared condition, *The Waste Land* explicitly universalizes it.

In emphasizing these points of alignment between *The Waste Land* and “Gerontion,” however, Spears Brooker overlooks a fundamental philosophical difference between them. The distinction between the poems’ appeals to the past necessitates a reappraisal of their suggested tonal alignment. In “Gerontion,” as in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night,” memory effects the isolation of the poetic speaker. Following the seductions of history results in the speaker adopting an increasingly abstract perspective that elides his own individuality and that of those around him. The pursuit of a totalizing perspective capable of legitimizing truth results in the dissolution of the old man. He becomes just another atom carried upon the destructive winds that blow at every level of the poem. In *The Waste Land*, however, I have argued that memory exerts the *opposite effect*. The characters most akin to the old man, those who seem to be “dull heads among windy spaces,”


are precisely the ones most detached from memory. The male speaker in “A Game of Chess” is accused of knowing nothing, seeing nothing, and remembering nothing. The violence Tiresias’s vision at the violet hour in “The Fire Sermon” is most effectively erased when the typist dissociates from memory, “smoothes her hair with automatic hand, / And puts a record on the gramophone.” I have argued that an attentiveness to the endurance of history, a mode of historical memory, actually disrupts the sense of isolation exhibited throughout the poem. Historical sense, a sensitivity to history not dissimilar to that employed by the old man in “Gerontion,” operates in the poem as a force that cultivates empathy instead of isolation. *The Waste Land* does not merely universalize the alienating forces explicated in “Gerontion,” as Spears Brooker suggests. Instead, it offers a response to that poem’s vision of isolation, and it does so by responding to the philosophical problems that guide “Gerontion.”

The redeployment of memory as a capacity for cohesion rather than fragmentation in *The Waste Land* reveals the intervention marked by Eliot’s account of historical sense in the argument against Bergson developed in “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” “Rhapsody on a Windy Night,” and “Gerontion.” “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism” results in a dichotomy between a purely subjective account of memory and the grounding of Bergsonian duration in an Absolute of pure identity instead of a dynamic ontology of change. “Gerontion” and “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” explore the ramifications of each of these positions and finds them lacking. The poems suggest that memory has the effect of isolating and paralyzing individuals under both frameworks. With his account of historical sense in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot disrupts this

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162 Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 122. The interlocutor’s response may perhaps be seen as an expression of memory, for he repeats a line from Ariel’s song in *The Tempest*, a line that is repeated elsewhere in the poem (125, 48). The memory suggested by the male speaker, however, appears partial, and its fragmentary quality gives the sense of confirming rather than refuting his interlocutor’s challenge.
dichotomy. He explicates an account of history that is grounded, I have argued, in a broadly Bergsonian account of temporality, but he grounds this account neither exclusively in the individual perspective nor a transcendent Absolute. Rather, he identifies historical sense as an individual relation to “the mind of Europe – the mind of his own country” which changes, and through this change “abandons nothing en route.” With this analogy between the mental structure of the individual and the historical development of Europe, Eliot assigns a durational structure to culture itself. In doing so, he establishes an intersubjective and accessible ground for individual memory, thereby resolving the dilemma established in “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism.”

Rather than present memory merely as an organizing force in the individual psyche or refer it to the operation of an absolute perspective, The Waste Land resituates memory within the domain of culture. Individual memory is not a radically private temporal experience. Nor is it grounded in a totalizing and eternal absolute. Instead, Eliot develops an account according to which the experience of an individual in a society is shaped by a vast network of historical forces, which persist despite being past. Thus, Eliot claims that the critical corpus of Wyndham, for example, appears as a manifestation of the historical circumstances that conditioned Victorian aristocratic culture. Those forces, further, manifest themselves both in his writing and his person. In The Waste Land, the violence perpetrated against Philomel, whose brutalization includes the removal of her voice, haunts the poem’s other depictions of the silencing of women, while a history

164 Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 42. Though Eliot presents historical sense in Eurocentric terms, I argued in the third chapter of this project that the concept itself exhibits a pressure toward synthesizing more inclusive wholes. To the extent that Eliot delimits the arena of historical sense to the history of Europe, I maintain he fails to live up to the productive potential of his own concept.

165 This development does not merely resolve the problem identified in “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” but it also offers an intervention into the Bergsonian framework itself. For Bergson’s analysis relies heavily on accounts that operate at the level of individual phenomenal experience or at the ontological material level. This dual focus is captured most poignantly by the title Matter and Memory. Because of this emphasis on the continuity between individual cognitive experience and a physical reality of which the individual is a part, Bergson does not devote significant attention to the relation between the intermediate realm of culture.
of violence spanning back to the “ships of Mylae” invests the corpse buried in Stetson’s garden with the significance of generations of war dead. The interruption of the poem by voices from the past suggests the extent to which that past persists alongside and is accessible to the present. These voices of the past may be remembered and acknowledged, as in the speaker’s appeal to Mylae, or they may cry out to be heard, as do Philomel and the Rhine-maidens. Regardless, however, we ourselves are implicated in the network of relations that includes those voices. We respond to those echoes whether we are aware of it or not, and our experiences alter their significance in turn.

By relocating the ground of duration to within culture, Eliot resolves the problems that arise from Eliot’s rejection of quality’s priority “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism.” The rejection of the priority of quality at an ontological level undermines the intersubjective ground of memory. Individual submersion in memory ceases to open out onto a world of which the subject is merely a continuous part. Rather, Eliot claims, the primacy of number as a category establishes a universe of external relations, cordoning the self within a private mental universe. With the appeal to a durational account of culture, Eliot establishes a durational ground that coordinates subjects. This ground does not depend upon the absolute priority of quality over quantity, for it is ontologically posterior to space. The history to which Eliot appeals develops through interaction and, given his emphasis on textual production, language. Though culture is not ontologically primary in the sense that matter is, it nevertheless coordinates the perspectives of disparate

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167 Sadly, the suggestion that language itself exhibits a durational structure, which is a necessary though underdeveloped consequence of Eliot’s account of historical sense, warrants more extensive treatment than can be provided here. This suggestion runs counter to Bergson’s treatment of language in *Time and Free Will* and *Matter and Memory*, just as the association of duration with culture does (Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 239–242). Yet, Bergson’s appeal to language as a force of the discontinuous “parceling of the real” treats only the function of language (Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 240). It does not address the evolution of language itself, through which words adopt new meanings even while preserving a history of sense that they continue to express.
individuals. Insofar as they participate in it, it constitutes part of them.\textsuperscript{168} Because of this, it facilitates the process by which the individual interrogation of memory opens onto an intersubjective field.\textsuperscript{169} The investigation of the history that conditions individuals, constituting a facet of their existence, reveals relations to the other individuals of which that history forms a part. Thus, the typist in “The Fire Sermon” and the female interlocutor in “A Game of Chess” are related to each other through their shared relation with Philomel. Memory, according to this account, does not appear as a barrier between the self and the world, as it does in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night,” because individual memory is grounded in and continuous with a more expansive durational structure that includes others.

While Eliot’s account of historical sense grounds the individual experience of memory in a mediating durational culture, it also manages to do so without exhibiting the problems that ultimately damn his tentative attempt to ground memory in the ideal Absolute of a Bergson Resartus. That ideal Absolute promises to provide an ontological ground capable of preserving intersubjective relations. It does so, however, by positing an absolute perspective that resolves all difference into a totalizing identity. Thus, in “Gerontion,” the old man’s seduction by history results in the complete evacuation of his identity. The dissolution of personal identity results because the absolute durational identity circumscribes all of time and, thus, “A is already so completely B, and B so completely A, that there is nothing to say about either.”\textsuperscript{170} From the restricted perspective of the individual, identity may not seem to collapse. But the individual perspective is grounded in the more fundamental Absolute, and from that ontologically prior

\textsuperscript{168} The argument for this conclusion appears in the third section of the third chapter of this work.
\textsuperscript{169} Alia al-Saji articulates the promise of an account of empathy implicit in Bergson’s account of memory in “The memory of another past: Deleuze, Bergson and a new theory of time.” In doing so, she endorses Bergson’s durational ontology. I maintain that Eliot identifies an analogous structure of intersubjective relations at a divergent ontological level.
\textsuperscript{170} Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 81. This claim follows from the appeal to internal relations, which will be taken up shortly.
vantage the distinctions are revealed to be illusory. With his appeal to tradition, Eliot resitutes the ground of duration within time and reaffirms the reality of difference. Because Eliot maintains a commitment to the ontological priority of quantity, he seems to emphasize the reality of material existence as more fundamental than the ideal determination of identity from within a durational perspective. Material entities are defined, in the first place, by their external relations, their material compositions and their locations in space. The commitment to the reality of these external relations preserves the identities of the entities even as they are implicated in a system of internal relations within the durational structure of tradition. Though she is related to Philomel, and through her the other victims of sexual violence in *The Waste Land*, the typist from “The Fire Sermon” maintains an identity apart from those other characters. She occupies a specific space in the poem. Her identity is conditioned by and expresses itself in relations that originate within a durational, historical structure, but these relations do not resolve into an absolute identity.  

Eliot’s account of historical sense, then, appeals to a durational ground that reestablishes connections between discrete perspectives without resolving them into an absolute identity. The distinction between external and internal relations, which Eliot derives primarily from Bradley, illuminates the ramifications of this account regarding the ontological status of both the individual and the cultural reality of which she is a part. Eliot appeals to the distinction between internal and external relations in his engagement with Bergson and, as Spears Brooker argues, the doctrine of

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171 Eliot problematizes this claim in his notes on *The Waste Land*, where he claims that “all the women in the poem are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias” (Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Norton Critical Edition*, 23). However, Eliot introduces this claim by recognizing that Tiresias is not a character in the poem but rather a “personage” who sees “the substance of the poem” (Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Norton Critical Edition*, 23). Tiresias appears as a manifestation of an absolute perspective intervening in the structure of temporality itself. In addition to highlighting the centrality of historical sense to the meaning of the poem, Tiresias also represents the threat of a collapse into identity resultant from a retreat into the Absolute. This perspective need not be taken as the truth endorsed by the poem. Rather, Eliot presents this as one perspective among many. I maintain that the poem confronts reader with opposing tendencies, the tendencies diagnosed in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” and “Gerontion,” the tendencies treated extensively throughout this dissertation, and challenges her to attain a vision that mediates between these two tendencies.
internal relations is integral to the operation of “Gerontion.” M.A.R. Habib articulates the distinction, along with the role it plays in Eliot’s argument, in his “Bergson Resartus and T.S. Eliot’s Manuscript.” When relations are understood to be external, they are not considered to be constitutive of the entities that partake in them. The entities themselves are independent of each other and of the relation itself. This understanding of relationality applies most straightforwardly to location in space. Objects occupy given points in space, and they may be closer to or further away from each other, but the coordination of their relative locations does not identify anything essential about the objects themselves. This account of relations crucially preserves the essential individuality of entities that enter into relations. A doctrine of internal relations, by contrast, posits the relation itself as essential to all members that participate in it because “the relation is not external to the entities but helps define them.” Yet, Habib notes, “if relations are all internal, all entities are ultimately connected and reality must be defined as an absolute which embraces everything,” and further, “such a point of view would be both idealistic and monistic.” Because the identity of any given entity depends upon its relations to others, whose identities further depend on subsequent networks of relations, knowledge of any thing requires a panoptic perspective on the whole system of relations, and this perspective becomes associated with the ultimate reality. Distinctness becomes subsumed into a unity.

172 Eliot, “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” 70, 72, 80. Spears Brooker, “The Structure of Eliot’s Gerontion,” 87. Eliot’s appeal to internal relations in “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” and particularly his identification of a doctrine of completely internalized relation in the account of a Bergson Resartus, suggest the continuity between Eliot’s engagement with Bergson and his engagement with Bradley. This alone, I think, advocates against the account of a radical break from Bergson.


175 Habib, “Bergson Resartus and T.S. Eliot’s Manuscript,” 50. Habib’s account of this distinction captures succinctly the progression of thoughts resulting in the conclusion that the absolute structure of reality is monistic. In her explication of the doctrine of internal relations in “The Structure of Eliot’s Gerontion,” Spears Brooker takes this conclusion for granted but articulates the resultant ontological and epistemological framework more extensively.
Eliot identifies internal relation as ontologically prior in the philosophy of Bergson, and Eliot’s engagement with the ontological priority of internal relation continues into his poetic investigation of absolute idealism in “Gerontion.” With his articulation of historical sense in *The Sacred Wood*, Eliot identifies a field of internal relation that is posterior to space, which grounds external relation. The field of internal relations is cultural rather than ontologically original. By decoupling the realm of internal relations from an absolute reality, Eliot preserves the ontological integrity of individual entities. They retain their distinctness. Rather than identify reality with a totalizing perspective, retreating into the absolute and pulling “the ladder up after him,” Eliot returns “to lay [his] head upon a stone.”176 This position endorses the feeling expressed in “The Relativity of Moral Judgment” that “what we call the physical universe represents something much more real and more permanent than all our structures of thought.”177 Yet, though it suggests that the physical universe is fundamentally most real, the articulation of historical sense does not reduce the structure of reality to pure external relation. Instead, it posits a durational realm of internal relations that transcends the individual. Within this structure of internal relations comprising tradition, discrete individuality opens out onto a continuous network of mutually determining relations.178 This realm establishes relations to an enduring past, such that one can write with the feeling that “the whole of literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.”179 Further, regardless of whether one cultivates historical sense, this structure of historical relations finds expression in the culture of a given place and time and, further, conditions the development of

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178 “These relations are mutually determining, and thus internal, because the intervention of a new work into the tradition essentially alters the structure itself along with all of the elements within it. The new work, however, also gets its meaning through its location in that structure (Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 41).
those raised within it. Individuals themselves thus appear to be both products and authors of the entire history that has developed into their contemporary moment. Within this history, they are essentially connected to all other individuals as parts of a transcendent whole.  

Individuals thus exhibit dual identities. They are, on the one hand, ultimately delineated by their corporeal existence. They are radically separated from each other, inhabiting bodies that can interact but that give rise to private worlds of experience. Simultaneously, however, individuals are born into a culture that transcends them. This culture exhibits a durational temporality, always changing but in such a way that “it abandons nothing en route.” The past persists, expressing itself in the present cultural moment, while historical developments reconfigure the past in turn, altering its significance. This durational structure also characterizes the individual experience of memory, such that the past persists not only in cultural organization but also in the psyche of each participant in it. The past of the individual is not merely preserved as personal memories, but it is preserved in the character of the individual, finding expression in every moment. This past includes the cultivation of attitudes and values integral to the cultural environment, and thus the past of the culture becomes integral to the individual as well. Conversely, the individual intervenes into the cultural situation, and the culture shifts, “if ever so slightly,” according to the actions of those who participate in it. Thus, the individual is incorporated into a vast history that endures and, as part of this history, exhibits relations to all other entities across time. Further, as it is integrated into her character this history becomes

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180 Perhaps the position that Eliot carves out here could be considered a cultural idealism grounded upon an ontological materialism.

181 Habib addresses a similar dichotomy when he appeals to Eliot’s embrace of an ironic account of the self, though he takes care to distinguish this account of the ironic self from Bergson’s (Habib, “Bergson Resartus and the Significance of T.S. Eliot’s Manuscript,” 57). Habib does not, however, engage with the ontological ramifications of this account, identifying the ironic split as a distinction between a culturally conditioned self and a reflective self.

182 Eliot, The Sacred Wood, 42.

constitutive of the individual. And so, the identity of the individual depends in part upon her relations to all other things, relations preserved in culture itself.
CONCLUSION

I. Two Visions of Social Reality

The Waste Land, I have argued, presents two radically divergent visions of social reality. On its surface, the poem represents modern life as fragmented. This sense of fragmentation manifests in the poem’s depictions of interactions between individuals as well as in the form of the work itself. The Waste Land’s assemblage of pieces of quoted material ripped from their original contexts and its resistance to a linear narrative confront the reader with a disjointed representation of social experience. Not only does the poem cultivate a sense of fragmentation, but this sense of fragmentation is also accompanied by an overwhelming sense of failure. Miscommunications predominate, revealing individuals’ failures to accommodate themselves to perspectives other than their own. Even when personages in the poem seem to interact, they nevertheless fail to actually respond to each other. The frantic locution of the female speaker in “A Game of Chess,” for example, is met merely with a litany of “nothing” and nonsense in return.1 The poem frequently adopts a second person mode of address, simultaneously implicating the reader in the interactions while also denying them a voice. The speaker in the final stanza of “Burial of the Dead” cries out in the second person to Stetson, who never responds, causing the reader to recede into the hordes undone by death who nevertheless shamble through the “Unreal City.”2 The characters in the poem are so incapable of connection, in fact, that they are able only to “connect / Nothing with nothing.”3 In this sense, the account of social relations articulated in The Waste Land seems to further develop one of the concluding images of “Gerontion,” in which “De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Camel,” the

tenants who share Gerontion’s house, “whirled beyond the shuddering Bear in fractured atoms.”

Like the tenants in “Gerontion,” the personages in The Waste Land scatter about like isolated atoms, despite their apparent proximity. They are incapable of bridging the gulf that separates their perspectives, incapable of making “closer contact” even in their most intimate moments.

According to this vision of failure, individuals are trapped in atomistic worlds. The personages depicted in the poem are unable to understand each other. Their miscommunications are typically characterized by a silencing that elides the presence of the other entirely. In Tiresias’ vision at the twilight hour, the appearance of the “young house agent’s clerk” is accompanied by the excision of the scene’s protagonist from the passage. They are unable to make connections. They are thoroughly and ineluctably isolated. In a pivotal passage at the end of the poem, with a shift from the first-person singular to the first-person plural, the speaker of the poem universalizes the condition of being locked in a solipsistic prison. “We think of the key, each in his prison,” the speaker claims, “thinking of a key, each confirms a prison.” The confines of our own perspectives appear inescapable. This passage implicates us as readers in the atomistic social reality that predominate the poem’s descriptions. Thus, the poem seductively invites us to embrace this vision of radical isolation as inevitable. These interpersonal failings are further reflected in the poem’s descriptions of a landscape characterized by a breakdown of the seasonal cycles of death and rebirth. Growth does not give way to decay, later to result in new growth. Rather, corpses themselves are described as sprouting and blooming, while symbols of fertility are replaced by symbols of pestilence. Nymphs no longer attend to “summer nights” along the Thames.

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wake of their departure, only rats remain, rattling bones with their slimy bellies. The seasonal disruption finds its starkest expression in the descriptions of a sterile landscape from the first and last sections of the poem. In this arid land, “the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,” and the poetic speaker promises to show the reader “fear in a handful of dust.” This “arid plain” offers only disintegration, as “Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London” resolve into an identity of destruction. Everything is reduced to the rubble of a wasted land. Thus, the poem seems to suggest that history itself is degenerative, and, in fact, terminally so. Not only does the arc of time bend toward destruction, but the anarchy that predominates is the irrevocable terminus of this trajectory.

I have argued that the poem does not in fact endorse this vision of failure as an inescapable reality. Rather, the poem presents the fracturing of the social reality into atomistic perspectives as a diagnosis of a historically contingent development. To the extent that the poem presents this development as contingent rather than an eternal condition, it rejects a commitment that Lukács suggests is paradigmatic of modernist literature. The Waste Land, I argued, presents this diagnosis through its incorporation of a structuring logic derived from the Grail legend. According to this sympathetic logic, the condition of the environment is taken to reflect the behavior and condition of the people living upon it. The wasting of the land is a manifestation of a sickness endemic to its inhabitants. In the legend, the knight gallant embarks upon a search for the Grail with a dual purpose. The recovery of the Grail is meant to restore the health of an ailing king and, in doing so, reinvigorate the wasted land of his kingdom. I have argued that the poem’s appeals to symbols from the Grail legend, such as its allusions to the chapel perilous and the fisher king in the final

section of the poem, offer a framework that organizes the poem’s disparate descriptions into a more unified whole. The descriptions of desolate landscapes “where the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief / and the dry stone no sound of water” are not mere interruptions of the scenes of social disintegration between which they appear. They are, instead, externalizations of the fragmentation exhibited in those scenes. Considered under the auspices of the unifying logic of the fertility ritual derived from the Grail legend, the arid and “dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit” is not merely a symbol but rather a further manifestation of the sterility that conditions the social reality of the poem.¹³

The mythical logic of the Grail legend supplies a structure that unites the fragmented passages of the poem, yet this feature alone does not amount to a diagnosis. Indeed, I have acknowledged that, on its surface, the embrace of a mythical method seems to enact the precise retreat into myth that Lukács claims characterizes the philosophical worldview underwriting modernist literature. If *The Waste Land* endorses a return to myth to escape what it presents as a universal experience of alienation, then, I have argued, it seems to embrace a flight from reality. Such a flight from reality, further, can nevertheless have dire ramifications, as evidenced by the deployment of a variation of *The Waste Land*’s sympathetic logic to horrible ends under the Nazi regime. Against this critique, I have argued that *The Waste Land* raises its appeal to a sympathetic logic to the level of diagnosis insofar as it yields this logic to articulate a more fundamental epistemological framework. According to this framework, which can be traced to Eliot’s engagement with Bradley, a shared world can be said to exist only insofar as the individuals within it intend the same objects. The coherence of their intentions, further, depends upon their capacity to unify their perspectives. When individuals become trapped within circumscribed perspectives

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and communication becomes impossible, they effectively cease to inhabit the same world. This epistemological framework transforms the sympathetic logic that unifies the disparate descriptions in *The Waste Land*. The vitality of the world does depend upon and reflect the health of its inhabitants. This connection is not, however, mythically guaranteed through appeals to a kind of cosmic sympathy. Rather, the health of the world depends upon those in it because the world can be said to exist only if individuals are capable of connection. The loss of the ability to synthesize perspectives results in the alienation of individuals and the dissolution of the sense of a shared world.

The articulation of this epistemological concern brings *The Waste Land*’s vision of failure into relief. According to this vision, modern social reality is characterized by an experience of fragmentation. Eliot presents this sense of fragmentation as a historical development resulting from a combination of factors, including the waning influence of the Christian church as a unifying social force and a proliferation of technical vocabularies that render interdisciplinary discourse increasingly problematic.\(^{14}\) The shared frameworks that unify perspectives seem, according to this vision, to be eroding, even at the level of language. For individuals, this sense of fragmentation affects their capacity to communicate, leaving them trapped within limited perspectives, unable to make meaningful connections. Their perspectives become atomic, discontinuous. This vision of failure further suggests that the atomization of perspectives results in the dissolution of the shared world. In *The Waste Land*, this dissolution appears total. The world can no longer sustain life. Alienation is inescapable. Fragmentation is absolute.

I have argued, however, that *The Waste Land* presents an alternative to this vision of failure. This alternative depends upon an awareness of the ways in which the past endures, an awareness

\(^{14}\) The conditions grounding Eliot’s appeal to anarchic contemporary social conditions, and the nuances of his account, received extensive treatment in the first section of the second chapter.
grounded in Eliot’s notion of historical sense. Eliot aligns historical sense with a “perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence” and a “sense of the timeless as well as the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together.” Further, I noted that Eliot identifies this account of historical sense with the ability to synthesize perspectives. In the artist, this capacity enables the integration of disparate material in the service of a new, more comprehensive perspective. It brings perspectives separated by time and place into relation with each other, facilitating their mutual exchange. Insofar as historical sense works to synthesize perspectives, it offers a response to the alienated condition explicated by *The Waste Land’s* vision of failure. For the ability to incorporate disparate points of view into a more comprehensive whole suggests the possibility that individual perspectives are not radically delimited. If this is the case, connections may be developed that can serve as the ground of a shared world.

*The Waste Land*, I claimed, employs the formal devices of allusion and repetition to articulate this vision shot through with historical sense. I appealed primarily to the figure of Philomel to ground this argument, though a variety of *The Waste Land’s* other historical allusions have received treatment throughout this project. Philomel appears twice in the poem, once in a description of a painting that displays her transformation after being “so rudely forc’d” by “the barbarous king” Tereus and once through the direct intervention of her song, “Twit twit twit / Jug jug jug jug jug / So rudely forc’d / Tereu.” In both cases, the appearance of Philomel precedes a scene characterized by the elision of a female voice. Further, Philomel’s relation to these scenes calls attention to the ways in which this elision amounts to a form of violence. For the story of Philomel is itself the story of a woman’s brutal rape and silencing. By revealing the elements of violence that are otherwise obscured in the poem, Philomel’s song connects her to the women in

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the scenes, combating the sense of isolated reification effected through descriptions marked by
synecdoche. The repetition of the poem’s appeal to Philomel further establishes a relation between
the women through their shared connection to her song. The poem seems to suggest that the song
of Philomel echoes through history, her voice crying out at the violence against women that
continues to be perpetrated and obfuscated.

Though I argued that The Waste Land develops an alternative to the alienated condition
that it diagnoses, I also acknowledged that this vision animated by historical sense demanded an
investigation into the model of temporality that it assumes. Because Eliot’s account of historical
sense depends upon an awareness of the past’s enduring presence, it can only fulfill its synthetic
capacity if this endurance of the past does, in fact, characterize the structure of temporality.
Explicating Eliot’s account of historical sense, I argued that his presentation of the concept entails
three temporal conditions. First, the model of temporality underwriting his account must
accommodate the past’s endurance independently of the individuals who engage with it. Second,
the ideal order constituted by the past must be affected by the present. This condition manifests,
for example, when in the discussion of artistic tradition grounding his elaboration of historical
sense, Eliot claims that with the intervention of each new work of art, “the whole existing order
must be, if ever so slightly, altered.”17 Finally, Eliot’s account of historical sense demands that the
past endure not merely as an ideal order. Rather, the model of temporality underwriting this
synthetic account must accommodate the past’s endurance in the present insofar as the present is
the continuing development of the past.18

Though Eliot does not develop these conditions into a unified theory of time, I argued that
the plausibility of The Waste Land’s response to the alienated conditions it articulates depends

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18 I derive these conditions in the first section of the fourth chapter.
upon the legitimacy of the model of temporality entailed in his account of historical sense. Interrogating the approaches to tradition against which Eliot positions his account, I argued that the model of temporality needed to ground the synthetic vision of *The Waste Land* must be non-linear. Insofar as linear models of temporality are committed to the destruction of the present as it passes, they cannot provide the temporal foundation for the operation of historical sense. Though linear models of temporality can account for the survival of the past in artifacts that persist through time, I contended that even more nuanced linear accounts cannot accommodate the full range of ways that *The Waste Land* invokes the past. For while the poem, itself an enduring artifact, appeals to a litany of historical material, it does not present its allusions uniformly. I distinguished between allusions presented in intratextual representations, such as the painting of Philomel that adorns the wall in “A Game of Chess”, and instances in which voices from the past are presented as intervening directly into the poem itself, as with Philomel’s appearance and the song of the Rhinemaidens in “The Fire Sermon.”

The account of the past’s endurance grounded in a linear temporal framework can account, I claimed, for the poem’s appeals to intratextual allusions but it cannot accommodate the direct appeals to echoes of the past. Finally, I considered the possibility that the account of time developed by Bradley might satisfy the conditions of historical sense, but I ultimately found it wanting. Bradley’s account failed insofar as it entailed a commitment either to a temporality of passage or to the coexistence of all time, thereby foreclosing the possibility of development integral to Eliot’s notion of historical sense.

As an alternative to these accounts, I pursued the possibility that the account of duration developed by Henri Bergson might satisfy the temporal conditions of historical sense. This account of duration is captured most basically in Bergson’s investigation of specific sensory experiences,

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such as the hypnotic effect of the ticking of a clock. Considered in isolation, each tick of the clock is identical to those that came before it. If the sound of the current chime ceases to exist as soon as it is no longer audible, the hypnotic effect of the rhythmic chiming becomes difficult to explain. Bergson leverages this phenomenon and others like it to argue that we do not experience the passage of time primarily as a linear motion, as the model of a timeline would suggest. Rather we experience time as the ongoing synthesis of “both the past and present states into an organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another.” This analysis of duration, a temporal mode “the heterogeneous moments of which permeate one another,” grounds Bergson’s account of memory. According to that account, which I developed through an explication of his famous figure of the cone of memory, the entirety of one’s past persists in an indefinite array of structures with varying degrees of compression or relaxation. We draw upon these structures of memory to help us respond to the circumstances we encounter. For, “memory, laden with the whole of the past, responds to the appeal of the present,” and it does so “by two simultaneous movements, one of translation, by which it moves in its entirety to meet experience….the other of rotation upon itself, by which it turns toward the situation of the moment, presenting to it that side of itself which may prove to be most useful.” Bergson argues, further, that this structure of memory that is “laden with the whole of the past” entails that the past continues to exist, but that its existence remains virtual until it is brought into contact with the present. Not only does this satisfy the condition of Eliot’s historical sense that requires the continued existence of the past, but it provides a conceptual apparatus for engaging with the

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20 Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 104–107. Bergson also offers a similar example of recognizing the number of strokes of a clock without consciously counting them (Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 126–128).
21 Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 100.
ramifications of that demand. Finally, though Bergson primarily develops his account of duration through an investigation of subjective experience, either of lived time or of the operation of memory, I argued that the final arguments of Matter and Memory suggest that Bergson develops an account that posits duration as a fundamental ontological principle. Appealing to Bergson’s suggestion that matter imitates memory “in its own way,” I claimed that Bergson endorses a position in which all things participate in an enduring past, even if he restricts his account of memory to humans.\footnote{Bergson, Matter and Memory, 297. I develop this argument in the conclusion of the fourth chapter.} With this turn, I claimed that Bergson’s account of duration satisfies all of the criteria of Eliot’s historical sense and provides a promising ground upon which to develop the temporal framework underwriting the appeal to tradition in The Waste Land.

I developed the final turn of my investigation of Eliot’s synthetic vision through an explication of Eliot’s own engagement with the Bergson’s philosophy. I argued that Eliot endorsed Bergson’s psychological account of duration and continued to operate with a broadly Bergsonian psychological framework even after ostensibly rejecting Bergsonism. I maintained that Eliot presents his critique of Bergson as a rejection of the ontological priority that Bergson affords to duration. Eliot returns in his critique, time and again, to the problem of space and to the necessity of ceding space a degree of ontological reality that, he claims, Bergson does not afford it. I argued that Eliot traces the ramifications of an embrace of Bergsonian psychology along with the rejection of Bergsonian ontology in the poems “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” and “Gerontion.” In both poems, the protagonist’s engagement with an enduring past results in his increasing isolation within a circumscribed perspective. In The Waste Land, however, I argued that Eliot reframes duration as a synthetic force by locating the ground of durational temporality not in individual experience but rather in an appeal to duration as a structure of culture. The synthetic possibility of

}\footnote{Bergson, Matter and Memory, 297. I develop this argument in the conclusion of the fourth chapter.}
historical sense is safeguarded by this appeal to a culture in which the past endures. We are informed by and participate in the cultures in which we are raised and to which we are exposed. To the extent that we integrate elements of a culture, we come to exhibit a connection to a past that transcends our own immediate experience and which connects us to each other. With this I concluded my investigation of Eliot’s vision of the synthetic capacity of historical sense.

II. Identity in Tension

The final turn in my argument revealed a latent tension that has manifested throughout this project, a tension that unfortunately could not receive a comprehensive investigation. This tension concerns Eliot’s presentation of entities as simultaneously self-enclosed and self-transcending, and it appears with respect to his treatment of works of art, individual subjects, and cultures in general. By self-enclosed here I refer to the various ways Eliot describes entities as exhibiting definite boundaries that render them distinct, and potentially radically separate, from others. This sense of self-enclosure is theoretically grounded in Eliot’s appeal to a materialist realism, addressed in the final chapter of this project. By self-transcending I refer to the ways in which entities are presented as incorporating diverse elements. Through their relations, entities incorporate otherness into their identities while simultaneously participating in the constitution of the identities of other things. This account received theoretical justification in Eliot’s appeal to the structure of internal relations that he suggests is a feature of duration. The underdevelopment of this tension proves particularly lamentable insofar as it has ramifications for Eliot’s account of individual identity and for our understanding of ourselves within his framework.

At the level of texts, this tension between self-enclosure and self-transcendence manifests most prominently through Eliot’s concern for the principle of unity organizing a work. For Eliot, works of art, or, at least, enduring works of art, exhibit a unifying principle that coordinates their
parts. The artist shapes disparate material, such as impressions, emotions, sensations, and beliefs, into a coherent whole.\textsuperscript{24} I have argued, for example, that the sympathetic logic of the Grail legend fulfills this organizing function in \textit{The Waste Land}, shaping its fragmented stanzas and perspectives into a more coherent vision. Unified works of art, with their principles of internal order, intervene as individuals into the ideal order of tradition. So we may speak, for example, of the discrete intervention and the significance of \textit{The Waste Land}. Simultaneously, however, Eliot emphasizes the extent to which texts develop from and incorporate elements of the contexts in which they are produced, contexts that ripple out into increasingly comprehensive wholes. \textit{The Waste Land} thematizes this permeability of texts through its radicalization of allusion on the one hand, and its integration into Eliot’s editorial project in \textit{The Criterion} on the other.\textsuperscript{25} These features render the boundaries of the poem unstable as the text is brought into increasingly expansive networks of relations. Though \textit{The Waste Land} thematizes this unbounded quality of textual identity in a particularly striking way, I have argued that Eliot appeals to it as a fundamental aspect of all textual production. Texts, then, seem at once to be bounded and unbounded, their identities organized according to a principle of unity that delimits their borders while also depending upon relations that reach beyond the limits of the texts themselves.

Eliot develops an analogous tension in his treatment of cultures, and I have argued that it results in an internal pressure that serves as a ground for developing an immanent critique of Eliot’s myopic and xenophobic tendencies. Eliot presents both sides of this tension in his “The Good European,” a speech in which he promotes the cultivation of comprehensive European perspective through the encouragement of individual national cultures. Thus, he speaks of the French national

\textsuperscript{24} This principle of organization receives most extensive treatment in the first section the second chapter of this project, while the work of the artist is treated more extensively in the first and third sections of the third chapter.

\textsuperscript{25} The argument for the expansion of \textit{The Waste Land}’s borders through Eliot’s editorial work appears through my engagement with C.D. Blanton in the third section of the third chapter.
culture and the English national culture as distinct and circumscribed entities that may ultimately be synthesized into a more comprehensive whole. Eliot appeals to a similar sense of delimited cultural identity in his “Note on Ezra Pound,” where he refers to Pound’s sense of history as a “perception of the relation between these periods and languages to the present, of what they have that we want.”\(^{26}\) This language, as I noted in the third chapter, suggests a radical separation of cultures, such that material can be simply taken from one and transplanted into another without a more comprehensive synthesis. Finally, Eliot’s appeals to culture, for the most part, extend only to the boundaries of Europe. Yet, while his engagements with culture often exhibit troubling tendencies toward Eurocentrism and nationalism, the account that he develops implicitly condemns these impulses. Because the account of historical sense developed in this project grounds the response to alienation in the synthesis of perspectives, appeals to hermetically sealed cultures seems to cultivate the precise conditions that *The Waste Land* decries. It unnecessarily and artificially preserves an incommensurability of perspectives, undermining the project of fostering connections. Further, because Eliot identifies culture as a durational ground in which entire histories endure, the notion that these cultures could be isolable in the first place is dubious. For, though a culture, such as a British or French national culture, may perhaps appear distinct in the present, these cultures necessarily formed through an extended process of interpersonal exchange. The history of England and the history of France are inextricably bound to each other, just as the history of Europe and the histories of Africa, Asia, Australia, and the Americas are all interrelated. Attention to the endurance of history in Eliot’s account of culture suggests that seemingly distinct cultures are, in fact, implicated in structures of interrelation, which entails that they are incorporated into each other’s identities. I maintain, then, that Eliot’s appeal to the

\(^{26}\) Eliot, “Note on Ezra Pound,” 750.
importance of developing a synthetic vision entails a call to pursue intercultural dialogue and actively engage with historical moments marked by intercultural exchange. These moments of exchange reveal enduring points of contact at which cultures permeate and open onto one another, forming more comprehensive wholes. And, even as we attend to the specificity of culture suggested by Eliot’s invocation of discrete cultural frameworks, we should also acknowledge the ways in which those cultures are nevertheless always already integrated into more comprehensive totalities.

I have further argued that Eliot’s critiques of both Bergsonian and Bradleyan ontological frameworks, captured most strikingly in “Gerontion,” taken in conjunction with his commitment to durational accounts of memory and culture, result in the reinscription of this tension at the level of individual identity. On the one hand, the identities of individuals seem to be, for Eliot, bounded by their extension in space. We are tied to our bodies, and these bodies individuate us from each other at a fundamental level. Meanwhile, our psychic existence is characterized by a durational power of “using everything that is apposite in one’s past experience to bear on the present moment.” Insofar as our characters are shaped by our experiences, experiences that necessarily involve other people, the preservation of the past in durational memory already suggests an extent to which the limits of the self expand to include others. This integration of others is amplified, however, by Eliot’s appeal to culture as a ground of duration that preserves the possibility of intersubjective experience. For with this account of culture, Eliot implicates elements of character

27 Bergson, too, appeals to the body as a principle of individuation in Matter and Memory, but he crucially does not do so by appealing directly to the extended limits of the body. Rather, he defines the body as “an aggregate of the material world, an image which acts like other images, receiving and giving back movement, with, perhaps, this difference only, that my body appears to choose, within certain limits, the manner in which it shall restore what it receives.” (Bergson, Matter and Memory, 4–5). In doing so, Bergson establishes a continuity between the body and the rest of the world through the continuity of images, while also identifying the limit of the body with the boundaries of its causal determinacy. This strikes me as a more promising starting point than Eliot’s seemingly naïve materialism.

in the development of tradition. His appeals to the importance of rhetoric to the Elizabethan worldview, or to the unified mythology that infused Dante’s Italy, suggest that our patterns of thought, for Eliot, are bound to the operation of culture.  

To the extent this is the case, the structure of culture, and the past preserved in it, become integral parts of our selves. Our identities incorporate this expansive network of voices, both prominent and marginal, that conditions our tastes and beliefs, our concerns and responses. Some of these influences may be more proximate while others are more distant, but they are all integrated in some way into our character. Further, insofar as we, too, intervene in these shared cultures, we effect changes in them. We are integrated into a network that transcends us even as it conditions us, and insofar as this network conditions others, we become implicated in their development, as well. Despite the circumscribed nature of our identities according to his seemingly naïve materialism, Eliot also develops an immensely permeable notion of selfhood which expands to include relations to countless others and an extensive enduring past.

Eliot’s attempt to maintain a productive tension between a bounded account of identity grounded in appeals to internal principles of organization or physical location in space, on the one hand, and an unbounded account of identity grounded in an appeal to the informing capacity of structures of internal relation, on the other, strikes me in turns as extremely appealing and rather tenuously defended. Each of Eliot’s appeals to an unbounded or self-transcending account of identity, regardless of whether that identity is textual, cultural, or individual, depends upon his durational account of culture. I have argued that Eliot’s attempt to locate duration at a cultural, rather than merely individual, level is meant to preserve the synthetic capacity of historical sense. Descriptively, I find this account of culture rather compelling. I think it provides a powerful

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framework for reckoning with the enduring effects of a past that informs us and conditions our experience. Yet the ontological ground of this durational account of culture remains unclear. Eliot does not explain what culture is such that it can participate in duration. At precisely this critical point in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” he appeals to the metaphor of “the Mind of Europe” to make his case and then, ultimately, demurs, opting instead to “halt at the frontier of metaphysics or mysticism, and confine [himself] to such practical conclusions as can be applied by the responsible person interested in poetry.”

The account that Eliot develops in his critical work can provide an appeal to the durational aspects of culture through the articulation of historical sense. *The Waste Land*, further, can distill a vision of the productive possibilities of this historical sense. But neither amounts to an argument for the veracity of this account of culture, nor can they articulate the ontological ground upon which it rests. What culture is for Eliot, such that it can preserve an intersubjective past, remains a cypher. While I ultimately had to stop short of addressing this problem in the project at hand, I hope further research will illuminate the philosophical conditions that could justify Eliot’s durational account of culture.

A problem that remains unresolved concerns the necessity of Eliot’s intervention into Bergson’s philosophical framework. Adopting a primarily historical orientation in my investigation, I traced the problems motivating the theoretical intervention of *The Waste Land*. As I pursued this investigation, I raised doubts about the quality of Eliot’s arguments against Bergson, but I did not linger on the ultimate ramifications that would result if Eliot’s arguments proved unsound. Though his critiques of Bergson may have been inadequate, they nevertheless motivated Eliot’s intellectual development. According to my account, this intellectual trajectory resulted in the vision of historical sense articulated in *The Waste Land*, which was ultimately my quarry. The

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problem remains, then, of how to engage with Eliot’s vision of historical sense if it turns out to be a response to a problem that arose from a misguided critique. To reject his position outright on these grounds would commit the genetic fallacy. However, we may still wonder about the promise of pursuing this account.

I do not have the space here, at the end of this project, to develop the answers to these questions fully, but I can signal my suspicions. Eliot’s account of culture seems, to me, to be robust enough to safeguard the synthetic capacity of historical sense but not duration *tout court*. A more substantial definition of culture and an explanation of its ontological ground seem necessary to account for its durational elements. Further, I think Eliot fails to successfully call the Bergsonian ontological framework into question. His critiques of Bergson do not take seriously Bergson’s claims about the limitations of discursive language, resulting in frustratingly uncharitable articulations of the positions he rejects. Though Eliot, like Bergson, is concerned with mediating apparent oppositions, his tendency to hold oppositions in a productive tension is ultimately not as satisfying as Bergson’s attempt to address more fundamental problems motivating the apparent antinomies. I suspect that Bergson’s ontological account is ultimately more promising than Eliot’s intervention in response to its imputed shortcomings. It seems to me, however, that Eliot’s account nevertheless offers insight insofar as it illuminates durational structures that Bergson does not investigate so thoroughly and, furthermore, insofar as it explicates their ethical ramifications. Additionally, though Eliot rejects Bergson’s ontological framework, I think Bergson’s account is capable of accommodating Eliot’s account of tradition because it appeals to a structure of duration that is prior to culture. Finally, I see value in Eliot’s account because it allows us to consider the ethical ramifications of an intersubjective field of duration without necessarily becoming immediately embroiled in metaphysical speculation, though this speculation is ultimately
necessary. Appealing to culture rather than metaphysics shifts the framework of the discussion, providing a concrete focus for the pursuit of an intersubjective field. It allows us to join him, for a time, as he returns to earth to “lay [his] head upon a stone.”

III. Inhabiting the Vision of Historical Sense

The generally historical orientation I have adopted in this project has admittedly resulted in a lacuna regarding the ultimate plausibility of Eliot’s intervention into the Bergsonian ontological framework, a lacuna that further research will hopefully supplement. However, *The Waste Land*’s development of a vision animated by historical sense offers, I think, an alternative way to approach the problem of discerning the value of Eliot’s account. By presenting a vision that attends to the endurance of the past, the poem invites us to consider whether inhabiting this vision enriches our experience. Further, by employing an allusive intertextuality that necessarily overdetermines the text to develop this synthetic vision, *The Waste Land* demands the cultivation of historical sense as a condition of engaging with the poem. It does not merely invite us to consider the effects of inhabiting its synthetic vision, it provides the tools for cultivating the requisite attunement to tradition. The poem presents this vision as a response to social conditions marked by fragmentation and isolation, and it endorses an attention to the echoing voices of the past as a force capable of synthesizing disconnected perspectives. Engaged with on its own terms, rather than through the question of an ultimate metaphysical ground (which I admit nevertheless lingers), the poem establishes the conditions of its own success. *The Waste Land* locates the value of its appeal to tradition in the capacity an engagement with that tradition has to foster connections and enrich our intersubjective experience. If inhabiting this vision proves to reinforce a sense of alienation or

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social fragmentation instead of bringing perspectives into closer contact, then we may reconsider whether pursuing its ultimate ontological ground is a worthwhile endeavor.

Considered according to this criterion of perspectival enrichment, I maintain that *The Waste Land* offers a number of promising interventions. I think one of the most promising features of the account of tradition developed in this project is the emphasis it places on the sense in which tradition is always changing. The significance of any work or any event, and even the horizons of the tradition itself, are perpetually being renegotiated. This more capacious account of tradition provides a framework for responding to attempts to wield mythologized appeals to a monolithic tradition as a reactionary defense against the integration of differing perspectives into the fabric of a society. The productive force of the account of historical sense at the heart of *The Waste Land* is its recognition that the intervention of novelty is as essential to the operation of history as the endurance of the past. Diversity is therefore built into the notion of tradition as an organizing principle. Attempts to reify the past, such as appeals to an unchanging and monolithic national or cultural identity, commit to the deficient mode of temporality derided by Eliot in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” and “Ulysses, Order, and Myth.” They fail to recognize that, as a function of its capacity for integration, the tradition to which they appeal cannot be frozen and fixed. The appearance of differing perspectives in a cultural framework necessarily alter it, if only slightly. Rather than cede the notion of tradition to reactionary cultural voices, the account of historical sense articulated by Eliot contests the very concept to which those voices stake their claim and offers a framework for wielding their cherished concept against them.

In addition to offering a framework for responding to reactionary appeals to a monolithic tradition, I maintain that the vision of historical sense developed in *The Waste Land* suggests a productive model for engaging with literary and historical traditions. By treating those traditions
as perpetually under negotiation, the account of historical sense resists the competing impulses to treat the literary tradition as an established and enduring canon and to eliminate problematic voices from that canon or to eliminate the notion of a canon entirely. For, on the one hand, Eliot’s appeal to the endurance of the past challenges us to consider whether voices could actually be eliminated from the tradition, even if such a course of action were deemed desirable. If the whole past persists, we cannot expect to eliminate the effects of a voice simply by excising it from our account of tradition. Its influences, the web of relations into which it intervened and which further developed around it, continue to condition our present reality even if we cease to attend to them. On the other hand, the perpetual renegotiation of tradition also calls into question the impulse to treat the canon as a constellation of fixed stars that we use to appraise the value of new works of art. Insofar as the intervention of novelty rearranges the whole ideal order that preceded it, historical and literary developments allow us to reassess the relative contribution of canonical figures. We may consider whether their significance is altered in light of our own shifting self-understanding.

The legacy of Joseph Conrad is, I think, illuminating in this respect, for Conrad has enjoyed a troubling and troubled reception. As a voice critical of the colonial project, Conrad offers some extraordinarily evocative and damning depictions of life under colonial regimes. As a contemporary of the executors of that project and a product of the imperial mindset, Conrad also endorses some of the most reprehensible features of that very same imperial project. Simply consigning the work of Conrad to obscurity would, I think, render us insensible to the influence he had upon subsequent literary figures. More importantly, it could deafen us to ways in which the colonial situation described by Conrad continues to echo in our contemporary circumstances. The horrific accounts of colonial rule articulated by Conrad provide powerful tools not only for assessing his own complicity in the racist imperial worldview but also for considering the lingering
traces of that worldview in, for example, the operation of the police state. I do not mean to suggest that Eliot’s model of historical sense is the only framework capable of cultivating nuanced approaches to a problematic and contentious literary tradition. However, to the extent that it suggests a method for engaging with the enduring effects of the tradition and the conditions that informed traditional authors while simultaneously facilitating the reappraisal of those same figures, this vision of historical sense seems, to me, to provide a method for productive engagement and immanent critique. This critical approach is, in fact, precisely the method I have adopted with respect to the tension between the pressure in Eliot’s account to incorporate diversity and his problematic, and at times repugnant, Eurocentrism.

I started this project in the wake of a police officer’s murder of Tamir Rice, a black child who was playing with a toy gun. Now, as the project draws to a close, the country is being wracked by protests over the refusal to bring significant charges against the police officers who murdered Breonna Taylor, another person of color. Meanwhile, the government is advocating an educational curriculum that minimizes the role of violence against, and enslavement of, people of color in the founding of the United States. The vision of historical sense developed in this project offers a framework for attempting to reckon with just how immeasurably tragic these events are. For each time the state murders a person of color, a litany of voices echoes out from the past. These voices are deafening – I am undone by them. A chorus of lives sacrificed in the name of industry calls to us when protests over these deaths are condemned for the resultant destruction of property. When we attend to these voices, we may come to understand the enduring legacy of the violence they suffered. We may recognize the transformation and preservation of the structures of law and belief that legitimated their abuse. Finally, Eliot’s vision of historical sense further articulates the danger of attempting to silence these voices once more, of denying them and of deafening
ourselves to them. For in attempting to silence these voices, by excising slavery and genocide from our understanding of this country’s history, we destroy the ground of our mutual understanding. We undermine the foundation that allows us to recognize ourselves and connect with others. We ravage our world and render ourselves senseless, able only to “connect / Nothing with nothing.”

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