MODERNISM FROM TEXT TO WORK: PERSONALITY, POETIC DEVELOPMENT, AND THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Stephen David Thompson

August 2016

MODERNISM FROM TEXT TO WORK: PERSONALITY, POETIC DEVELOPMENT, AND THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

Stephen David Thompson, Ph.D.

Cornell University 2016

Modernism from Text to Work argues that both literary modernism and modern literary criticism were deeply influenced by the intellectual assumptions and values of the modern university – from its scientific epistemology and its valorization of research to its emphasis on rigorous methodology, professionalization and specialization. But where in literature departments, institutional pressure led to the pragmatic internalization of such assumptions, literary modernism's intimate ambivalence toward the university enabled the development of a poetic critique of institutional reading practices and their philosophical underpinnings. Focusing first on the rise of modern literary criticism and then on the work of T.S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, and Melvin Tolson, which variously embodied, questioned, and resisted academic assumptions about literature, this dissertation explores the critically disruptive poetics of personality, participation, and commitment that grew out of high modernism.

My first chapter approaches the early work of I.A. Richards as an intellectual historical point of convergence between a humanist ethos and a scientific method, one that reveals the tensions operative within literary studies as a discipline and the modern university as a cultural institution. In the second chapter I argue that T.S. Eliot's sustained engagement with scholarly forms like the footnote registers a set of philosophical difficulties related to but distinct from those found in Richards's early thought, and that the intellectual, artistic, and personal development of Eliot's career resists and reformulates attitudes both thinkers inherited from the

modern university. The third chapter examines Marianne Moore's continual concern with moral philosophy, her democratic citational practice, and her radical revisionary tactics, arguing that not only is her late poetics of transparent commitment consistent with her early work, but that it is a culmination of those endeavors. Finally, the fourth chapter turns to Melvin Tolson, and resisting critical tendencies to treat his work in abstract and discursive terms, I maintain that the self-reflective, autobiographical, and community-oriented moral concern that Tolson cultivated in his classrooms motivates even the most esoteric and impersonal of his poems like *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia* and *Harlem Gallery*. Having been heavily influenced by and engaged with the modern university, each of these writers share a common investment in the ostensibly impersonal poetic forms of high modernism, while ultimately infusing those forms with personality.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Stephen David Thompson was born in Castro Valley, California in 1984. He graduated from the University of California at Berkeley in 2007, earning a B.A. in English Literature with high honors. He entered the Ph.D. program at Cornell University in 2010.

To Marisa and Magdalena

ACKNOWLEDGEMENS

I wish to thank my chair, Jeremy Braddock for the exceptional support, encouragement, and interest he so readily brought to this project, and for his kindness. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Roger Gilbert, Molly Hite, and Rayna Kalas, all of whom offered indispensible guidance in thinking through the questions of this dissertation. I owe many thanks to Theodore Harwood for the many hours he spent quietly working beside me in the library, and to Stephen Tardif for the weekly conversations wherein he patiently and insightfully talked through so much of this project with me. Additionally, Dena Fehrenbacher, Chad Hegelmeyer, Charity Ketz, David McInnis, and Ryan O'Dowd have all been sources of great encouragement and have kept me alive to the joys and wonders of the intellectual life. I am also grateful to Steven Justice for his inspiring example of intellectual patience and charity, and for his incisive feedback and invaluable guidance. Material support for this writing was provided by the Graduate School at Cornell through its Sage Fellowship, and by the family of Alan Young-Bryant through the fellowship it established in his honor. I am also grateful to Matthew Rose and the Berkeley Institute for offering both stimulating intellectual community and a beautiful workspace in California; and to Mark Edwards and Michael Jackson for facilitating my visiting year at Harvard University and for discussing the earliest stages of this project with me. I owe much to the encouragement of my parents, Dan and Kim Marie, and most of all to lovely wife for both her tireless support and her willingness to read drafts rife with terms like "methodological."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION:
Methodological Impersonality in the Modern University

1. Modernist Impersonality, Critical Impersonality

Ever since T.S. Eliot announced to poets and critics alike "that the poet has, not a 'personality' to express" but only "a particular medium" and that "poetry is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality," the field of literary studies has remained doubly invested in impersonality.[1] In a more local and particular sense, scholars of twentieth century Anglo-American literature from Hugh Kenner to Rochelle Rives have understood impersonality to be a fundamental component of modernist aesthetics.[2] But in a more general sense, impersonality undergirds not just literary modernism, but the very methodology that academic critics apply to both that period and others. Of these two situations, the particular literary-historical fact of impersonality is the more readily apparent, for modernists like Eliot, Ezra Pound, W.B. Yeats, and Wyndham Lewis themselves advertised the category as central to their work. It is only natural, then, that critics should pick up this thread and interrogate the provenance and effects of the impersonality doctrine. But criticism's own methodological

[1] Eliot, T. S., *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. The Critical Edition*, ed. Ronald Schuchard, Jewel Spears Brooker, Anthony Cuda, Frances Dickey, Jennifer Formichelli, and Jason Harding (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), I.111.

[2] Maud Ellmann influentially traced impersonality in the work of Pound and Eliot, Michael Levenson explored Joseph Conrad's participation in this tradition; Daniel Albright addressed the same in Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, and Thomas Mann, and much more recently Rochelle Rives has charted the impersonality of H.D.'s work. See: Ellmann, Maud. *The Poetics of Impersonality: T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987); Levenson, Michael H., *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine 1908-1922* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 22-33; Albright, Daniel, *Personality and Impersonality: Lawrence, Woolf, and Mann* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Rives, Rochelle, *Modernist Impersonalities: Affect, Authority, and the Subject* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). See also: Lewis, Pericles, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

investment in impersonality is somewhat less evident, though recent discoveries of the theme beyond the historical scope of the early twentieth century might suggest the discipline's general investment in it. Sharon Cameron, for instance, uncovers impersonality in the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Herman Melville, and Jonathan Edwards, and Michael Levenson traces the concept back to Matthew Arnold. While intellectually illuminating, such genealogies are more topical than theoretically self-reflective; they tend to overlook the complicity of their own disciplinary practice with impersonal modes of thought.

For instance, when Northrop Frye grounds the theoretical meditations of *Anatomy of Criticism* on the patent necessity of the critical endeavor, he does so by insisting that criticism fulfills not only a cultural function, but also an explicative function required by literature itself. Criticism, we are told, "has to exist" because only it "can talk, [while] all the arts are dumb." He goes on to explain:

> In painting, sculpture, or music it is easy enough to see that the art shows forth, but cannot *say* anything. And, whatever it sounds like to call the poet inarticulate or speechless, there is a most important sense in which poems are silent as statues. Poetry is a *disinterested* use of words: it does not address a reader directly.[3]

Unsurprisingly, Frye turns first to the modernist Archibald MacLeish to substantiate this claim, though the poet is evoked more for his authoritative than for his explanatory force.[4] But unlike Eliot's theory of impersonality, which can be understood as the expression of an historically specific aesthetic sensibility precisely because it became a governing principle for his early

[3] Frye, Northrop, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4.

[4] Indeed, should we pause on this argumentative move just slightly longer than Frye himself does, we would realize that the reference defeats the very claim it is invoked to support. For the work of MacLeish to which Frye directs us is a poem ("Ars Poetica"), and though the critic had just insisted that poems are inarticulate or speechless, the language of this poem is treated as if it speaks for itself. After insisting on a discursive distinction between art and critical discourse, Frye immediately treats the utterances of poetry *as* critically forceful. Such inconsistency might draw our attention to the operative assumption behind Frye's claim, that the act of interpretation belongs *only* to the critic, and that a work of art can only "speak" to a reader through the descriptive or exegetical speech of criticism. However, judging from his treatment of MacLeish, Frye himself apparently doesn't even believe this.

(modernist) poetry, Frye's assertion of poetic disinterest purports to a critical and descriptive universality. While "Tradition and the Individual Talent" might be read as a manifesto for writing poetry at a specific historical moment, *Anatomy of Criticism* demands to be read as a theoretical guide for practicing criticism. The polemical and apologetic context alone informs us that while Frye purports to describe poetry, he is actually offering a methodological tenet of literary criticism: poetry is disinterested, silent, and does not address the reader directly, and therefore criticism must invest it with interest and bestow it with speech by its own direct exegetical mode of address (the reader, we will notice, is silently transformed from a reader into either a student or a peer critic). What is especially curious here is that even while investing poetry with interest or speech, as an academic critic Frye maintains a *disinterested* posture; the fruit of his speaking on behalf of these mute artworks is not a particular (i.e. interested, limited, personal) interpretation, but rather a universal framework whose value inheres in its detached or objective veracity and general applicability. From one perspective, the critic's pursuit of this such universal and objective veracity is so unremarkable as to be almost inane; virtually every field of academic inquiry in the modern university is predicated on the notion of disinterestedness, and literary studies is hardly exceptional in this regard.

But a long view of institutional and intellectual history reveals that neither literary studies, nor the modern university, nor even disinterested inquiry itself are necessary or inevitable developments.[5] Because literary studies was born within the university at a time when the disinterested inquiry of science was generally accepted as the only valid mode of study, and because the epistemological assumptions of science still govern that institution, it has never been

[5] Though the university has become such a pervasive feature of public life that some might find it unnatural to do anything *but* study literature, recent developments in literary studies itself (surface reading, for instance) suggest that books might indeed be "just read." See Best, Stephen, and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction". *Representations* 108 (1). (2009).

institutionally intuitive or advantageous to imagine the study of literature as anything other than impersonal. One of the central assertions of this project is that the impersonal posture of literary studies, from New Criticism to Poststructuralism, is symptomatic of broader intellectual and institutional developments that are often overlooked by the practitioners and historians of the discipline. Which is to say that despite the perennial opposition between science and the humanities that often characterize contemporary debates, the humanistic disciplines in general, and literary studies in particular, were conceived of and still are practiced as sciences (that is, as experimental endeavors that seek to produce objective knowledge). This reality goes largely unnoticed precisely because it has always been the case; for as long as literary studies has existed as a stable, institutionally-sanctioned discipline, it has breathed the intellectual air of the modern university, an air that is rich in epistemological empiricism.[6] The philosophical assumptions of modern science have been promoted by the modern university for at least two centuries, though the roots of this intellectual complex can be traced back to the Enlightenment.

2. Science and the Modern University

In order to understand what constitutes the modern university, it is necessary to chart, however roughly, its intellectual roots in both the philosophy and scientific practices developed in the Enlightenment. Contemporary educational historians are in general agreement about the

[6] The scientific epistemology that informs academic study in the modern university is similar to what Charles Taylor calls a "social imaginary." This "common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy," flies under the intellectual radar because it consists not in explicit doctrines but rather in the complex of assumptions and values that make doctrines and practices possible and intelligible: Taylor, Charles, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 23. David Foster Wallace presents this same idea rather pithily in a joke: "There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, "Morning, boys, how's the water?" And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, "What the hell is water?": Wallace, David Foster, *This Is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered On a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life* (New York, NY: Little, Brown, 2009), 1-2.

considerable and diffuse influence of science in shaping the modern higher education.[7] In the United States, the ascent of science in the university is often cast in terms of a growing conflict between theological claims and scientific discoveries. According to this narrative, which Julie Reuben elaborates in *The Making of the Modern University*, scientific advances in the later half of the nineteenth century, most notable among them Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, threatened the centrality of natural theology as the unifying principle of knowledge in the American university. The ensuing decades-long debate within intellectual and academic circles about the nature of truth and intellectual inquiry resulted in the gradual elevation of empirical and experimental modes of thought over theological and revelatory ones, the polarization of science and religion, and the enshrinement of science as not just an intellectual enterprise, but also as a cultural, and moral one.[8] But any complete understanding of the rise of the modern university in the United States must look beyond such national debates, for the situation Reuben describes was more a condition than a cause; the steadily growing esteem for scientific modes of thought didn't produce the structure of the research university as much as it prepared the soil for it to be transplanted from Germany.[9] Indeed, the scientific practices that came to be so influential in nineteenth century America had their roots in the scientific theories and methods that had long been cultivated by the European university, an institution that was itself changing to become

[7] See for instance, Rüegg, Walter, *Universities in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries (1800-1945). A History of the University in Europe* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3-20.

[8] Reuben, Julie A., *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago, IL: the University of Chicago Press, 1996), 31-66.

[9] For a somewhat more broadened view see: Veysey, Laurence R., *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 121-179. Though more expansive, Veysey's account takes the Humboldtian model as a starting point, and thus necessarily overlooks the earlier intellectual provenance of nineteenth century scientific attitudes.

more hospitable and encouraging to scientific advancement.[10] The provenance of that transformation has often been pinpointed to 1810, when under the influence of German Idealists from Immanuel Kant to Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Wilhelm von Humboldt founded the University of Berlin, which quickly became the model for higher education that was adapted by universities throughout Europe and the United States.[11] The Humboldtian university was built on the unity of two complex concepts that were meant to work synthetically. The first, *Bildung*, refers to the ideal of individual self-development through the pursuit of truth.[12] The second, *Wissenschaft,* is best approximated by the English word 'science,' though this translation is misleading since the concept entails and embraces all forms of knowledge and inquiry.[13] Although F.W.J. Schelling, theorizing these two ideas in relation to the German university, argued that the unity all knowledge arose from its participation in the Absolute, on an institutional level, the unity of the university's disciplines issued from the philosophy faculty, and was thus informed by the Enlightenment's philosophical tradition and its emphasis on autonomous reason.[14] The institutional centrality of philosophy was itself an idea inherited from Kant, who placed it on the university's throne (recently vacated by theology) for methodological reasons.[15] Unlike the three

[10] Though the major scientific innovations of the Enlightenment have long been thought to have developed outside the universities that progressive thinkers like Galileo and Francis Bacon criticized for their dogged allegiance to ancient (Aristotelean) views of the universe, recent historical scholarship has suggested that the rise and spread of scientific innovation was actually facilitated by and cultivated in universities. See Porter, Roy, "The Scientific Revolution and Universities" in *Universities In Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800.* ed. Hilde de Ridder-Symoens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 531-620.

[11] Röhrs, Hermann, and Gerhard Hess, *Tradition and Reform of the University Under an International Perspective: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag P. Lang, 1987), 13-25.

[12] Anderson, R. D., *European Universities From the Enlightenment to 1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 52.

[13] Ibid., 56.

[14] Ibid. 52-3, 57.

[15] Ibid., 58.

"higher" faculties of theology, law, and medicine, philosophy became preeminent precisely because, as Bill Readings explains, it "has no content as such, apart from the free exercise of reason…it is guided by nothing other than free, rational inquiry."[16] What Kant asserts directly, the Humboldtian university realizes structurally; for though Schelling might aver that the unity of knowledge depends on the Absolute, as far as the university is practically concerned, this Absolute is autonomous reason.

Thus whatever the spiritual and romantic inclinations of the German research university, it had its practical roots in Enlightenment rationality, an intellectual ideal as philosophical as it is scientific. As Hannah Arendt observes, "modern philosophy owes its origin and its course more exclusively to specific scientific discoveries than any previous philosophy."[17] For it was the discoveries of scientists like Galileo, aided by technologies like the telescope, that first called into question the empirical reliability of sensory experience, thereby throwing into doubt whole fields of apparently intuitive knowledge. Descartes' skeptical interiority arises in consequence of this, for when the very notion of sense-data is radically thrown into doubt, and when we therefore cannot trust our own experience to furnish truth, it is no wonder that philosophy becomes increasingly concerned with epistemology.[18] Out of this grew Kant's epistemological idealism, which insists that we can only know the concepts we ourselves impose upon experience, as well as Bacon's preferences for theoretical and predicative models of reality over immediate phenomena.[19] For scientific reasoning, as for philosophy, what is reliable is not sense

---

[16] Readings, Bill, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 56.

[17] Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition. Charles R. Walgreen Foundation Lectures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 272.

[18] Ibid., 257-284.

[19] cf. Kant' *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783) and Bacon's *Novum Organon* (1620).

but thought, and observation accordingly became subordinated to computation. Like Arendt, Martin Heidegger recognizes a fundamental affinity between Enlightenment science and modern philosophy, between the mathematization of nature effected by Galileo and Newton and Descartes' project of a *scientia universalis* – the skeptical methodology of both proceeds by granting priority to preconceived conceptual systems over phenomenal encounters.[20] According to this method, Heidegger points out, the world becomes a series of objects for which there is only ever one subject, the detached scientific observer.[21] The principle of Enlightenment science and philosophy is objectivity – depersonalization – a movement outside the self that functionally transforms it into an abstracted "rational subject" from which peculiarities and idiosyncrasies are banished in the quest of universal knowledge; the self is boiled down to pure mind.

Despite the spiritual-integrative aspirations of the Humboldtian model as it was theorized by idealists like Fichte and F.W. J. Schelling, the latent skeptical objectivity that we see sewn into its very organizational structure became increasingly influential for the development of the human sciences in Germany, which would in turn condition humanistic disciplines in the United States and Britain. Examining the growth of modern historiography, Hans Georg Gadamer traces the human science's methodology to Friedrich Schleiermacher's universal hermeneutics, which operates by a logic of doubt similar to the epistemological skepticism of Descartes, where

---

[20] Bacon, in his *Novum Organon*, also gives priority to conceptual systems, which are erected through experimental observation. See: Bacon, Francis, *The New Organon,* ed. Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 81-96. Like Arendt, Heidegger owes something to his own mentor – Edmund Husserl advanced a very similar argument late in his career; see: Husserl, Edmund, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology; an Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 21-59.

[21] Heidegger, Martin, "Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics" in *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to the Task of Thinking (1964*), ed. David F. Krell (New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008).

"experience is alien and the possibility of misunderstanding is universal."[22] For Schleiermacher, the need for hermeneutics "is given precisely with the decline of self-evident understanding."[23] Though this presumption of opacity, which is analogous to the opacity of the natural world presupposed by seventeenth century scientists, became the basis of the historical-realism that came to characterize the human sciences, we might more readily recognize it in Northrop Frye's assertion about the speechless arts that stand in need of critical illumination.[24] Coupling Gadamer's intellectual history with the more literary-oriented account offered by Jacques Rancière in *Mute Speech* suggests that the silences of history and the silences of art participate in a common intellectual genealogy — both art and history are as silent and withholding as the sensible universe itself.[25] The rise of the human sciences in Germany suggests the increasing influence of Enlightenment philosophical assumptions at not just the intellectual but the institutional level: nearly all of the early architects of the human sciences (Schleiermacher, Leopold von Ranke, Johann Gustav Droysen, Wilhelm Dilthey) were affiliated with the Humboldtian University of Berlin.

While in the late nineteenth century, under the influence of Dilthey, the human sciences were growing into a particularized discipline within the German institutions of higher learning, both American scientists and educators were becoming more and more interested in the Humboldtian university in general, which under the influence of educational pioneers like Daniel

[22] Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method.* The Bloomsbury Revelations Series, ed. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury, 20130), 186.

[23] Ibid., 190.

[24] Ibid., 240.

[25] Rancière, Jacques, *Mute Speech: Literature, Critical Theory, and Politics*, trans. James Swenson (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011). Both Rancière and Gadamer trace this genealogy back to G.W.F. Hegel and his compatriots, though Arendt and Heidegger would likely go back to Descartes, and Brad Gregory might go back as far as Duns Scotus. See: Gregory, Brad S., *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 37-57.

Coit Gilman (University of California, Johns Hopkins) and Charles William Eliot (Harvard), became the model for the American research university.[26] But just as hermeneutics, within historiography and the human sciences, gradually devolved into the sort of positivism that Gadamer criticizes in Dilthey, many of the nuances of the Humboldtian model were similarly lost in the process of translation to a new American environment.[27] As Louis Menand observes, when Americans studied in German universities in the late nineteenth century, "the notion of science they brought back with them when they returned to the United States was empirical and positivist — that is, hostile to explanations that invoked unobservable entities," like Schelling's Absolute, for instance.[28] Thus, as Laurence Veysey puts it,

> The German ideal of "pure" learning largely unaffected by utilitarian demands, became for many Americans the notion of "pure science," with methodological connotations which the conception had often lacked in Germany. The larger, almost contemplative implications of *Wissenschaft* were missed by the Americans, who seem almost always to have assumed that "investigation" meant something specifically scientific.[29]

It is no wonder that Gilman had trouble finding philosophy faculty for his new university. While this mistranslation might seem an historical accident, when viewed from the angle of

---

[26] Veysey, Laurence R., *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 126-130.

[27] This might seem counterintuitive, since for Dilthey the distinction between the natural sciences (Naturwissenschaften) and the human sciences (Geisteswissenschaft) hinged on spirit (*Geist*, with all of its Idealist implications in tow). Gadamer shows, however, that "the epistemological Cartesianism that dominated him proved stronger" than his romantic and idealist inclinations, for he only "succeeds in harmonizing the human science's mode of knowledge with the methodological criteria of the natural sciences" (i.e. positivism, empiricism). Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 240-3.The influence of positivism on the social sciences is remarkably pervasive – its scope extends well beyond Germany. One might trace similar genealogy through France (Hyppolite Taine) and England (John Stuart Mill) back to Auguste Comte. See: Briggs, Asa, "History and the Social Sciences" in *Universities in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries (1800-1945). A History of the University in Europe*, ed. Walter Rüegg (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[28] Menand, Louis, *The Metaphysical Club* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 257. The same is true of the British universities. By the end of the nineteenth century Oxford had come under the influence of German research models. See: Rüegg, *Universities In the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,* 11-15; Anderson, *British Universities*, 28-33, 107-9.

[29] Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University,* 127.

Enlightenment science, it seems only fitting that any unverifiable (i.e. unempirical) aspects of *Wissenschaft* should eventually be jettisoned; when phenomenal observation could no longer be trusted, quantification became the epistemological norm. And if the development of the human sciences in Germany suggested that that *Wissennchaft* involved a tacit inclination toward the sort of positivism that would ultimately shear Dilthey's *Geistwissenschaft* of its *Geist*, this tendency is all the more explicit in American counterpart of the human sciences, the social sciences, which were eager to justify themselves according to scientific methodologies. As John Roberts and James Turner observe, "[a]s disciplines that self-consciously sought to ally themselves with the natural sciences, [in the United States] the human sciences were in a very real sense born with a commitment to methodological naturalism."[30] In turning to the positive and empirical methods of the natural sciences, the human sciences betray a larger intellectual current running through both European and, more significantly for the present inquiry, American institutions of higher learning. A.D. White's vision for Cornell University, concretized in his "endeavor to inculcate scientific methods for their own sake," was paradigmatic for the entire university.[31] The human sciences suggest what, I will argue, the rise of literary studies confirms — that a scientific methodology was required for disciplinary establishment and respect within the modern university.

3. Criticism, Biography, and the Persistence of Personality

In the work of I.A. Richards we find not persons but individuals, a distinction that is crucial both for my own analysis of T.S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, and Melvin Tolson, as well as

[30] Roberts, Jon H., and James Turner. *The Sacred and the Secular University* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 47.

[31] White, quoted in Roberts and Turner, *Sacred and Secular University*, 64.

for the general category of biography that most twentieth century criticism has generally scorned. Richards set up literary study as an endeavor of pseudo-scientific experiment and research, and accordingly, the human beings who read literature became individual subjects. For Richards, the reader of literature is a bundle of psychological impulses, and we see a similar, and likely related reduction in early critical discussions of authorship in following decades. Literary scholars were denigrating the interpretative recourse to biography well before Frye was insisting that criticism must speak for mute artworks, and even before W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley canonized the impersonal posture in their influential essay "The Intentional Fallacy" (1946). Perhaps the most famous moment in this conversation came in 1939, when in an extended debate with E.M.W. Tillyard, C.S. Lewis's vigorously opposed what he termed the "personal heresy," insisting that "when we read poetry as poetry should be read, we have before us no representation which claims to be the poet, and frequently no representation of a *man*, a *character*, or a *personality* at all."[32] But even before this Martin Schütze had denounced "the factualist perversion of poetic-artistic meaning" and its recourse to biographical data "as primary evidence of literary meaning" in 1933; and afterward Harold Cherniss joined what was becoming a common chorus in pillorying "the biographical fashion in criticism" (1943).[33] More recently, Stein Olsen points out that much of the anxiety surrounding this debate was based in an evaluative concern that saw biographical inquiry as taking attention away from the work *in itself*,

[32] Tillyard. E. M. W., and C. S. Lewis, *The Personal Heresy: A Controversy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 4.

[33] Schütze, Martin *Academic Illusions In the Field of Letters and the Arts: A Survey, a Criticism, a New Approach, and a Comprehensive Plan for Reorganizing the Study of Letters and Arts* (Hamden, CN: Archon Books, 1962), 238-9; Cherniss, Harold F., *The Biographical Fashion in Literary Criticism. University of California Publications in Classical Philology*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1943), 279.

and thereby threatening the capacity of artworks to embody fundamental humanistic values.[34] And while Olsen offers a provocative and thoughtful program for rethinking criticism's relationship to biography, his suggestion that we rethink the field of biographical data as useful rather than legitimate is still governed by a largely reductive notion of the human person.

For Olsen and other recent proponents of biographical criticism, the life of the author is figured as a complex of information that is either illuminating (of the work, of historical situations, of social formations) or off limits (as irrelevant).[35] The author, then, is the subject of research – and recourse to biography is useful when it yields information that is relevant to other fields of research. Such an approach is in basic sympathy with Lewis's denunciation of personality, for scholarly research doesn't traffic in such ethereal and immaterial matters. The best that biographical criticism can yield is an historical individual. And yet to deny the *presence* of the creative personality in the work risks dismissing as non-existent that which may simply defy articulation. Zadie Smith and Benjamin Widiss, both reflecting on the readerly engagement solicited by Vladimir Nabokov's novels and both writing with a deep awareness of structuralist and poststructuralist rejections of biography, each suggest an alternative way of conceptualizing the author.[36] For in novels like *Pnin* and *Lolita*, the reader is invited to engage in certain conceptual and aesthetic games that not only suggest the persistence of an intentional and organizing consciousness, but that might also enable a sort of access to that consciousness. For

[34] Olsen, Stein Haugom, "Biography in Literary Criticism," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*, ed. Garry L. Hagberg and Walter Jost (Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

[35] See also: Knoper, Randall, "Walt Whitman and New Biographical Criticism," *College Literature* 30, no. 1 (Winter 2003). Such contemporary affirmations would be sympathetic with Lewis' denunciation of early biographical criticism precisely because both sides assume that only that which is accessible as information is either real or useful.

[36] Smith, Zadie, "Rereading Barthes and Nabokov," in *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays.* New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2009); Widiss, Benjamin Leigh, *Obscure Invitations: The Persistence of the Author In Twentieth-Century American Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

Smith, this involves the humble "mimeograph of the Author's creative act" which allows the reader to participate in the aesthetic and intellectual bliss of the author's "own writerly act."[37] Such cooperative or sympathetic participation demands that the author be conceived of as more of a person than a merely historical individual – the aggregate of so much biographical data – as Smith suggests in the final lines of her essay:

> Nowadays, I know the true reason I read is to feel less alone, to make a connection with a consciousness other than my own. To this end I feel myself placing a cautious faith in the difficult partnership between reader and writer, that discrete struggle to reveal an individual's experience of the world through the unstable medium of language.[38]

With similar attention to the philosophical difficulties attendant upon such literary communications, David Foster Wallace dramatizes the obverse side of this dynamic in his cerebral story "Octet," where an imaginary fiction writer devises a series of conceptual games in a fraught attempt to communicate some urgently felt "something." The concern of Smith and Wallace isn't reconstruction of an individual, but rather the encounter with a person whose consciousness is accessible through but not equal to the created artwork.

Just as Widiss, Smith, and Wallace all react against an intellectual formation much older than Roland Barthes or Michel Foucault, the roots of which run back not just to I.A. Richards, but even to Descartes, these contemporary resuscitations of personality are also not without precedent. Indeed, it was from one of the foundational supports of critical impersonality — literary modernism — that personality began to resurface. Although modernism was influenced by the objectivizing structures that have conditioned institutionalized intellectual life in the university, the long-arc development of certain modernist writers shows a gradual rejection of such depersonalizing postures in favor of the personal. These literary developments are often

[37] Smith, "Rereading Barthes and Nabokov," 53-4.

[38] Ibid., 57.

overlooked in literary studies precisely because the institutional situation I delineate in first chapter continues to condition the norms of academic study.[39] The goal of this project is to uncover the personal tendencies of late modernism, to articulate its personal poetics in both formal and theoretical terms, and to begin reflecting on the implications of such personality for the practice of literary criticism.

As a necessary prolegomenon to this endeavor, some attempt at an archeology of personality is necessary. In Greek, the combination of the preposition *pros* (towards) and the noun *ôps* (eye, face, or countenance – *ôpos* in the genitive) yields *prosôpon*, a word which was likely derived from the Etruscan *phersu* (mask), and became *persona* in Latin, *person* in English. In its Greek form, the word suggested having one's face turned toward someone, standing opposite another, and originally indicated an immediate reference or relationship.[40] Considering its etymology and provenance, it is fitting that both the Greeks and Romans applied the term principally to the stage, where it could indicate either the role, the actor, or the character. Yet the word was sufficiently evocative to quickly develop other nuanced meanings for jurisprudence and philosophy, and it was later deployed by Christian exegetes first to account for different vocal registers in the Psalms, and later to draw theological distinctions between the hypostases (persons) of the Holy Trinity (Nicaea 325) and in the Christological discussions of Chalcedon (451).[41] The first lucid philosophical definition of the term comes from Boethius, for whom "a

[39] Though, as I suggest in the closing pages of my final chapter, this situation may be changing from within.

[40] Yannaras, Christos*, Person and Eros* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox, 2007), 5; von Balthasar, Hans Urs, "On the Concept of Person," *Communio* 13, Spring (1986), 20; "person, n.*". OED Online*. June 2016. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/141476?rskey=zN8bRd&result=1&isAdvanced=false (accessed July 15, 2016).

[41] von Balthasar, "On the Concept of Person," 20-1; see also: Zizioulas, Jean, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church In the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop During the First Three Centuries* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001), 32.

person is the individual standing-in itself of a spiritual nature" and after whom it became a term almost exclusively applied to human beings.[42] Jacques Maritain locates the densest sense of this theologically-charged anthropological use in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, where it indicates the transcendentally oriented, spiritual-material unity of the human being whose existence is communal and who therefore works toward the common good.[43]

Coincident with the intellectual changes inaugurated by Enlightenment science and philosophy discussed above, in the seventeenth century the metaphysically charged category of the person gave way to the rationally defined subjective self-consciousness that became the bedrock and focus of enlightenment philosophical inquiry. As Hannah Arendt observes, "[o]ne of the most persistent trends in modern philosophy since Descartes and perhaps its most original contribution to philosophy has been an excessive concern with the self, as distinguished from the soul or person or man in general."[44] Though it stayed in steady circulation, the term person gradually came to indicate something more like the modern "individual," a being characterized by inherent dignity, autonomy, privacy, and self-development.[45] This transition is more or less put on display when, in *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), Kant denotes "rational beings" as "persons, because their nature already marks them out as ends in themselves…[they] are not merely subjective ends whose existence as effect of our action has a worth for us; but rather objective ends, i.e., things whose existence in itself is an end, and

[42] von Balthasar, "On the Concept of Person," 21-2.

[43] Maritain, Jacques, *The Person and the Common Good,* trans. John J. Fitzgerald (New York, NY: C. Scribner's Sons, 1947), 5-20.

[44] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 254.

[45] Lukes, Steven, *Individualism. Key Concepts in the Social Sciences* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1973), 45-87.

specifically an end such that no other end can be set in place of it…"[46] Hans Urs von Balthasar observes that Kant's notion of person as autotelic object is indebted to the earlier theological renderings and "still maintains its Christian coloring," though it is sheared of any actual divine resonance or transcendent grounding.[47] Where for Aquinas the ultimate end or telos of the person encompassed both other persons (the common good) and God, with Kant we see that the person is defined solely in terms of itself. It is the persona as conceptualized by Kant that becomes the subject of Alexis de Tocqueville's individualism, which, "at first, only saps the virtues of public life; but, in the long run, it attacks and destroys all others, and is at length absorbed in downright egotism…a passionate and exaggerated love of self, which leads a man to connect everything with his own person, and to prefer himself to everything in the world."[48] We find a similar articulation in John Stuart Mill, whose treatise *On Liberty* (1859) presents the individual as a political subject isolated from and pitted against the inimical forces of society.[49] These are of course political examples, and while the individual became increasingly powerful as a political category, it maintained conceptual force in the domain of philosophy as well, though in increasingly dismal forms. The isolation of rational individualism was the problem Kierkegaard strove to overcome, and it makes its appearance in certain later strains of existentialism, as with Sartre's solitary subject asserting itself against a world of objects.[50] For Emile Durkheim, the

---

[46] Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. Allen W. Wood and J. B. Schneewind. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 46.

[47] von Balthasar, "On the Concept of Person," 24.

[48] Tocqueville, Alexis de., *Democracy in America, vol. 2*., trans. Henry Reeve, ed. Francis Bowen (Cambridge MA: Sever and Francis, 1862), 118.

[49] Turning back to Frye, we see just how deeply involved the discipline's conception of literature is with these intellectual currents, for ahead of MacLeish, it is Mill to whom Frye acknowledges debt for his notion of poetry as an impersonal and speechless enterprise. After all, it is Mill who first formulated the lyric as speech not uttered but "overheard."

[50] See: Danto, Arthur C., *Jean-Paul Sartre*. Modern Masters (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1975).

individual is identified by "anomie" and "egoism," which Lukes summarizes as "the social, moral and political isolation of individuals, their dissociation from social purposes and social regulation, the breakdown of social solidarity."[51]

Thus aligned with pessimistic existentialism, where it consists in what Jacques Maritain describes as "self-realization achieved at the expense of others," individualism involves a self-concern that excludes others.[52] As a material category, individuality is a formal and negative principle, creating distinctions by exclusion, and in the case of humans, it "has only a precarious unity, which tends to be scattered in a multiplicity" precisely because "matter is inclined to disintegration."[53] It also might be understood as more than a philosophical doctrine of material distinction, however, for its logic, as Emmanuel Mounier explains, undergirds "the ideology and prevailing structure of Western bourgeois society in the 18th and 19th centuries." The Enlightenment's "man in the abstract, unattached to any natural community, the sovereign lord of a liberty unlimited and undirected; turning towards others with a primary mistrust, calculation, and self-vindication" gave rise to "a system of morals, feelings, ideas, and institutions in which individuals can be organized by their mutual isolation and defense."[54] Personality, on the other hand, signifies an interiority that is both particular to the discrete self but which also entails a fundamental relationality to other persons. Because personality is rooted not merely in the material but also in the spiritual, the person is constantly pushed beyond the threshold of rational

[51] Lukes, *Individualism*, 15.

[52] Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, 22.

[53] Ibid., 28.

[54] Mounier, Emmanuel, *Personalism* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1952), 18-19. In the introduction to his personalist manifesto, Mounier locates this philosophical roots of individualism in the thought of Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, Rousseau; but like other such accounts, he presents personalism as a movement or philosophy that subsumes and grows out of the mislead directions of these thinkers.

autonomy or assertion of independence, and is defined not against society, but rather is beholden to the other. As fundamentally communal, the subjectivity of the person has little to do with the isolated unity, without doors or windows, of the Leibnizian monad, although as Hans Urs von Balthasar observes, individuality and personality are continuous rather than oppositional, the first being the condition for the second.[55] Yet insofar as its interiority is not merely philosophical but ethical and oriented toward responsible action, personhood is opposed to the excluding and isolating qualities of individualism, which is why Mounier asserts that "the person is only growing insofar as he is continually purifying himself from the individual within him" – a growth that is achieved not "by force of self-attention" but the "decentralization" by which one becomes "available…and thereby more transparent to both himself and to others."[56] "The person could therefore be defined as a movement towards a transpersonal condition which reveals itself in the experience of community and the attainment of values at the same time," Mounier summarizes, signaling personhood's double foundation in communication and commitment.[57] Or as Maritain has it, personality involves a continual giving of the self.[58] Where the individual is characterized by autonomy, dignity, privacy, and self-development, the person is marked by going out of or beyond the self, by understanding, sharing, giving, and fidelity.

4. Towards a Poetics of Personality

Though this notion of personhood is most often articulated by religious thinkers of the twentieth century such as Maritain, von Balthasar, and also Karol Wojtyła, Martin Buber, and

[55] von Balthasar, "On the Concept of Person," 18-21.

[56] Mounier, *Personalism*, 19.

[57] Ibid., 70.

[58] Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good,* 29.

Gabriel Marcel, the indictment it levels on the category of the individual is not particular to religious discourse. Martin Heidegger is perhaps the most outstanding example of a felt need in philosophy to reexamine the category of the human in more metaphysically capacious terms.[59] One might simply look to *Being and Time* (1927), with its concerted reexamination of the human being (*Dasein*) in its ontological aspect, though Heidegger's later "Letter on Humanism" (1946) is more to the point in its indictment of existential humanism for "not recogniz[ing] the proper dignity of man…[as] 'thrown' from Being itself into the truth of Being."[60] In failing to distinguish between existence as *"actualitas"* and "ek-sistance" as "a way of being proper to man," Sartre, the foremost spokesperson for existential humanism, erects a sort of puppet ontology that reduces *humanitas* to *animalitas*.[61] The point here is not that Heidegger's claims are true (a discussion well beyond the scope of the present inquiry), but rather that his contentions, which by no means have "decided in favor of theism," register a general felt need in philosophy to revisit and expand the notion of the human person.[62] In the field of literary studies, a similar distinction has recently been made by Derek Attridge, who balks at the assumption of transcendence so confidently maintained by George Steiner in his *Real Presences,* even while acknowledging the need for criticism to address the sort of literary experience that gives rise to such theories of spiritual ineffability.

Indeed, this need has been felt increasingly in the field of literary studies. It began attracting increasing attention with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's advancement of "recuperative

---

[59] See Williams, Thomas D. and Jan Olof Bengtsson, "Personalism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/personalism/.

[60] Heidegger, Martin, "Letter on Humanism" *in Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to the Task of Thinking (1964)*, ed. David F. Krell (New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008), 233-4.

[61] Ibid., 226-30.

[62] Ibid., 254.

reading," which turns away from the now routinizd hermeneutics of suspicion in order to occupy instead a more generous position, one that "confer[s] plentitude on an object" and traces "the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of culture."[63] It did not take long for literary critics to rally behind the affirmative banner of recuperative reading, and in the introduction to a special edition of the journal *Representations*, dedicated to "the way we read now," Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus gesture to several recent interpretive methods that depart from the suspicious hermeneutic postures of "symptomatic reading" in their shared concern for "what is evident, perceptible, and apprehensible in texts."[64] The various interpretative practices that Best and Marcus call "surface reading" include history of the book, cogitative reading, a return to formalism, the practice of "critical description," or merely the literal meaning of the text. Both Heather Love's "thin description," which "focuses on aspects of texts often seen as too obvious to be of interest," and Franco Moretti's digitally realized "distant reading," which declares that "we know how to read texts, now lets learn *not* to read them," share a similar commitment to impersonal or non-human modes of meaning. [65] While these approaches purport to break with earlier "paranoid" frameworks like Marxism and Psychoanalysis, they do so largely by shifting from an interpretative to a formal or descriptive framework, and thus continue to participate in the same structure of impersonality. Indeed, Rónán McDonald suggests that such shifts amount to a "new positivism" or an "empirical turn" that tacitly "urge[s] a unity of the hard sciences, social sciences, and humanities, through an understanding of all processes in nature and culture as having material causes, and hence, being

[63] Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, and Adam Frank, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 149-50.

[64] Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading." 9.

[65] Love, Heather, "Close Reading and Thin Description," *Public Culture* Volume 25, Number 3 71 (2013): 412; Moretti, Franco, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review 1.* Jan-Feb (2000): 54-68. 57.

subject to objective, empirical analysis."[66] Far from being a novel development in literary studies, such positivistic leanings are built into the discipline's very foundation, as my first chapter's discussion of I.A. Richards demonstrates.

And yet, while the various reading practices gathered under the umbrella of "surface reading" represent a powerful and influential movement within the discipline, they are by no means the only responses to the breakdown of critique first registered by Sedgwick.[67] Rita Felski is perhaps the most dogged and outspoken proponent of renewing phenomenological attention to the thick and complex "mysterious event of reading," and seeking "richer and deeper accounts of how selves interact with texts" by building bridges between literary theory and common knowledge.[68] More recently Felski has drawn on the actor-network theory of Bruno Latour to resist the reductive accounts of contextual causality in literary studies by considering how the interaction between texts and readers is a two-way street.[69] The increasing respect Felski accords to both readers and artworks is echoed by Derek Attridge's insistence "that the relationship of the reader to the work has an ethical dimension," though this might be "regarded by many an inappropriate."[70] In exploring the reading practice that might follow from such an ethical situation, he suggests that "the most convincing reading is one that reflects not any idiosyncratic but an individual response, one that stems from the particular reader's own history and position

---

[66] McDonald, Rónán, "After Suspicion," Surface, Method, Value" in *The Values of Literary Studies: Critical Institutions, Scholarly Agendas,* ed. Rónán McDonald (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 234-6.

[67] For a more recent diagnosis, see: Latour, Bruno, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (Winter 2004).

[68] Felski, Rita, *Uses of Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2008), 11, 13.

[69] Both here and *Uses of Literature,* Felski is profoundly indebted to Gadamer's insight that intellectually responsible hermeneutics entails the fusion of two different historical perspectives (those of the reader and those of the text). Felski, Rita, "'Context Stinks!'" *New Literary History* 42, no. 4 (2011): 581-6.

[70] Attridge, Derek, "Literary Experience and the Value of Criticism" in *The Values of Literary Studies: Critical Institutions, Scholarly Agendas,* ed. Rónán McDonald (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 256.

but at the same time stems from the fact of being at home in the wider culture and thus representing broader currents and preferences."[71]

Such "individual response," however, entails a view of the subject that has been hotly contested by several decades of theoretical debate, as Felski acknowledges in *Uses of Literature*. Any sophisticated hermeneutic theory cannot grapple with questions of interpretation and understanding without addressing the question of personality, which is broached not only by the personalist thinkers of the early twentieth century, but also, and in an arguably more nuanced manner, by the modernist poets I discuss in the following chapters. Writing well before our contemporary debates, T.S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, and Melvin Tolson prove exceptional theorists of personality precisely because their work is embedded in the intellectual, academic, and institutional structures that appear, at first glance, inhospitable to personality. This is true both formally and biographically, for all three poets were not only intimately, though often unconventionally, involved in academic institutions throughout their careers, but they also all deploy in their poetry that most prototypical feature of academic style – the endnote. Curiously, these poets erect poetic expressions, and often theories, of personality with the very tools of impersonal academic objectivity. They furthermore tend to work by demonstration rather than description or assertion. The notion of personality I uncover in the work of these poets shares much in common with the articulations of Maritain and Mounier, though through examining their work I expand such articulations to encompass personality not merely as a philosophical category, but as a literary mode with distinct hermeneutic consequences. The attention to personality that I chart in the work of Eliot, Moore, and later in Melvin Tolson, channels a self-expressive and autobiographical impulse into a participatory poetics thorough which the

[71] Ibid., 262.

personality of the author and that of the reader are brought to bear on one another.[72] What personalists like Maritain and Mounier describe, these poets simply *give*, such that it is more appropriate to describe their work as *being* personal than as *articulating* personality, though this distinction in no way implies opposition. For the embodied personality of such poetry does, in a somewhat autobiographical sense, articulate the specific persons who wrote it, even if the articulation is only part of a larger dynamic of engagement. Just as the person has her being with and toward other persons, so the late personal work of these poets is oriented toward the reader in a very particular way.

But the poetry is not merely autobiographical expression, for all of these poets are, in their own ways, working on themselves and thus working *out* their personality in their writing. So while Eliot's *Four Quartets*, Moore's "The Jerboa," amd Tolson's *Harlem Gallery* might be read as autobiographical accounts, considering the personal stakes involved for their creators, these works are also instances of autobiographical formation. Which is simply to say that though they may often be read with critical disinterestedness, they were not composed in a disinterested fashion. Thus while such poems involve self-expression, they must also be considered as such forms of practice as Peter Sloterdijk describes, endeavors whereby "humans… have an effect on themselves, work on themselves and make examples of themselves."[73] Though the sort of self-expression I articulate does have expressive autobiographical purchase, its self-reflectivity is oriented both outward and inward, suggesting that its creators exist "in an operatively curved space in which actions return to affect the actor, works the worker, communications the

[72] The lateness of both Tolson's entrance on the scene of modernism and his turn toward the personal suggests that the trend von Balthasar discovers in philosophy is also true in the literary field – breakdown and return to personality seems to be written into the very logic of impersonality. See von Balthasar, "On the Concept or Person."

[73] Sloterdijk, Peter, *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Malden, MA: Polity, 2013), 110.

communicator, thoughts the thinker, and feelings the feeler." [74]

Because such self-reflective endeavors assume the continuity of the creative person, each discrete work must then be thought of as part of that larger dynamic of development that might be called the career, but would more properly be termed simply life, since it involves not just the author as function or discursive category, but as a person. The personality of these poets is revealed not merely through what Sloterdijk would call their anthropotechnic endeavors, but more emphatically through the particularly engaging forms and morally demanding implications of their work, which draw the reader not only into aesthetic participation, but also into ethically charged self-reflection. Thus I argue of Eliot's religiously meditative *Four Quartets*, which works like Augustine's *Confessions* in soliciting the same sort of activity it enacts, of Moore's morally sensitive reflections on both the natural world and socio-political dilemmas, and of Tolson's *Harlem Gallery*, with its alternately personally and socially reflective call to thoughtful action.

The hermeneutic upshot of this personal poetics is somewhat analogous to the mystical tropology described by Henri de Lubac in his magisterial work on medieval exegesis. In that religious conception, "Scripture is fully *for us* the Word of God, this Word which is addressed to each person, *his et nunc* ["here and now"]… God has spoken but once, and yet his Word, at first extended in duration, remains continuous and does not entirely cease to reach us."[75] Though this sense of universally applicable but particularly directed meaning owes much to the transcendent and divine quality of de Lubac's speaker (God), there is a sense in which every human utterance, insofar as it is intended to be received by another person, entails a similar sort of address, and

[74] Ibid.

[75] Lubac, Henri de., *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, *Vol.* 2, trans. E.M. Macierowski (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2000), 140-1.

therefore a similar possibility for personal meaning. This is especially true because, like the tropological sense of meaning in the medieval scheme, the personal meaning of this late modernist work arises from an investment in moral or spiritual inquiry in which the reader is also invited to participate. This general tropology is not unlike Zadie Smith's notion of cooperative reading, though the moral concerns of Eliot, Moore, and Tolson solicit a far more engaged and risky participation than does Nabokov's almost nihilistic aestheticism.[76]

The late work of these three poets foregrounds the ways in which the act of writing is embedded in a total life; it is not merely expressive of, but also efficacious for the writer. By putting its practice on display, and by emphasizing the sort of moral or metaphysical questions that have not only particular but universal force, the poetic forms this writing takes offers an avenue for productive encounter between two people – the reader and the author. Like the frantically earnest writer whom David Foster Wallace presents in "Octet," such work seems to cry, "'This thing I feel, I can't name it straight out but it seems important, do you feel it too?'"[77] And like the archaic bust of Apollo lyrically immortalized by Rainer Maria Rilke, it just might demand that "you must change your life."

[76] That is, the sort of aestheticism that evacuates pedophilia of its moral valence by turning it into either an intellectual puzzle or a well-wrought urn.

[77] Wallace, David Foster, "Octet" in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1999), 154.

ONE

Practice as Method:
I.A. Richards and the Limits of Literary Study

Nearly three decades after I.A. Richards theorized the reading practice that, translated and recast by the American New Critics as close reading, would become the backbone of literary studies in the university, Lionel Trilling reflected on "The Teaching of Modern Literature," expressing doubts referring not "to the value of literature itself, [but] only to the educational propriety of its being studied in college."[78] For Trilling it was the literature of the twentieth century, then making its first curricular appearances at Columbia, that raised such doubts; the "extravagant personal force of modern literature […] makes difficulty" for him precisely in its dissonance with the neutralizing and de-personalizing tactics of university study.[79] "I asked them to look into the Abyss," Trilling sardonically writes of his students,

> And, both dutifully and gladly, they have looked into the Abyss and the Abyss has greeted them with the grave courtesy of all objects of serious study, saying: "Interesting, am I not? And *exciting*, if you consider how deep I am and what dread beasts lie at my bottom. Have it well in mind that a knowledge of me contributes materially to your being whole, or well rounded, men."[80]

The unsettling ease with which such studiousness derives positive lessons in socialization and culture from negative and recalcitrant works of art like *The Waste Land, The Castle*, and *The Magic Mountain* constitutes a sort of functional contradiction, amounting to "the socialization of

---

[78] Trilling, Lionel, *Beyond Culture: Essays On Literature and Learning* (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1965), 4
[79] Ibid, 8.

[80] Ibid, 24.

the anti-social, the acculturation of the anti-cultural, or the legitimization of the subversive."[81] The tension Trilling detects in the teaching of modern literature is not limited to the literary, and if anything literary studies is merely the most outstanding symptom of an institutional cognitive dissonance that is as old as the modern university itself.

The double investment that characterizes the development and movement within literary studies – a simultaneous insistence on the subjective or personally transformative on the one hand, and on the objective or externally universal on the other - is merely the disciplinary internalization of a general institutional dynamic.[82] Hence the tension within the nascent literary field between say the philology of W.W. Skeat and humanistic enthusiasm of Matthew Arnold is a particular instance of the larger friction between the scientific sensibility of the Enlightenment and the residual moral and religious preoccupations of the medieval university.[83] Intellectual historians and philosophers have long been aware of the West's gradual internalization and normalization of scientific attitudes and assumptions; beginning perhaps with Vico's indictment of Bacon in *On the Study Methods of our Time* (1709), and culminating in Husserl, whose *Crisis of the European Sciences* (1936) made epistemological critiques of science a foundational move for the phenomenology later developed by Martin Heidegger, Hans Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur. Likewise educational historians have observed on both sides of the Atlantic that the institutional naturalization of scientific standards of knowledge and evaluation is often

[81] Ibid, 24.

[82] Gerald Graff charts the oscillation between these two positions in the development of literary studies in the United States. See: Graff, Gerald, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Chris Baldick traces a similar dynamic in British universities in: Baldick, Chris, *The Social Mission of English Criticism, 1848-1932* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

[83] To name only the British analogue. Michael Warner describes the same dynamic in late 19th century American literary studies, pitting Cornell's Hiram Corson against Theodore Hunt. See: Warner, Michael. "Professionalization and the Rewards of Literature: 1875-1900." *Criticism: A Quarterly For Literature And The Arts* 27, no. 1 (Winter 1985).

coincident with the devaluation, marginalization, or abandonment of earlier religious standards.[84] Such narratives become noteworthy when considering how the resultant shift of the university from a site for the formation of individual persons to a site for the production of knowledge was not a complete one. While the rise of research on the German model redefined universities as storehouses and factories of knowledge, these institutions continued to fulfill an increasingly tacit role of social and moral formation.

And nowhere more conspicuously than in English departments is this residual concern with formation apparent.[85] Indeed, the entire history of English studies, both in England and in the United States points to the persistent preoccupation with social, moral, and cultural formation within an institution increasingly invested methods that would appear to exclude such values. This general humanist investment of English can be traced in Britain to the founding of philanthropically spirited working men's colleges, the imperialist need to transmit the Queen's tongue and culture to the colonies, and in the twentieth century, to preserve a sense of national identity at home; in the United States the moral solicitude of early Protestant colleges translated into a strand of humanist enthusiasm running from Hiram Corson to Irving Babbitt to Lionel

[84] Works as diverse as Bill Reading's *The University in Ruins*, Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, and Brad Gregory's recent *The Unintended Reformation* suggest the close association of Anglo-American notions of science with *Wissenschaft*, a concept rooted in both Protestant hermeneutics and the Kantian valorization of autonomous reason. On a more concrete institutional level. See: Anderson, R. D., *British Universities: Past and Present* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 28-34; Veysey, Laurence R. *The Emergence of the American University.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970. 125-35. Regarding the secularization of the modern university, in both England and the United States one need merely look to the absence of divinity schools in newer universities (Manchester, UCL, Johns Hopkins, Stanford, etc.); on the devaluation of theology *within* older universities, see: Reuben, Julie A., *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago, IL: the University of Chicago Press, 1996); Roberts, Jon H., and James Turner, *The Sacred and the Secular University* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[85] E.D. Hirsch suggests that such a cultural function underwrites the entire enterprise of English literary studies. Hirsch, E.D., "Derrida's Axioms" in *London Review of Books*, Vol. 5 No. 13 (July 1983): 17-18.

Trilling.[86] Such observations don't seem surprising if we look back to Matthew Arnold's quasi-religious humanist rhetoric, which set the theoretical foundation upon which the humanities have been building for nearly two centuries, as T.S. Eliot scathingly observes in his discussions of both Arnold and I.A. Richards.[87] What is more remarkable is how in the early twentieth century literature was promoted as a means not only of affecting moral education, but also of ensuring (or reestablishing) a unified body of cultural and historical knowledge against the fragmentation and specialization of the sciences.[88] But even before groups like New Humanists were touting "the modern humanities as the source of unity and moral guidance in higher education [… as] the only true antidote to specialization," humanist scholars, particularly in the field of English literature, had been slowly adopting the same methods these scholars sought to substantially resist.[89] As Michael Warner has shown, literature became an academic discipline in the modern sense when it established a particular field of inquiry – "literary knowledge… everything that can be determined by the study of literature" – which in turn gave rise to a specialized language – "a boundless critical discourse" – and the limitless possibility for research. Integral to the constitution of a specialized field and discourse, Warner begins to suggest, is the codification of a method, which for literary studies transpired when the personal and enthusiastic mode of

[86] Palmer, D. J., *The Rise of English Studies: An Account of the Study of English Language and Literature From Its Origins to the Making of the Oxford English School* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965),41-6; Baldick, *The Social Mission of English,* 59-75, 86-98; Graff, *Professing Literature,* 28-35, 47-8, 81-91.

[87] One can discern a direct line from Matthew Arnold's notion of Literature as the study of life to Richards's insistence that poetry is capable of saving us; T.S. Eliot lays bare the religious impulse on both sides in the conclusion of *The Uses of Poetry and the Uses of Criticism*.

[88] Julie Reuben observes that in the early twentieth century "proponents of Arnold's conception of culture had become some of the most outspoken critics of the ideal of scientific inquiry and its translation into the educational practices of the university." Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*, 215-6.

[89] Ibid., 219.

interpretation was infused with the linguistic and historical sensibility of philology.[90] D.J. Palmer echoes these observations in a British context, noting that movement of literature from the cultural and educational outskirts to the Oxonian center was made possible by harmonizing literary enthusiasm and philology.[91]

Such developments, which belong largely to the last decades of the nineteenth century, only prepared the conditions of possibility for modern literary studies, developing a tacit awareness of the evaluative standards of legitimacy that were already operative in the modern university. But in order to become firmly established as an academic discipline "literature," that new offspring of enthusiasm and philology, needed to be bred with the burgeoning discourse of university research – science. While I.A. Richards's early book *Science and Poetry* (1926) seems to make him the ideal candidate for pin-pointing this fusion, his actual contribution consists not so much in bringing the concepts and terms of science to bear on literature, but rather in his development of a method of analysis that conformed to the epistemological assumptions of scientific inquiry. Works like *Science and Poetry* and *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1926) merely establish a conceptual framework for *Practical Criticism* (1929), which expounded a method whose isolating tendency significantly obscured the framework that produced it. Not only does Richards's place in the intellectual history of literary studies bring to light the centrality of method to both its establishment and its growth as a discipline, but it reveals the ideological and philosophical conditions and assumptions of humanistic study.[92] Indeed, study is

[90] Hence Warner, speaking to contemporary scholars, can say "We no longer think of ourselves as scientists, but our notion of what interpretation is and why we do it was the creation of a philological community that *did* think of itself as scientific, and so also was our assumption that literature is something to which interpretation, so conceived, is apposite." Warner, "Professionalization and the Rewards of Literature: 1875-1900," 14-15, 11.

[91] Palmer, *The Rise of English Studies,* 104-10.

[92] This is precisely what certain morally sensitive scientists had been attempting in the decades leading up to Richards's debut. See: Reuben, *Making of the Modern University,* 167-175.

the operative and often under-examined term here, for Richards locates in the act of study itself the vivifying humanistic power others attributed to literary texts; "poetry is capable of saving us," but only when we study it properly. By examining practical criticism as a pseudo-scientific method arising from a rigorous psychological theory of value, and as contributing to the ideologically invested operations of New Criticism in the United States, this chapter will examine how Richards's critical method compresses the subjective-objective cognitive dissonance of the university as a whole into literary study.

The main thrust of my argument is that the method presented in *Practical Criticism*, later to be generally adopted and adapted by the New Criticism, establishes "principles" quite independently of its author's philosophical and ideological intentions. What appears in Richards's early work, especially *Principles of Literary Criticism*, as an intellectual framework to justify a method becomes in *Practical Criticism* a method *as* intellectual framework, a framework determined and delimited by that method. We might recall Marshall McLuhan's famous aphorism – much like the medium, here the method *is* the message, or content; what *Practical Criticism* says it's doing, and what it actually does are far from the same. The early theoretical work of Richards is important, then, less for illuminating the method than for highlighting the contrast between intention and effect; it is, essentially, the intellectual content that both anticipates and is erased by the method it justifies.

Of central concern for my argument is the homology, illuminated by I.A. Richards's work, between the modern university and literary studies; the tension between the methodological and epistemological purview of the university and its assumed social mission is recapitulated in the tension between the limited possibilities afforded by literary study and the expectations brought to it. Before we even address Richards's own writing, his very institutional provenance begins to

uncover this homology. Before Richards practiced criticism he philosophized, and between the university and literary study we find a middle term, moral science. A disciplinary distillation of the former and a precursor to the later, moral sciences combines the methodology of a scientific epistemology with the subject matter of humanist values.

Like the breed of analytic philosophy it engendered and typifies, moral science was (and continues to be) a Cambridge affair. In the first half of the twentieth century Cambridge was arguably the center of British philosophy: the thinking going on there provided the intellectual foundation for Anglo-American analytic philosophy through the last century and into the present. But its influence was not limited by the disciplinary rigidity often associated with analytic philosophy today. For in the early twentieth century, Cambridge philosophy was nearly coterminous with moral sciences, a relatively new branch of study (Tripos established 1851) which applied an "empirical, analytic, and mathematical" temperament to economics and the social sciences, and which, through its involvement (via thinkers like G.E. Moore and John McTaggart) with the more informal institutions of Bloomsbury and the Cambridge Apostles, influenced such diverse fields as economics (J.M. Keynes), ethics (G.E. Moore), literary production (E.M. Forster), classics (F.M. Cornford), social criticism (Lowes Dickinson), and of course literary criticism (I.A. Richards).[93] Despite this interdisciplinary appeal, philosophy proper at Cambridge remained "a very esoteric science, concerned with precise meanings and logic, dominated for a time by logical positivism which tended to drive away all metaphysics and narrow the field of thought to the logic of scientific statements."[94] Thus the method of moral

[93] Russo, John Paul, *I.A. Richards: His Life and Work* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989): 36, 43; Brooke, Christopher, Victor Morgan, Damian Riehl Leader, and Peter Searby, *A History of the University of Cambridge, vol. 4* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 483.

[94] Brooke, *A History of the University of Cambridge,* 483.

science was specialized with a tendency toward the scientific, while both its impulse and influence were general with a tendency toward the humanistic. This one can see clearly in the figure of Bertrand Russell alone, who is remembered as much for his contributions to logic and mathematics as for those "writings in which he champions humanitarian ideals and freedom of thought."[95] Janus-faced, moral science is on the professional side formally scientific, but on the cultural side, broadly humanistic; it addressed a subject-oriented concern for moral behavior from the stance of objectivity.

After entering Magdalene College in 1911, it took Richards only a year to abandon reading history in favor moral science, pulled perhaps by the gravitational force of aligning celestial bodies: G.E. Moore was back on the Cambridge scene after seven years away, Russell had returned to Trinity as well for a five-year lectureship, and later that same year the young Wittgenstein made his way up from Austria.[96] Although it wasn't possible to read English Literature at Cambridge until 1917, it seems doubtful that Richards would have taken that option had it been presented to him; as his biographer Richard Russo observes in considering the original proponents of the English Tripos, "Nothing appears more distant from [A.C.] Benson's vague longings for the beautiful or [George] Saintsbury and [Arthur] Quiller-Couch on the Grand Style than Richard' Benthamite utilitarianism, psychological models, and technical procedures for close reading…"[97] While such figures as Benson or Quiller-Couch take the experience of the sublime or beautiful in literature as the motivating ground for and the

[95] As the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences described Russell's political activism when it awarded him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1950. "The Nobel Prize in Literature 1950." *The Nobel Prize in Literature 1950*. Accessed May 27, 2016. http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1950/index.html.

[96] As it turns out, the Viennese wunderkind interrupted a meeting between Russell and C.K. Ogden, with whom Richards would later collaborate on several projects. See: McGuinness, Brian, *Young Ludwig: Wittgenstein's Life, 1889-1921* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 73, 88.

[97] Russo, *I.A. Richards: His Life and Work,* 30.

substance of literary study, Richards takes as his starting point the account of such experience. Hence his first published endeavor, *The Foundation of Aesthetics* (1921), is organized around philosophical categories rather than *objects d'arts* themselves, and culminates in a psychological theory of synaesthesis that runs a Confucian concern with equilibrium through both German idealism and contemporary psychology. Although synaesthesis "marks off a field" quite distinct from Beauty, "which cannot otherwise be defined" and though it also "explains why the objects therein contained can reasonably be regarded of great importance," Richards says almost nothing about what objects belong to the field of synaesthesis.[98] This is because the entire project purports to describe the experience of a subject rather than qualities of an object.

If the early advocates of English were invested in studying literature as a means of facilitating literary experience as personally and culturally productive (*a la* Arnold's "the best that has been thought and said"), Richards seems more interested in experiencing literature in order to systematically account for that experience. This is not to deny early English scholars their systematic impulse; after all, the discipline arose as much from philology as it did from vague humanistic longings. The difference consists rather in the *sort* of systemization; where the organizational drive of early literary scholars was largely historical and philological, that of Richards was more abstractly theoretical, arriving at the study of literature as he did by way of a psychologically supercharged philosophical aesthetics.[99] Such abstracting tendencies are doubly unsurprising when we consider Richards's early dislike of history; not only did he abandon its

[98] Richards, I.A., C.K. Ogden, and James Edward Hathorn Wood, *The Foundations of Aesthetics* (London,: G. Allen and Unwin limited, 1922), 79.

[99] Richards is of course not the first literary scholar to approach his objects via philosophical aesthetics - Joel Spingarn (actual coiner of the phrase "new criticism" in a 1910 lecture delivered at Columbia) is perhaps the best candidate for this, at least in the English-speaking world. Richards's contribution is rather the codification of this philosophical approach into an easily reproducible method. See: Spingarn, Joel Elias, "The New Criticism" in *Creative Criticism* (New York, NY: H. Holt and company, 1917).

study, but he remarked once that he "didn't think History ought to have happened."[100] A personal aversion to history combined with his training in the philosophically abstract and universalizing procedures of moral sciences predisposed Richards to an empiricism that conditioned his later work in literary analysis.

The impact of Richards's empiricism follows significantly from its tacitness. Indeed, it appears at first glance that he was moving *away* from empiricist and materialist attitudes by insisting on the subjectivity of aesthetic experience; hence his denunciation of the "delusion" of mistaking aesthetic effects for qualities of an object (what he calls "the fallacy of 'projecting'"), with the corollary clarification that "the remarks we make as critics do not apply to such objects but to states of mind, to experiences."[101] Taken alone, the preponderance of such statements could present Richards as a closet phenomenologist or idealist. Yet like Descartes, to whom he is profoundly (if unwittingly) indebted, Richards's movement to the interior isn't a retreat from objectivity so much as a broadening of its scope to envelop the subject. For him, subjective experience is interesting precisely because it is accessible and quantifiable, which is why he envisions the arts as a "storehouse of recorded values" – a sort of database which, "if rightly approached, supply[ies] the best data available for deciding what experiences are more valuable than others" (*PLC* 27-8). This approach to art as information-supplying is why creative intention is no more viable a sphere of investigation than are artworks in themselves: "Whatever psycho-analysts may aver, the mental processes of the poet are not a very profitable field for investigation" because "nearly all speculations that went on in the artists' mind are unverifiable" (*PLC* 24). The subjective mind into which Richards inquires is always that of the reader, and one

[100] Russo, *I.A. Richards: His Life and Work,* 35.

[101] Richards, I. A., *Principles of Literary Criticism* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, 1948), 16-17. (Hereafter abbreviated and parenthetically cited as *PLC*.)

need only look at the enormous record of student responses to poetry, or "protocols" in *Practical Criticism,* to see that Richards believes the various intentions and experiences of readers is eminently verifiable.

Such verification is possible because Richards's takes mental operations to be purely material phenomena, which can therefore be descriptively and unambiguously accounted for. Which is why later in *Practical Criticism* he approaches the protocols as if they offer direct access to the mind. This accessibility and measurability depends on the material record of aesthetic experience being equal to the experience itself, an equation which implies the equivalence of mind and matter.[102] But Richards takes this even further, suggesting that the mind is not merely equated with the nervous system, but is also subordinated to it: "that the mind is the nervous system, *or rather a part of its activity*, has long been evident, although the prevalence among psychologists or persons with philosophic antecedents has delayed the recognition of the fact in an extraordinary fashion" (*PLC* 74, emphasis mine). Hence the "intervention of organic sensation in perception plays a part in all the arts…it is not a mode of gaining knowledge that differs in any essential way than any other mode" (*PLC* 91).[103] Here we alight on the curious reduction at the center of Richards's theory – that poetic experience is of the same order as all other experience, or he puts it in *Principles*, "the only workable way of defining a poem [is] as a class of experiences which do not differ in any character more than a certain amount, varying for each character, from standard experience" (*PLC* 212). Indeed, he commences *Principles* by

[102] There is something in this situation, where Richards constructs from the protocols a body of measurable effects, strikingly similar to the "geometrization of nature" that Husserl discovers in Galileo's experimental science. In both cases phenomenal experience is reduced to the data derived from it. See Husserl, Edmund, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology; an Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 21-59.

[103] Both are materially grounded in their referentially, even if the referentiality of poetry consists in hypotheticals, or "pseudo-statements**"** that register emotively but not "scientifically," that is, which embody mental attitudes even if they fail to point to the outside world – they still point to material because they point to the mind.

maintaining as psychologically untenable (and therefore illusory) "the assumption that there is a distinct *kind* of mental activity present in what are called aesthetic experiences" (*PLC* 7, 12). Because of this continuity and substantial similarity between aesthetic experience and any other form, Richards protests heavily against studying things in isolation (*PLC* 71). Climbing a mountain or reading Shelley poeticize about one are both boiled down to the same neurological phenomena. For Richards this common denominator is of the utmost importance because it offers a way of understanding empirically what has heretofore been cast only in sloppy idealistic or metaphysical terms by philosophers and literary critics alike (feeling, inspiration, truth, spirit).[104] And because he takes the mind itself as his object of inquiry, the distinctions between the mountain and its literary counterpart are principally superfluous – both are forms of knowledge. But the great irony is that because his inquiry concerns the sort of "mental activity" that can be known and analyzed *as knowledge*, the very act of analysis involves the same objectifying isolation he decries in critics like A.C. Benson.[105] For as T.S. Eliot demonstrates in *Knowledge and Experience*, mental experiences can only become "knowledge" through such an isolating process.

If there is a degree of internal contradiction between the theoretical assertions of *Principles* and its actual practice – looking at the subject but actually looking at the objective structures that

[104] One sees this tendency, for instance, in Hegel's *Aesthetics*, where the philosopher maintains that in the work of art "man as spirit duplicates himself" and in "represent[ing] himself to himself," concretizes inward spirituality. See: Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), I. 30, 81. In the United States such inspirational elements had two big surges. Gerarld Graff refers to the first (mid 19th century) as rooted in "oratorical culture," which shared the temperament of religious forms, and staked the cultural importance of literature in its capacity to speech to the "spiritual essence" of the reader. The second surge came at the end of the nineteenth century reacted against nascent research inclinations by touting a robust generalism that rooted itself the humanistic culture inherited from Arnold, Ruskin, and other Victorian "apostles of culture." Graff, *Professing Literature*, 41-51, 81-86.

[105] This is why in Ch.13 Richards reduces emotion and pleasure to their "cognitive aspect," which implies both materiality and quantifiability: "The 'intuitive' person uses his coenesthesia as a chemist uses his reagents or a physiologist his galvanometer" (*PLC* 90, 91).

describe the subject (psychology), or isolating literary discourse as particular while maintaining its essential homogeneity with everything else – this tension exists and remains largely unregistered precisely because Richards himself is unaware of the tacit epistemological dualism at back of his foundational reliance on neurology and psychology. The way Richards "abolishes the distinction between 'awareness' and 'causation'" alone leads René Wellek to characterize his thought as founded upon "an astonishingly naive theory of knowledge".[106] Once reduced, Richards locates this materialized causality in the "living tissue" of the brain (116). So when Richards dismisses the mind-body problem as illusory, he is actually simplifying it by reducing the mind to the body. In this equation "the extreme ecstasies of the mystic" become "like the attitudes of the engineer toward a successful contrivance;" though differently intentioned, both are neurological (not metaphysical) events (*PLC* 76-7).

The advantage of identifying "the mind with a part of the working of the nervous system," is that having become material, the mind becomes subject to rigorous and verifiable scientific investigation (*PLC* 77). Indeed, Richards's most blatant dismissal of idealism comes as a rejection of metaphysical "ultimates" (e.g. The Good, the Beautiful) for the very practical reason that "they bring investigation to a dead end too suddenly. An ultimate Good is … just such an arbitrary full stop" (PLC 34). Of course anyone even slightly familiar with German Idealism knows that metaphysical categories certainly needn't confound intellectual analysis - just think of Hegel. Such categories are problematic for Richards not because they are inscrutable, but because they fall outside the epistemological limits of his method; without material accountability, ideas fade into the realm of unreality.

[106] Wellek, René, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950*(New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1955), V. 230; cf. "A thought of the striking [of a bell] is nothing else and nothing more than a thought caused by it" (*PLC* 90, 116).

So mental experience becomes fair ground for intellectual inquiry because psychology has discovered that the mind *is* the nervous system, and as such the mind can be scrutinized in a materially verifiable manner. In this sense it seems quite reasonable that Richards would locate his aesthetics in the experience of the subject rather than the qualities of the object. But his very methodology denies him access to the subject he so prioritizes; for the moment it is placed on the table for analysis, the subject becomes an object. In taking mental experience as his object of inquiry, Richards asserts on the one hand that "we have to come out of it in order to judge it," and on the other that such evaluation involves "taking account of everything, and of the way things hang together" (*PLC* 68). Everything, that is, except the subject who has removed himself from 'the great structure of human life' which he purports to judge. But if poetry is largely an internal, mental, and emotive experience of the subject (and remember, the critic is concerned with precisely such experience), then by this subjective distancing we are removing the experience of poetry from 'the great structure of human life' and replacing subjective aesthetic experience with an objectified version of it (e.g. the protocols). According to the proclamations of Richards's theory, the subject comes to the fore as a central concern, but by the process of analysis the subject recedes and is replaced by a reductive replica. The great irony is that in having been objectified, the subject has become not more concrete but more ideal.

Two related concepts follow directly from this vexed distancing. The first is a psychologically inflected utilitarian theory of value, which undergirds Richards's entire aesthetic program: "anything is valuable which will satisfy an appetency [or a general "seeking-after"] without involving the frustration of some equal or *more important* appetency" (*PLC* 43). Richards's moral theory rests on the central principle that "the organization [of impulses] which is least wasteful of human possibilities is, in short, the best" (*PLC* 47). As he then acknowledges

by turning to none other than Jeremy Bentham to demonstrate that the extension of "this individual morality to communal affairs is not difficult," this is the psychological counterpart to utilitarian social organization (*PLC* 48-9). Because value is derived from a balancing of impulses, "the problem of morality…becomes a problem of [psychological] organization," whose goal is to attain not an abstract idea (e.g. the Good) but the "widest and most comprehensive co-ordination of activities and the least curtailment, conflict, starvation, and restriction" of the same (*PLC* 53). This is why the value of poetry, the reason it is "capable of saving us," is to be found in its capacity to reorganize our impulses, which it does through its own formal organization: experiences of art "are the most formative of experiences, because in them the development and systemization of our impulses goes the furthest lengths" (*PLC* 222). This systemization is achieved not by communicating any sort of substance – for Richards insists that poetry *doesn't* communicate but traffics rather in pseudo-statements, which is partially why it has nothing to do with belief; rather, the formative quality of art consists entirely in its *form*, where our psychological response to the organization in/of poetry affects neurological reformation (*PLC* 244-54).[107] Speaking of meter, Richards avers that its value inheres "in our response," because prosody's "effect is due not to our perceiving a pattern in something outside us, but to our becoming patterned ourselves" (*PLC* 127). Though he claims that "all mental events," including aesthetic experience, "occur in the process of adaptation, somewhere between a stimulus and a response," the evacuation of meaningful content and the accompanying reduction to abstract form obviates the stimulating world: "the joy which is so strangely the heart of [aesthetic] experience isn't an indication that 'all's right with the world' or that

[107] For all of Richards's empiricist and scientific postures, this theory of internal-external ordering logic owes something, though probably unwittingly, to early modern theories of magic, which often rested on the assumption that manipulation of certain occult image structures could affect the celestial and (thereby) terrestrial orders. See Yates, Frances Amelia, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago,IL: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 213-227.

'somewhere, somehow, there is Justice'; it is an indication that all is right here and now in the nervous system" (*PLC* 77 230).

The distinction between material and ideal that Richards elsewhere claims is illusory turns out to be operative regardless of his dismissal; for though he insists on an absolutely material framework, he ends up in the realm of idealism. Bracketing substance in order to disinterestedly judge forms seems to promise the reinforcement of materiality but it actually threatens to evaporate the material world; for the impulses of the nervous system are material enough to be scientifically scrutinized, but ideal enough to have no actual intercourse with the world outside the mind. Thus in attempting to understand the subject in objective terms, the objective world disappears, leaving us without a distinguishing outside. The unwittingly and uncomfortable idealism spawned by Richards's materialism is nowhere more apparent than in the second principle concept of his aesthetic theory – imaginal action. When aesthetic experience becomes so internalized that its entire field of activity is confined to the nervous system, it is no great surprise that

> The result of the co-ordination of a great number of impulses of different kinds is very often that no *overt* action take place. There is a danger here of supposing that no action whatever results or that there is something incomplete or imperfect about such a state of affairs. But imaginal action and incipient action which does not go so far as actual muscular movement are more important than overt action in the well-developed human being. (*PLC* 102)

"These imaginal and incipient activities or tendencies to action" Richards terms "attitudes," and then claims that "it is in terms of attitudes, the resolution, inter-inanimation, and balancing of impulses…that all the most valuable effects of poetry must be described" (102-3). This is entirely in keeping with the materialist tendency of Richards's epistemology - poetry can't be about Ideas, since Ideas aren't real; nor can it be about information, since poetry deals in fictions, not truths. Affecting mental structures appears to be a viable way of passing through the Scylla

and Charybdis of materialism and idealism, for such neurological structures render scientifically accessible the (heretofore misunderstood) ideal realm of thought, emotion, or spirit.

At first imaginal action looks like a similar middle way, where *indirect* manipulation testifies to both the internal nature of thought as well as its neurological materiality. But as with his theory of value, the further Richards burrows into the mind, the more unintelligible becomes the materiality by which he seeks to understand it. Again a theory that arises from a materialist epistemology ends up in the realm of idealism. For the claim that imaginal action is more important than actual action involves an assumption of value that is indefensible (really, unassessable) according to Richards's own definition of value; without the world there is no material basis to understand imagination as objective knowledge, and hence there is no way to register or assess it *as* material. Thus in asserting that action in the world has little or no importance, Richards is evaluating a situation that necessarily falls outside the scope of his own theory of value, which we have seen deals only with internal situations (psychological states, mental impulses). What makes such an assertion at all fathomable is the assumed analogue between the mental organization and social organization; his earlier invocation of Bentham suggests that he sees a necessary correlation between mental efficiency and societal efficiency, and the notion of incipient action further suggests that this analogue is unidirectionally causal. Actual action is unnecessary because to Richards imaginal action *is* actual – efficient internal states *produce* efficient external states. Never mind the validity of this assumption – which is quite debatable even if Richards never debates it. More important here is the tremendous effect it has had on the methodology not of literary theory but of literary analysis. The total primacy of the internal, and its assumed but never explored relevance to the external greatly influenced Richards's method of literary analysis, and would proceed to condition the practices of the New

Criticism. What Richards does to the mind he also does to the literary object - both are treated as autonomous and non-referential structures of immanent meaning; like the mind, Richards also abstracts the poem from the world of both material and history. And what grounds this laboratory treatment is the assumption of correlation between the inside and the outside that we have seen results in the erasure of the external.

To fully understand just how the sort of scientific-exclusion-turned-universalized-idealization translates from Richards's theory to his actual practice, it is helpful to think against the grain of Richards's early work – that is, to think in a tradition. We see the radical consequences of Richards's epistemological grounding no more clearly than when we compare traditional hermeneutics to Richards's laboratory method of interpretation. From the patristic period to the middle ages, the hermeneutic tradition that through Schleiermacher provided a groundwork for general and not just biblical interpretation involved four senses of meaning: the literal, the allegorical, the tropological (or moral), and the anagogical (or eschatological).[108] Dante provides among the clearest illustrations of this system in his *Letter to Can Garde*, when he discovers all senses in a single line from the Psalms.

> "When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a barbarous people, Judea was made his sanctuary, Israel his dominion." Now if we look a the letter alone, what is signified to us is the departure of the sons of Israel from Egypt during the time of Moses; if at the allegory… our redemption through Christ; if at the moral sense… the conversion of the soul from the sorrow and misery of sin to at the state of grace; if at the anagogical…the departure of the sanctified soul from bondage to the corruption of this world into the freedom of eternal glory.[109]

The multidimensionality of this interpretative framework affords a tremendous scope – while

[108] See Lubac, Henri de, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture, Vol. 1*, trans. Mark Sebanc (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.,1998); On the secularization and universalization of this tradition via Schliermacher, see Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method.* The Bloomsbury Revelations Series, ed. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 191-204.

[109] Alighieri, Dante, *Literary Criticism of Dante Alighieri*, ed. Robert S. Haller (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 99.

respecting historical specificity it allegorically reaches beyond the limits of fixed time, while at the same time the idealizing tendency of allegory is checked by the individualizing focus of the ethical component. Having moved from the past particular (history) to the timeless general (allegory) and back to the present particular (moral), the eschatological opens back out onto the general in a manner involving both universal and individual significance. In tracing its philological development, Erich Auerbach calls this final sense "figural," and explains how in it history

> remains open and questionable, points to something still concealed, and the tentativeness of events in figural interpretation is fundamentally different from the tentativeness of events in the modern view of historical development. In the modern view, the provisional eminent is treated as a step in an unbroken horizontal process; in the figural system the interpretation is always sought from above; events are considered not in their unbroken relation to one another, but torn apart, individually, each in relation to something other that is promised and not yet present.[110]

The fourfold hermeneutic thus involves the individual in all of history: a moment in the past points to what is true from the beginning, to the present experience of that truth, and to the final (eschatological) significance of all three of these.

Related as this hermeneutic approach is to Biblical exegesis, it is fitting that its decline was precipitated by an ecclesiastical revolution. What began with the Protestant Reformation's emphasis on *sola scriptura* was combined with Enlightenment science's isolating method of analysis (e.g. Bacon, Newton) by the proponents of early human sciences to produce a method of reading first history and then the world as a text to be approached objectively, without the influence of traditional understanding or the bias of personal or historical prejudice. Turning away from what Dante called polysemy, Friedrich Schleiermacher inaugurated a new approach that "no longer seeks the unity of hermeneutics in the content of tradition to which understanding

[110] Auerbach, Erich, *Scenes From the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 58-9.

is applied, but rather… seeks it, apart from any particular content, in the unity of procedure that is not differentiated even by the way the ideas are transmitted.[111] This unity of procedure is related to the experimental method developed by Francis Bacon in *The Novuum Organon*, which equated reproducibility with truth. For Schleiermacher this reproducibility was directed toward historical psychology, and the goal of all understanding became the reconstruction of context in order to illuminate authorial intent. As Gadamer explains, "what is to be understood is now not only the exact words and their objective meaning, but also the individuality of the author;" every interpretative endeavor is thus a "re-creation of the creative act," because "every act of understanding is for Schleiermacher the reverse of an act of speech, the reconstruction of a construction."[112] While ostensibly concerned with a concept of the individual, Schleiermacher's rendering of hermeneutics "as an independent method, detached from all content" allowed the interpreter "to claim superiority over his object," where "the aim is to understand a writer better than he understood himself."[113] This approach was then expanded to universal history, and the *communique* that was once sought in the historical individual now issues from history itself, and "the goal of historical research [becomes] to reconstruct the great text of history from the fragments of tradition."[114] This textualization of not only history but all of life, which Ranciere calls the poeticization of the world, Gadamer traces to Dilthey, who "thought he was legitimating the human sciences epistemologically by conceiving the historical world as a text to be

[111] Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 185.

[112] Ibid., 192, 194.

[113] Ibid., 198, 200; we might note the similarity of this project to both the biographical and the "suspicious" or "paranoid" modes of reading discussed in the Introduction.

[114] Ibid., 221.

deciphered."[115] Through this development, the methodological approach to not only actual texts, but the entire historical and material world, was reduced to only the (first) literal sense of the medieval hermeneutic scheme. This is not because thinkers like Dilthey failed to seek spiritual significance in universal history – they did – but because knowledge was relegated to the datum.[116] After this, understanding in both the natural and the human sciences began with the objectivity-motivated assumption that all prejudice must be radically excluded. But here we run into precisely the same dilemma that we have seen in Richards – such insistence on objectivity is a subjectively conditioned move that erases the very subject that occasions it. Or as Gadamer explains, the denial of prejudice is eminently prejudiced, an assertion of objectivity is always grounded in the willful subject, and the eschewal of tradition is itself a traditional.

Gadamer discusses this conflicted development largely in terms of historiography, but because it is a fundamentally hermeneutic and epistemological affair that is institutionally grounded, its ramifications were much broader than the intellectual tradition he describes. Simultaneous with the intellectual history presented in *Truth and Method* was the largely German development of the modern university, which is characterized by its concern for methodology and research. The movement away from tradition as either a hermeneutic or epistemological foundation for the human sciences is mirrored in the development of the university itself. As Bill Readings observes, in an account that strikingly parallels Gadamer's:

> Importantly, Kant founds the modern university on reason, and reason is what gives the University its universality in the modern sense… the unifying principle of the medieval University is theodicy, and thus lies elsewhere, only intervening as external censorship of the temporal by the spiritual. What distinguishes the modern University is a unifying

[115] Ibid., 242; Jacques Rancière suggests that the emergence of history as an encrypted textual object is intellectually related to rise of opaque and linguistically self-referential literature that he characterizes as "mute speech." See Rancière, Jacques, *Mute Speech: Literature, Critical Theory, and Politics*, trans. James Swenson (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011), 52-61, 68-70.

[116] Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 233-44.

principle that is *immanent* to the University.[117]

Because this unifying principle is reason itself, its immanence is ultimately that of the individual mind. Knowledge issues not from tradition or history, but from the subject who encounters these; it is subjectively grounded but objectively oriented. Hence knowledge no longer regards external significance of the sort that concerns the medieval scheme; rather it inheres in the subjective responses to the material world. Kant's autonomous reason is most of all liberated from the temporal development that defines intellectual traditions – the only justifiable concepts are *a priori* ones. It is not received but produced by the subject's interaction not with history or tradition alone, but with any object whatsoever (the world, recall, is a text).[118] As with the life of historical research after Schleiermacher, "the life of the Kantian University is therefore a perpetual conflict between established tradition and rational inquiry…Each particular inquiry, each discipline, develops itself by interrogating its own foundations with the aid of the faculty of philosophy."[119] The philosophical and theoretical concerns of *Principles of Literary Criticism* thus conform to this rule, even if the foundation the work interrogate proves no more coherent than the philosophical foundation of autonomous reason undergirding the university itself.[120]

For Richards the result of this interrogation is functionally similar to that of his eighteenth century German progenitors; in seeking for literary studies a theoretical framework grounded in

---

[117] Readings, Bill, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 56.

[118] In this sense the indiscrimination with which Cultural Studies' determines its objects of inquiry, so vociferously denounced by Terry Eagleton in *After Theory* (2004), is less an issue of culture than of epistemology.

[119] Readings, *The University in Ruins,* 57.

[120] In exploring its incapacity to exclusively assess structures of value, Alasdair MacIntryre has demonstrated the poverty of autonomous reason as a principle of both moral and intellectual (philosophical) unity: MacIntyre, Alasdair C., *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); Brad Gregory argues a very similar point about reason in a more institutional context: Gregory, Brad S., *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 298-364.

the subject itself, he excludes anything outside the subject. Historical development, intellectual traditions, cultural context – all of these are denied. Nevertheless, Richards maintains some sense of meaning's polysemy, only what Dante understood as external and polyvalent, he understands internal and multifaceted but singular. Differences in meaning are matters of differences in subjective capability and reception: for "people of very different capacities for discrimination and with their attitudes developed in different degrees…a work occasions valuable responses of the same kind at a number of different levels" (*PLC* 196). This point is not dissimilar in spirit to Augustine's praise of scripture for its appeal to both the uneducated and the philosophically trained.[121] In both cases different capacities for reception yield different interpretative results. Yet even in this same work we find the hint of other, more significant limitations, as when Richards invokes the Sermon on the Mount as a sort of "essential literature" in order to explain how: "Into an adequate reading of the greater kinds of poetry everything not private and peculiar to the individual reader must come in. The reader must be required to wear no blinkers, to overlook nothing which is relevant, to shut off no part of himself from participation," except of course the part of him that is private and idiosyncratic – that is, the part of him which is personal (*PLC* 72). What has traditionally been understood as "essential" about this particular piece of writing is precisely the quality that Richards's theory excludes; without metaphysical ultimates like "blessedness," and without the ability to make truth-statements or demand belief, the Sermon on the Mount is left with little morally prescriptive purchase. Instead the "essential" force of the "Sermon" must inhere in its ability to pattern and manipulate mental structures. Here the desire "to overlook nothing" has already foreclosed the tropological sense; by *Practical Criticism* this impulse will burrow so deeply into the imminent operations of the poem that

[121] Augustine, *Confessions.* Oxford World's Classics, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 254.

blinders are thrown up not only to individuality but also to history. In that work historical and intellectual contexts are so abhorred that even authorship is considered irrelevant information; students are expected to interpret selections of poetry that have been sheared of any contextualizing frame – no date, no author, no title, just words on a page.

The expanses of significance are now limited to the phenomenological encounter of the reader – what sounds, senses, and associations are invoked *within* what Cleanth Brooks would later call the "organic whole" of the poem. The great irony of this reduction of historical, metaphysical, and personal meaning to what is offered by an artificially simplified experience is that Richards describes the possibilities of significance as precisely fourfold. Instead of the literal, allegorical, tropological and anagogical, the "Total Meaning" outlined in *Practical Criticism* consists of sense, feeling, tone, and intention. Richards summarizes "[f]inally, apart from what he says (Sense), his attitude to what he is talking about (Feeling), and his attitude to his listener (Tone), there is the speaker's intention, his aim, *conscious or unconscious*, the effect he is endeavouring to promote."[122] As with Schleiermacher, Richards limits the sphere of meaning to what can be gleaned of the intended *communiqué* of a historically reconstructed individual, but unlike the enlightenment hermeneut, Richards denies access to the contexts which would assist in such reconstruction. And while for the most part these contexts are tacitly rejected – historical context, for instance, isn't denounced but merely omitted – the contexts that facilitates tropological meaning, that is, individual-personal associations, are outright lampooned.

This is not to suggest that Richards's aversion to stock responses doesn't arise from a reasonable desire to avoid misunderstanding, but rather that that desire is made the foundation

[122] Richards, I. A., *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), 176. (Hereafter parenthetically cited and abbreviated as *PC*.)

for an illusory aesthetic autonomy. The sort of responses to be eschewed, according to Richards, include: "The simplest case […] where some particular memory of the reader's personal biography is recalled, and his response to the poem becomes largely a response to this reminiscence," "association with another poem" or any case of "irrelevance [which] come[s] from the intrusion into the poem of the hobby-horse or obsession" or any "larger body of ideas" – "religious and anti-religious prejudices" or "political leanings" (*PC* 225-6, 229). Such stock responses aren't meant to completely bracket

> "the personal situation of the reader [which] inevitably (and within limits rightly) affects his reading… for the comparison of the feelings active in a poem with some personal feeling still present in the reader's lively recollection does give a standard, a test for reality. The dangers are that the recollected feelings may overwhelm and distort the poem and that the reader may forget that the evocation of somewhat similar feelings is probably is only a part of the poem's endeavour" (*PC* 227).

But these feelings are never the point of the poem, and certainly they shouldn't affect the "reality" they bring to bear on the literary encounter, for the poem "exists to *control and order* such feelings and to bring them into relation with other things, not merely to arouse them" (ibid.). When Richards allows such personal experience, he does so only provided that the "liberty and autonomy of the poem" is respected, but because these experiences, commitments, personal associations, and beliefs are always *subordinated* to the literal meaning of the poem, any possibility for literary experience to offer tropological significance is foreclosed.

This vacuum hermeneutic has exerted tremendous influence on literary studies in the twentieth century, beginning especially with its centrality to the theory and practice of the New Criticism. But even before detailing this modern legacy, it is important to note that from a broad intellectual-historical perspective, what Richards proposes is in no way novel or surprising. In many ways his early work merely draws "from the air a live tradition" – one that is rooted in the isolating tendencies of both Reformation hermeneutics (e.g. Luther's *sola scriptura*) and

scientific practice (Descartes' *cogito* or Bacon's *novum ogranum*). Indeed, sweeping intellectual histories like Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, Brad Gregory's *Unintended Reformation*, and Thomas Pfau's *Minding the Modern*, which recount the expanding influence of this singular methodology, suggest that Richards merely proves the rule: like Biblical interpretation, scientific analysis, and historiography, literary studies also becomes subject to the epistemological and methodological assumptions of the Enlightenment opposition of autonomy to tradition, so typified in the work of Kant.[123] Richards thus codifies for the relatively new field of "literature" an analytic methodology well-established in other disciplines. In this sense his influence was profound precisely because he was calibrating rather than innovating – practical criticism, and the theoretical groundwork that preceded it in *Principles of Literary Criticism,* merely adjusted the approach of literary studies to the epistemological, methodological, and cultural expectations of serious study – expectations that had already been solidified and perpetuated by the institution of the university, as the beginning of this essay suggests. It comes then as no surprise that Robert Graves was establishing a method similar to Richards's at roughly the same time, nor is it astonishing that the American New Critics' practice of close reading mirrors the decontextualizing abstraction of practical criticism.[124] And while these particular developments are in some cases causally related, the explosive expansion and relative permanence of isolation hermeneutics in literary studies is better explained by intellectual genealogy than historical causality. More important than the influence of Graves on Richards, or Richards on Empson, or

[123] For a particularly insightful examination of the influence of Kant's thinking on the institutional ethos and structure of the university, see: Readings *University in Ruins* 54-62. Hannah Arendt remarks hyper-presentism as a feature of post-enlightenment philosophy in general: "From the seventeenth century on, the insistence on absolute novelty and the rejection of the whole tradition became commonplace." Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition. Charles R. Walgreen Foundation Lectures* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 249.n1.

[124] Childs, Donald J., *The Birth of New Criticism: Conflict and Conciliation in the Early Work of William Empson, I.A. Richards, Laura Riding, and Robert Graves* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013).

any of these Britons on the American New Critics, is the fact that all such thinkers work in the intellectual inheritance of Kant, Descartes, Newton, Bacon, and Schliermacher.

If anything, the specifics of direct historical influence reveal that the autonomy-centered methodology effectively refuses, or rather is indifferent to, the agency implied by historical causality. Like Oedipus, the puissant and blind methodology of vacuum hermeneutics levels and silences the very agents that gave it form. Subjected to the logic of his own early methods, by the 1940s literary studies had placed Richards himself in the same vacuum of analysis that held Donne and Shelley in *Practical Criticism*, consequently arresting his development in the mind of the discipline. And Richards developed extraordinarily. Beginning in late 1939, when he met the classicist and champion of the educational ideal of *paideia* Werner Jaeger, Richards became over the next decade increasingly invested in both the idea of formative development and the Western intellectual tradition. In a sense, Jaeger's body of thought merely addressed an already felt need, for Richards's years of teaching English in China awakened him to the unfeasibility of vacuum hermeneutics; as his biographer explains, Richards realized that "the intractable difficulties that his Chinese students faced were not in the main linguistic but cultural, springing from their lack of knowledge of Western intellectual tradition and society."[125] Having been trained in Moral Science at Cambridge, where "philosophy begins with Descartes," whatever sense Richards himself had of this tradition was inherited not from formal educational training, but more as by osmosis, from living and breathing the cultural air of England.[126]

And as his involvement with the Harvard Committee on the Objectives of a General Education in a Free Society testifies, Richards clearly considered this neglect to transmit a

[125] Russo, *I.A. Richards: His Life and Work,* 472.

[126] Ibid., 37.

cultural and intellectual tradition to be a failure on the part of Anglo-American higher education. This committee, which had been formed in 1943 to revise the undergraduate core curriculum at Harvard, expressed its objectives two years later in the famous *General Education in a Free Society,* commonly known as the *Red Book*, in terms that would unsettle Richards's earlier valorization of incipient mental action:

> Education looks to the whole man and not to his reason alone; yet we have maintained that the whole man is integrated only insofar as his life is presided over by his reason. While we thus regard the cultivation of the mind as the chief function of the school, we view reason as a means to the mastery of life; and we define wisdom as the art of living.[127]

At the time of this proposal, Richards was also teaching his most popular course to date – *Humanities 1a: Sources of our Common Thought: Homer, the Old Testament, and Plato* – and though scrapped by the ultimate degenerations of the *Red Book* proposal (so different from their original intentions that Richards later commented that the proposal had never actually been given a chance), the surviving notes on this course shed some light on just how far Richards's own thought had come since 1928. The opening lecture stressed the primacy of self-understanding in studying the works of classical antiquity, we read Homer and Plato "to find out more about OURSELVES," and we discover "more about ourselves from them the less we suppose them *at the start* to be like ourselves."[128] Here we see a revamped theory of personality that begins not with the reductions of positivism, but rather with the intuition of a "great paradox" of sameness and difference, a respect for the radical alterity of past voices and peoples that is both accessible to and incommensurable with readers' situated and particular experience. Indeed, in the following academic term Richards offered a more narrowly focused and modern course treating

---

[127] *General Education in a Free Society: Report of the Harvard Committee* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1945), 112, 68-9, 78, 108, 114, 175. 205.

[128] Richards MS, qtd. in Russo, *I.A. Richards: His Life and Work,* 489.

Hume, Bentham, Mill, James, and others, where personality theory was of central concern. In stark contrast to the depersonalizing, objectifying, and anti-idealist postures of *Principles*, this course culminated in a lecture where Richards "indicted the post-Lockean English moralists for abandoning the idea of the Good and wreaking havoc on the concept of the self, without which moral choice foundered" – both Bentham and Moore fall under his crosshairs. Ultimately this final lecture presses toward a "'dynamic theory of Personality' to repair the ruins of tradition," by correcting Anglo-American psychology with classically inflected German idealism, emphasizing the importance of community, voluntary action, and history.[129]

These developments are certainly important for the ways they mirror the movement from abstraction to personality that we will chart in the careers of T.S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, and Melvin Tolson; but more significant is the fact that for the history of literary studies, the evolution of Richards's thought after *Practical Criticism* is routinely ignored. Nearly a decade after these radical developments, which were occurring at ground zero of American higher education, and which had been publicly adumbrated by Richards's expanding views on hermeneutics and imagination, the conversation he had started back in the late twenties continued with little notice of these changes.[130] Perhaps the greatest example this strange legacy is W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley's classic of New Critical theory, "The Intentional Fallacy," which, unlike any of Richards's writing, made its way into the *Norton Anthology of Criticism and Theory* (2001). This essay, which famously argues that "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art," is explicitly indebted to Richards and advances his thinking beyond the limits of

[129] Ibid., 501-2.

[130] See for instance *Interpretation in Teaching* (1938) and *Coleridge on Imagination* (1934).

Principles and *Practical Criticism*.[131] Not only does one find the same mechanizing tendency in both, the assertion that "judging a poem is like judging…a machine…[o]ne demand that it work" echoing the opening volley of *Principles* that "a book is a machine to think with," but one also discovers a shared dismissal of any recourse to historical or biographical context. Yet for reasons that might be explained by a young Harold Bloom, Wimsatt and Beardsley set in contradiction to Richards a theory that is merely the logical continuation of his own thought.[132] Indeed, the autonomy of the poem from any signifying intention of the author, even if not advanced by Richards directly, is anticipated by the mere method of *Practical Criticism* – there can't very well be an intending author when readers aren't even supplied with the author's name. Where Wimsatt and Beardsley *argue* that the mind/intention of the author is irrelevant, Richards just assumes it by denying access to identifying information, and in this sense they are simply filling in theoretical details already signaled by *Practical Criticism*. Obversely, that Richards maintains the importance of intention in that work merely evinces to what extent his practice involves assumptions beyond the pale of his theoretical articulations.

What is remarkable about Wimsatt and Beardsley's little essay, however, isn't so much the intention-denying poetic autonomy it advances as the critical autonomy it demonstrates. If we transgress the directive to ignore ancillary information and turn to the broader intellectual-historical context in which "The Intentional Fallacy" is situated, we find that its central assertion about art – that "the poem belongs to the public" – applies equally to criticism. For at the very moment that American New Criticism was advancing the anti-historical, anti-personal vacuum hermeneutic of early Richards, Richards was in America discovering and beginning to advance the untenability of that position. That Richards's later advocacy for a personally and traditionally

[131] Wimsatt, W. K. Jr., and M. C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," *Sewanee Review* 54, (1946): 468.
[132] Ibid., 473.

grounded historical sensibility fell on deaf institutional ears is evidenced at both general and specifically disciplinary levels. Not only does literary studies' trajectory of thought ignore Richards's later qualification of vacuum hermeneutics (and we will see to just what extent shortly), but his big humanities course at Harvard was scrapped when the educational committee's proposal was implemented, a result largely contrary to the express aims it formally expressed in the *Red Book*. Instead of "infusing the liberal and humane tradition into [Harvard's] entire educational system," the final version of the revised undergraduate curriculum delivered all the incoherence promised by Charles William Eliot's institution of the elective system some fifty years earlier.[133] By the 1950s there were two Richards, and two legacies. The first was attached to Richards's own person, and lived with his own thought - this is the Richards encountered by a young Helen Vendler at Harvard, the critic among whom "no one was more sensitive to the resonances among texts--and not only the reverberations among literary texts, but between literary texts and those others –historical, philosophical, and religious –which influenced the poets."[134] The second Richards, ageless and static, was an idea – or more precisely, a method; this is the Richards represented in scholarship by Wimsatt and Beardsley, but also to be found at Harvard, speaking with voice of Reuben Brower to instruct a young Paul de Man in the basics of vacuum hermeneutics.[135] What carried over was not the thought but the method, precisely because the method was tailored to exclude thought.[136] Richards's later

---

[133] *General Education in a Free Society,* xv.

[134] Vendler, Helen, "I.A. Richards at Harvard," *Boston Review* (Boston, MA). April, 1981. Accessed May 16, 2016. http://new.bostonreview.net/BR06.2/vendler.html#7.

[135] De Man, Paul, *The Resistance to Theory. Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 23.

[136] While this is explicitly the case in Richards's early thought, which insists that poetry deals only in "pseudo-statements," and must necessarily bracket all questions of belief, action, or personal investment, this situation is also (ironically) one inherited from the tradition of aesthetics beginning with Kant, which denies all content and concerns

attitudes had virtually no effect on the practice of literary study because the method of study his work helped articulate (and thereby spread) peremptorily excluded his later investments in history, tradition, and personality. Thus Richards himself is subject to the isolated understanding that is applied to the poets treated in the ensuing chapters – he helped establish the thing that would not only arbitrarily circumscribe and quarter the "great [poetic] personalities" he so admired, but that would also quarter and circumscribe him.

Because the vacuum hermeneutic we have been describing belongs to an intellectual-cultural inheritance permeating what Eliot would call "the mind of Europe," we can understand Richards as both an effect and a cause. This general perspective allows us to see further developments in the history of literary criticism as also both effects and causes. Take for instance Rolland Barthes' influential essay "The Death of the Author," which in a common light can be read against the grain of New Critical tendencies. Barthes is unequivocally *not* interested in the rhetorical and stylistic operations of the text in a vacuum; insofar as "the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture," the structuralist goal is to discern just how a text is situated in and produced by the countless discourses of culture.[137] This is the sense in which structuralism has been understood as standing in opposition to the New Criticism - where the former considers the operations of the text for its own sake, the later considers the text as it relates to and is determined by larger structures of meaning and discourse. But of course the famous *mort de l'auteur* is merely the logical conclusion of the New Critical aversion to intention; and the reason that structuralism found such fertile ground in the United States is precisely because critics like Wimsatt and Beardsley had functionally killed the author about

---

only pure form. See: Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Judgement,* trans. Nicholas Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 52-74.

[137] Barthes, Roland, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1977), 146.

twenty years before Barthes came onto the scene. Other broadly New Critical works like Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930) or Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's *Understanding Poetry* (1938) are both ideal training manuals for and exemplars of reading that "ceaselessly posits meaning, ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning."[138] Just as Richards's method implied Wimsatt and Beardsley's theory, Empson's method implied Barthes' theory, displaying in practice that "the reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up writing are inscribed without any of them being lost."[139] And it is of course not insignificant that Empson was a student of Richards's and produced the work that became *Seven Types of Ambiguity* at the master's behest; nor is it particularly surprising that "method,'" as Michael Wood points out, "is Empson's favorite word."[140] The evocation of structuralism begins to adumbrate my thesis that virtually all of the developments in literary criticism in the twentieth century are methodologically indebted to Richards's early advancement of vacuum hermeneutics, and to some degree those developments can be understood as working to recuperate earlier, more complex hermeneutic approaches. In this sense the importation of frameworks from anthropology and linguistics (structuralism, deconstruction), from psychology (psychoanalysis) and from political theory (Marxism) can be understood as expanding the scope of understanding *beyond* the autonomous aesthetic object, retaking the field of allegory, history, and personality.

But I would like to suggest that all of these systems remain bounded by the methodological assumptions that they might strive to counteract or overcome, and this bondage is nowhere more

---

[138] Ibid., 147.

[139] Ibid., 148.

[140] Wood, Michael, "William Empson," *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, *Vol. 7* ed. A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 219.

clearly demonstrated than in the difficulty literary studies continues to have with personality. On the one hand one may look to psychoanalysis, which regains the territory of the self only by universalizing and systematizing it into a bundle of impulses (neuroses, drives), and subordinating particular instances to a universal theoretical construct (the self becomes the "case"). On the other hand we might look to the hermeneutically robust moves of a Marxist like Frederic Jameson, who recuperates everything in the fourfold medieval schema *except* the tropological, which level is roundly and hastily dismissed: "the relationship the Christian [medieval hermeneutic] scheme projects between anagogical and moral is not available to us today,"[141] presumably because Jameson avers Althusser's dictum "History is a process without a telos or subject," and the consequent attempt to grapple with the impulse toward closure and master narratives arises not because those phenomena are real or valid, but because "master narratives have inscribed themselves in the texts as well as in our thinking about them."[142] For Jameson the ultimate function of the allegorical mode he valorizes is to awaken readers to the ways in which such texts (and we, their readers) have been conditioned and produced by political phenomena – hence allegory becomes the symptomatic reading of ideology critique. Indeed, the politicizing of the unconscious goes quite far in revealing just how *impersonal* is the self of psychoanalysis, and recent discussions amongst literary critics have lumped all of these approaches together in excoriating Jameson's perpetuation of "suspicious" or paranoid "symptomatic reading."[143] But the "surface" reading these critics suggest as an alternative echoes the suggestion made much earlier by Susan Sontag – it works "against interpretation" to valorize

[141] Jameson, Fredric, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 31.

[142] Ibid., 34.

[143] Best, Stephen, and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108 (1). (2009): 3-6; Felski, Rita, "After Suspicion," *Profession* (2009): 28-35.

readings that range from aesthetically intuitive, "descriptive," or simply literal. The result is akin to the tropological evacuated of ethical imperatives, a "weak interpretation" emphasizing a sort of closeness that involves a "minimal agency," interested in culture but refusing to either "attack or defend it."[144]

What these critics are dealing with is the functional and uncomfortable identification of ideology critique with moral imperative – their dismissal of Jameson charges that that he and countless critics like him adopted a heroic and didactic posture that their criticism failed to properly realize:

> We find ourselves the heirs of Michel Foucault, skeptical about the very possibility of radical freedom and dubious that literature or its criticism can explain our oppression or provide the keys to our liberation. Where it had become common for literary scholars to equate their work with political activism, the disasters and triumphs of the last decade have shown that literary criticism alone is not sufficient to effect change.[145]

The mistake is one of professionally motivated confusion between description and prescription; the professional literary critic expects radical affects to be produced not by a student's encounter with, say, Dostoyevsky or Proust, but by their interpretation of or research on their novels. Such budding specialists, like their professional instructors, examine not *works* but *texts*, specimens of language that are historically, culturally, discursively, but never *personally* situated. Ultimately this exclusion of the personal arises from the inherited epistemological and methodological reduction affected by Richards's theory and operating still today. The broadening scope of literary studies, which comes to encompass language, universal history, and the category of the self, follows the enveloping expansion of an assumed materialism – these spheres come into the purview of literary analysis only because they can be objectively scrutinized according to universal principles. The idiosyncrasy of and incommensurability of tropological significance

[144] Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading," 17.

[145] Ibid.

remains obscure to the operations of study precisely because it involves not world-understanding but *self*-understanding, not research but action. Wittgenstein's cataclysmic conclusion to the *Tractatus* holds as forcefully for literary studies as it does for philosophy: "That whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." Literature itself, as the ensuing essays will demonstrate, retains the power to speak topologically, and this power is exerted precisely against the silencing machinery of literary criticism.

TWO

T.S. Eliot: Philosophy as Poetry as a Way of Life

In 1964 the world saw what would be T.S. Eliot's final publication, the doctoral dissertation which, incidentally, was the first major work he ever undertook. The fruit of two years' writing, one major overhaul, and much unhappiness in Oxford, Eliot completed *Experience and the Objects of Knowledge in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley* in the summer of 1916.[146] He then proceeded to sit on it, undefended, for nearly half a century, only to show it the light of day at the request of his wife Valerie, as he explains in the preface to the published version:

> Forty-six years after my academic philosophizing came to an end, I find myself unable to think in the terminology of this essay. Indeed, I do not pretend to understand it. As philosophizing, it may appear to most modern philosophers to be quaintly antiquated. I can present this book only as a curiosity of biographical interest, which shows, as my wife observed at once, how closely my own prose style was formed on that of Bradley, and how little it has changed in all these years. It was she who urged me to publish it; and to her I dedicate it.[147]

It isn't terribly surprising that the work seems strange to the aged Eliot, who after all had changed significantly in the decades after its completion: in those interim years he had become a

---

[146] About life at Oxford, Eliot had this to say to his friend Conrad Aiken: "In Oxford I have the feeling that I am not quite alive – that my body is walking about with a bit of my brain inside it, and nothing else. As you know, I hate university towns and university people, who are the same everywhere…" Eliot, T. S., *The Letters of T.S. Eliot.* Volume 1, *1898-1922*, ed. John Haffenden, Hugh Haughton, and Valerie Eliot (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2011), 74. (Hereafter cited parenthetically and abbreviated as *LTSE*.)

[147] Eliot, T. S., *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. The Critical Edition*, ed. Ronald Schuchard, Jewel Spears Brooker, Anthony Cuda, Frances Dickey, Jennifer Formichelli, and Jason Harding (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), I.240. (Hereafter cited parenthetically and abbreviated as *CPr.*)

major poet, an editor, a British citizen, an Anglo-Catholic, a playwright, and a cultural critic, to name only the more conspicuous hats he came to wear. Diverse as it was, however, Eliot's collection didn't really include an analytic philosopher hat, the poet having discarded (or rather destroyed, as we shall see) that one when he left the university for the world of the poetic avant-garde. While critical interest in Eliot's early philosophy work has grown significantly in the past twenty years, first with the archival recovery and examination of the poet's graduate papers, and more recently with the gradual release of Ronald Schuchard's magisterial edition of Eliot's prose, such conversations tend to focus on the earliness of this work, overlooking the significance of the dissertation's late presentation.[148] What is surprising and strange about this late publication of *Knowledge and Experience* (as it was retitled) is less the content of the dissertation than the apparent regression of presenting it; for in releasing this work, Eliot appears to be resituating himself both in the university and in the specialized discourse of academic scholarship.

Despite the distance the preface creates between the aged poet and the young scholar, both the act and the mode of publication are fundamentally scholarly; in presenting us with this technical piece of scholarship, Eliot offers it as neither philosophy nor art, but as information. Entirely supplementary, not interesting in itself but only in relation to his later development as a (non-philosophical) writer, the dissertation is, essentially, a footnote – or rather, an endnote – to Eliot's whole corpus. This is all the more striking because not only did Eliot walk away from a scholarly career, but he also walked away from scholarly forms, going even so far as to deny (however dubiously) the importance of the endnotes to *The Waste Land.* By tracing across

[148] See: Habib, Rafey, *The Early T.S. Eliot and Western Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Childs, Donald J., *From Philosophy to Poetry: T.S. Eliot's Study of Knowledge and Experience* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2001).

Eliot's career his various engagements with and postures toward both the university and its form of scholarship, one can see that this apparently out-of-left-field final publication completes the slow development of a total reimagining of academic discourse. If the writing of the dissertation broke the discourse of the academe, as I shall argue, its belated publication, now contextualized by a lifetime of generalist and interdisciplinary work, reimagines the forms of scholarship as fundamentally personal.

Of the surprisingly scant attention that has been paid to Eliot's engagement with academic discourse, most of it has focused on the endnotes to *The Waste Land* either as a formal or textual problem, or as significant for specifically literary-critical debates. When W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley alighted on *The Waste Land* in their "The Intentional Fallacy," it was to argue that the notes aren't extraneous but an integral part of the poem.[149] Likewise, when Laurence Rainey examines the publication history of the poem, he argues textually what the earlier New Critics asserted theoretically, that the notes "were not merely a late and arbitrary addition imposed by the publishing exigencies of Horace Liveright, as often argued, but an integral part of the work as Eliot himself wished to have it published."[150] And when scholars move to Eliot's more general penchant for academic discourse, that conversation is cast in similarly limited disciplinary terms. Though Peter Middleton recognizes the hermeneutic depth of *The Waste Land*, the insightful claim that it "is a ready-made academic poem with interpretations already included" is qualified by the assertion that the poem "is about the consumption of poetry," and has consequently been "important as a demonstration of the validity

[149] Wimsatt, W. K. Jr., and M. C. Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy." *Sewanee Review 54* (1946): 468-488.

[150] Rainey, Lawrence S., *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998): 103.

of certain critical doctrines."[151] Following upon Middleton's interest in the poet's academic posture, Jo Ellen Kaiser refreshingly invests older readings of Eliot's endnotes with new life by stepping back and reflecting on the ways in which "readings of the notes – and of the poem – have changed precisely because the notes represent a particular conflict in professional literary critical discourse in the 1920s."[152] From one perspective, this conflation of the academic with the literary is entirely understandable, considering Eliot's copious writings on criticism. But they suffer by forgetting that almost all Eliot's academic career was spent studying not literature but philosophy. The recent surge of interest in Eliot's philosophical beginning offers a valuable corrective to such literary readings, for the notes must also be understood as arising from certain philosophical questions that concerned Eliot, questions that I will argue belong not just to literary criticism or philosophy, but to the entire structure of academic scholarship.

Building upon Caroline Levine's insight that "institutions organize not only the objects that we study, but our own scholarly practices" and that institutions like the university are constituted by sets of practices and emerge out of different cultural and intellectual situations, I will argue that Eliot's developing use of scholarly notation is not only institutionally and philosophically symptomatic, but that it is also, ultimately, critical of the impersonal assumptions that often characterize academic study.[153] At one time it might have seemed willfully contrarian to maintain that the poet famous for touting an "impersonal theory of poetry" ultimately affirmed the personal, but recent readings of Eliot's impersonality doctrine have tended to emphasize the

---

[151] Middleton, Peter, "The Academic Development of The Wasteland." in *Demarcating the Disciplines: Philosophy, Literature, Art*, ed. Samuel Weber (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986): 176, 164.

[152] Kaiser, Jo Ellen Green, "Disciplining The Waste Land: Or, How to Lead Critics into Temptation," *Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly And Critical Journal 44*, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 83.

[153] Levine, Caroline, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network.* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015): 56, 60-62.

dialectical nature of his theory. Rochelle Rives, for instance, attempts to rescue impersonality from the authoritarian and elitist camps to which earlier treatments had relegated it, arguing that modernist theories of impersonality like Eliot's "theorize emotional engagement by dismantling the duality between subject and object, inside and outside" effectively disabling "the boundaries of the self-contained individual."[154] Similarly, Jewel Spears Brooker presents this dismantling tendency in explicitly dialectical terms as she traces its Hegelean progression across Eliot's philosophical and critical works. For Rives and Brooker, the ultimately personal thrust of Eliot's impersonality doctrine belongs as much to that poet's thought as to modernism itself; the latter discovers the dialectical progress in the work of Yeats and Conrad, and the former in that of Pound and Woolf. The theoretical purchase of such arguments tends to be historical rather than critical, for while articulating the general notion of impersonal personality developed by modernist writers, both accounts eschew biography in favor of theory. Accordingly, Eliot's assertion of personality is treated as a philosophical position rather than a hermeneutic reality that impacts our reading of his corpus. Such criticism, I will suggest, is symptomatic of the epistemological assumptions that guide academic scholarship in general and literary criticism in particular, assumptions called into question by Eliot's developing use of scholarly notation. The present argument attempts to occupy the position it uncovers in Eliot's work, maintaining that the creation and reception of art, though conditioned by inherited intellectual forms (institutional and otherwise), necessarily concerns the category least accommodating to systematization – the individual life. While my method takes the biographical as a point of departure, it is ultimately geared toward synthesizing attention to personality and to intellectual history.

My argument begins and ends with the dissertation for two related reasons, both of which

[154] Rives, Rochelle, "'Things That Lie on the Surface': Modernism, Impersonality, and Emotional Inexpressibility." *Disclosure: A Journal Of Social Theory* 16, (2007): 59-87.

point to the importance of biographical totality, where textuality and personality are inseparable. As a philosophical document, *Knowledge and Experience* sheds light on the significance of Eliot's surprisingly neglected penchant for and ultimate movement away from scholarly apparatuses. But as a biographical document bookending his entire career in two different forms, it suggests a developmental dynamism within his corpus which nullifies attempts to treat any work on its own. On this point we might recall Pierre Menard, the fictional author who Jorge Luis Borges imagines composing a second, perfect replica of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* in the early twentieth century. The story maintains that although it is a textual facsimile, this second *Quixote* is "almost infinitely richer" than original because it was arrived at not by channeling Cervantes but rather "*through the experiences of Pierre Menard.*"[155] Thus the passage of time completely transfigures the significance of what is essentially the exact same text, stretching its substance to resonate not only with seventeenth century Spain and twentieth century France, but with everything in between. Accordingly with Eliot, the difference between two identical texts – the reason they are emphatically not the same work – is history. The significance of both belated works inheres almost entirely in the intellectual development that preceded them; where for Menard's *Quixote* this development belongs to "the mind of Europe," for *Knowledge and Experience*, the domain of development is Eliot himself. As with Menard's "deliberate anachronism," the utter singularity and extensive significance of *Knowledge and Experience* (1964) is made intelligible only by the intellectual development between it and its original 1916 version. We might smile at Eliot's cleverness – "In my end is my beginning" indeed – but the cheeky literalization of this late refrain presents a ponderous scholarly obligation by establishing a total network of interconnection. While many critics have looked to *Knowledge and*

[155] Borges, Jorge Luis, Donald A Yates, and James East Irby, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings* (New York, NY: New Directions, 2007): 94-5. (emphasis in original.)

Experience as a sort of explanatory apparatus for the philosophical aspects of Eliot's poetry, treating it almost as a condition of possibility for his art, the fact of its publication demands that this causality also be reversed.[156] Belonging as it does to both the beginning and the end, the dissertation leads to everything else just as much as everything else leads to the dissertation, and in order to see how the second identical version might be "almost infinitely richer," we must attend to the whole of Eliot's life and career.

Running through Eliot's creative and critical work are many developmental threads that connect *Knowledge and Experience* (1916) with *Knowledge and Experience* (1964), but the most conspicuous and important of these is scholarly discourse, in particular marginal, annotative, or explanatory notation – endnotes. The most conspicuous endnotes in Eliot's corpus belong, of course, to *The Waste Land*. And while much critical attention has been accorded to those famous notes, rarely does this attention extend beyond the poem itself. In keeping with the holistic hermeneutic that Eliot's circular bibliography creates and demands, my exploration reads *The Waste Land*'s endnotes as immanently idiosyncratic but also as part of a larger concern with both scholarly apparatuses and their epistemological implications. Though singular and pronounced, the endnotes of 1922 are only one fixed instance of a developing understanding of and attitude toward an intellectual discourse that greatly exceeds the philosophical limits of this formal

[156] The way scholars have deployed the dissertation is as various as it is limited. Some read the dissertation as psychologically revealing, Manju Jain describes it as a tormented book," Richard Wollheim as a "painfully dark work," and Lyndall Gordon as the work of "a haunted young man torn between the truths of his visions and his rational distrust of them." See: Jain, Manju, *T.S. Eliot and American Philosophy: The Harvard Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 205; Wollheim, Richard, *On Art and the Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 222; Gordon, Lyndall, *Eliot's Early Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 52-3. More philosophically minded critics like Lewis Freed and William Skaff discover in the dissertation an aesthetic philosophy that guides and helps explain Eliot's later poetry, an approach Louis Menand warns against: "the temptation when discussing Eliot's dissertation is to give it an explanatory power over his literary writings; the danger is that in order to do so the dissertation will be endowed with a prescriptive character which it is determined not to possess." See: Freed, Lewis, *T. S. Eliot: Aesthetics and History* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1962), 77; Skaff, William. *The Philosophy of T.S. Eliot : From Skepticism to a Surrealist Poetic, 1909-1927* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 3.; Menand, Louis. *Discovering Modernism: T.S. Eliot and His Context.* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 20.

iteration. Forming an arc through Eliot's career, this perennial and developing engagement with scholarly citation belongs less to a single work than to the whole work of a life, and thus is less a matter of fact than, to borrow a phrase from Bruno Latour, a "matter of concern."[157] The hope of the following pages is to demonstrate how the poetic, philosophical, and institutional concerns of Eliot' corpus develop in increasingly personal terms and entail an increasingly rich notion of personality, both of which are very much matters of concern for the practice of literary study.

1. *Knowledge and Experience* in the Philosophy Department

In the winter of 1915, Eliot declared in a letter to Norbert Wiener that "all philosophizing is a perversion of reality," and offered his own work first as a symptom of this situation, and then as a possible solution. Of his doctoral dissertation, he explained:

> I took a piece of fairly technical philosophy for my thesis, and my relativism made me see so many sides to questions that I became hopelessly involved, and wrote a thesis perfectly unintelligible to anyone but myself; and so I wished to rewrite it. It's about Bradley's theory of judgment, and I think the second version will be entirely destructive. (*LTSE* I.80-1)

As it turned out, the object of this second draft's destructive force was its very own discourse; for what Eliot's dissertation accomplishes philosophically is the ungrounding of philosophy. It argues that received philosophical distinctions – such as subject and object, mind and world, experience and thought – aren't actually real; for insofar as they dissolve in the face of incommensurable individual experience, they are fundamentally untenable. This is because immediate experience, which is "more real than anything else" and is the "foundation and goal of our knowing," can only be descriptively apprehended ("known") via objectifying structures of knowledge that distort what they purport to comprehend. Whenever we try to wrest knowledge

[157] Latour, Bruno, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry 30*, no. 2 (Winter 2004): 231-3.

out of experience, whenever a description of experienced reality is posited, "in the process, reality has changed;" "the world of your theory is certainly a very different world from which you began," and consequently "all of our terms turn out to be unreal abstractions" (*CPr* I.245, 379). As soon as we begin to speak of experience as a phenomenon separable enough to be placed on the table for analysis, we demand that it make "reference to something real which lies outside of *that* experience"; but as Edmund Husserl was also coming to discover in his own investigations, there is no reality *beyond* experience – experience *is* reality (*CPr* I.248).[158] Stumbling upon an insight that would condition the future work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Eliot goes on to explain that the only reason the philosopher is burdened with the task of defining "reality" or "knowledge" is because metaphysics and epistemology have produced these categories, which are then reductively imposed on the "constantly shifting…felt whole" of experience. "As to the problem of knowledge," Eliot declares toward the end of *Knowledge and Experience*, "we have found that it does not exist…as it is metaphysics which has produced the self so is it epistemology, we may say, which has produced knowledge" (*CPr* I.368-369).[159]

But the future poet doesn't confine himself only to philosophy, for if epistemology has produced knowledge, "it is perhaps [also] epistemology… that has given us the fine arts; for what was at first expression and behaviour may have developed under the complications of self-consciousness, as we become aware of ourselves reacting aesthetically to the object." Here we begin to see how the illusory problems that Eliot had been discussing in terms of highly refined disciplinary discourse don't belong just to philosophy. What metaphysics, epistemology, and

[158] A persistent theme in studies of *Knowledge and Experience* is its uncanny anticipation of many later theoretical developments, from Wittgenstein and Husserl to Heidegger and Derrida. See: Jain, *T.S. Eliot and American Philosophy*, 148-158.

[159] This false equation of linguistic categories with ontological realities is precisely what the therapeutic program Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) sought to undo.

aesthetics all have in common is self-consciousness, which is itself a sort of double-mindedness that insists on standing both inside and outside of immediate experience. While now standard-fare critiques of the Enlightenment might tempt us to point the finger at Cartesian dualism as the source of such difficulties, Eliot finds a much more primordial and troubling source, locating in language itself the self-awareness that divides experience into knowing subjects and known objects. Before the objectifying stance of study, it is speech that shatters and removes us from experience; such formalized modes of inquiry as epistemology merely imitate and are thus symptomatic of the predication that begins in descriptive language. For the moment one begins to speak *about* anything at all, the moment one asks a question or makes a statement, the very form of that utterance functionally divides the world into speaking subject and spoken-of object. This is why Eliot insists that "we have no right, except in the most provisional way, to speak of *my* experience, since the I is a construction out of experience, an abstraction from it"(*CPr* I.246). Thus the shortcomings of philosophical inquiry are caused less because their methodologies pursue an impossible objectivity, than because their very *form* assumes that such objectivity is possible. Philosophy merely thematizes and organizes a problem inherent in language itself.[160] When Prufrock bemoans, "It is impossible to say just what I mean," the difficulty lies less with the speaking subject than with speech for creating that subject in the first place and thus assuming a division between self and world that he feels so powerless to bridge.[161] And philosophically, Prufrock is absolutely right, for whatever is "meant," inheres not in what is said, but in what is experienced, which, if he had read *Knowledge and Experience*, he would know is

[160] Again we might turn to Wittgenstein, the goal of whose later work was to rescue philosophic thought from its perceived difficulties by therapeutically demonstrating that they arise from misused language rather than from anything real.

[161] Eliot, T. S. *Complete Poems and Plays* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, 1969): 6. (Hereafter abbreviated and parenthetically cited as *CPP*.)

ineffable.

The dissertation turns out to be not merely destructive, but self-destructive; in leveling its ultimate criticism at its own medium – language – it amputates the legs that uphold it. Or at least it tries to. Things get thorny precisely because it fails to achieve this self-destruction; the maddening aspect of Eliot's argument inheres in its intelligibility and coherence as an argument. It succeeds in failing. For Eliot's indictment of language for spuriously dividing experience into subject and object, self and world, is an argument conducted *in language,* the predicative logic of which already assumes the *practical* division he wants to dissolve. Given the conclusion he will draw, his project is doomed from the beginning, for it is impossible to refute dualism without relying on the structures of dualism, of which language is the archetype. As much as Eliot asserts that "all our terms are unreal abstractions," the validity of this claim depends on *its* terms *not* being unreal abstractions. The result is rather paradoxical, for the argument of *Knowledge and Experience* works, but if the conclusions of that argument are true, then it should not work. If the dissertation succeeds in convincing us that language can't adequately describe reality, it should accordingly compel us that the language by which we were convinced is also specious. Thus it appears impossible to accept the conclusion of the argument without consequently rejecting the very terms of argument.

Part of the reason philosopher-critics like Manju Jain and Richard Wollheim, in more biographical moods, respectively consider *Knowledge and Experience* to be a "painfully dark work," and "a tormented book," is that it presents not just a rather hopeless situation for the professional philosopher, but also a more universal (and less purely disciplinary) difficulty. For the logical antinomy of its argument mirrors the restless and groundless situation of human understanding in general, where the intuitive conviction that experience offers some fundamental

unity is constantly disrupted and undermined by the very form of experience. And like the dissertation, this general difficulty has to do with language. The unitary experience that interests Eliot is opposed to any sort of linguistic articulation or expression, insofar as that experience becomes reduced or fragmented the moment it is linguistically registered. This presupposes two distinct modes of experience: the unified, ineffable, and immediately felt whole on the one hand, and the fragmentary descriptions of that whole on the other. In giving priority to the first mode, Eliot assumes that language is always epiphenomenal; it is ever-belated, desperately playing catch-up and destined to fail in its attempts to capture first-order experience.

The assumption that experience is pre-linguistic, however, is rather dubious to begin with, even though the very endeavor of describing experience presumes the separation. In fact, philosophy itself provides ample counter-conceptions: one might discover instances of linguistic priority as easily in Heidegger and Gadamer as in Aristotle or St. John. Each of these thinkers begin with the same basic conflation of language, reason, truth, (and for Christianity, God) into *logos*, implying that language, far from being epiphenomenal, is actually implicated in ontology, epistemology, and metaphysics; to borrow Eliot's own language, language is bound up with experience.[162] If experience is always happening in, with, and through language, then Eliot's difficulties with language are either ontological problems, and are therefore inescapable, or they are not problems at all. For one wonders how experience could possibly disclose a basic unity when the linguistic mode of experience guarantees that any primordial unity is either shattered on arrival or is just an illusory fiction. If language fragments experience, and experience happens

[162] See: Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time.* Harper Perennial Modern Thought ed., trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008): 55-8*,* Gadamer *Truth and Method,* 429-35, Aristotle *Ars Rhetorica*, The Gospel of John 1:1-15. One might just as easily look anywhere else (the Stoics, the Neo-Platonists, the Early Church Fathers, etc.).

in language, then *ipso facto* experience is fragmented. From this view if anything is unreal, it is not our terms but the ideal notion of experience as a pre-linguistic, unified "felt whole."

And yet the possibility of such a unified totality is actually suggested by the *fact* of language itself, the evolution and persistent use of which seems to validate the descriptive enterprise to which it is ultimately inadequate. We might here recall another of Borges' mythic minds: Ireno Funes, whose impeccable memory and inexorable perception engendered in him a dissatisfaction with language that lead him not to abandon it for purified silence, but rather to perfect it by eradicating all repetition and generality. The project is Sisyphean and absurd, yes, but Borges' philosophical satire works precisely because all language, insofar as it purports accurately capture reality, is just as quixotic as Funes' exhaustive lexicon, and just as unavoidable. This logic holds analogously for Eliot's direct treatment of transcendent totalities. Insisting that the "real world" consists only in the various viewpoints of so many finite centres, and that "no view is original or ultimate," Eliot concludes that a concept like Bradley's *absolute* "responds only to an imaginary demand of thought, and satisfies only an imaginary demand of feeling." And yet he cannot help relying on just such a concept to make this point: "From a point of view completely detached, reality would contain nothing but finite centres and their several presentations; but from the point of view of each centre, there is an objective world upon which several points of view are trained, and to which they all refer." As with the "felt whole" of linguistically mediated experience, that a total viewpoint is conceivable in the first place is troubling precisely because there is no experiential basis for it, and even more so because we instinctively rely on it.

Regardless of the name it goes by – the felt whole of experience, the absolute, or a completely detached viewpoint – that a singular unified totality is imaginable in the first place

seems not only to ensure constant though experientially ungrounded recourse to it, but also to practically justify attempts to comprehend it. Indeed, Eliot's ultimate contention with philosophical discourse is that its descriptions of reality fail to grasp a philosophically indefensible intuition. The intuition Eliot refers to as "immediate experience" he also calls "feeling" – which "the conscious subject, as a construction, falls partly outside of," which "is more than either object or subject, since in a way it includes both," and which is in the end neither "separable" nor "isolatable" from anything else (*CPr* I.254, 244). Yet Eliot insists that although this utterly elusive phenomena also constitutes the "foundation and goal of our knowing," and that although it confounds study by vanishing the moment one tries to isolate or bring it into focus, it is nevertheless ever-present and necessary. But language is always tricking us into believing that it *is* detectable, for the linguistic mode of human experience *practically* relies on the distinctions that confound experience; by speaking we *act* as if there is a totality that exceeds us and of which we are part, thereby assuming that there is some outside of our finite centre. We are met with failure the moment we set out in search of experience, but because it is fundamentally linguistic, experience itself is always urging us to recommence the search. This vicious cycle, where the predicative form of experience insists and relies upon distinctions that experience can never verify, is responsible for the intellectual restlessness that Eliot discovers in the dissertation, and that he differently addresses throughout his career, beginning with his abandonment of academic philosophy.

By now what perhaps began as quiet demurral has likely grown into the audible grumblings of blatant objection. *Is* language fundamentally predicative? *Must* speech immediately shatter whatever intuitive unity is felt in immediate experience? If *Knowledge and Experience* is indeed "entirely destructive," is the object of its assault language *tout court*? Such

questions cut to the quick of Eliot's criticism of the metaphysical systems articulated by philosophy (especially in the British empiricist and German idealist traditions), but within the bounds of the dissertation itself they are impossible to answer. This is because the dissertation's object of censure is the descriptive language that philosophical analysis has so thoroughly internalized that it now simply assumes that all language is analytical language.[163] In *Knowledge and Experience* Eliot approaches the disciplinary limits of analytic philosophy precisely because he reaches the philosophical limits of descriptive language; a craft is, after all, only as good as its tools. Thus on the whole the dissertation manages to articulate problems that it knows it cannot solve because those problems are not *for* philosophy but *with* philosophy; if philosophical difficulties arise from the discipline itself, attempted solutions from within the discipline will only generate *more* difficulties. So if Eliot is destroying anything, it is not language as such, but philosophical language that purports to congeal experience into knowledge, which happens to be the only language epistemology knows or cares about. Hence "in analysing knowledge, we merely educe the fact that knowledge is composed of ingredients which are themselves neither known or cognitive, but which melt into the whole we call experience" (*CPr* I.371). And so Eliot ends where he began, if not having reconciled immediate experience to language, at least having repudiated a particular discourse. Which sheds some light on the expenditure of nearly two years' thought and writing for a project that is purely negative, which didn't solve a philosophical problem but rather to transported it beyond philosophy by exhausting philosophical discourse.

[163] As in: "the development of language is the history of our exploration of the world of concepts. The goal of language is in this sense unattainable, for it is simply that of a complete vocabulary of concepts, each independent of the rest; and all of which, by their various combinations, would give complete and final knowledge - which would, of course, be knowledge without a knower (*CPr* I.269). In this sense Eliot is writing in the *spirit* (if not the letter) of highly rhetorical thinkers like Nietzsche, and anticipates the tendencies of Heidegger, Derrida, Wittgenstein, Austin, among the host of philosophers who pay very close attention to the language of philosophy. For a nice discussion the dissertations' prescience, see: Jain, *T.S. Eliot and American Philosophy,* 147-54.

Ultimately, the dissertation argues, philosophical knowledge is not only unequal to the world of experience, but it actually obscures it. As far as the philosophizing Eliot is concerned, the whole endeavor is a fool's errand. It is not altogether surprising that he directed his energies elsewhere. In view of the attitude toward philosophy it advances, the sheer existence of *Knowledge and Experience* seems somewhat paradoxical. It is, for instance, rather puzzling that Eliot undermines philosophical categories precisely by assuming their validity and deploying them in a philosophical argument. It is also puzzling that a monograph so antagonistic to academic philosophy was enthusiastically accepted by the Harvard philosophy department, hailed as "the work of an expert," in Josiah Royce's words, as the aged Eliot reminds us (*CPr* I.240). But most puzzling is that Eliot wrote it at all. For not only does the letter to Wiener indicate that Eliot knew philosophy was a fool's errand *while he was writing* the dissertation, but in 1915 he also knew and had expressed to his advisor James Woods that his pursuit of an academic post was unlikely (*LTSE*, I.152-3, 169-71, 256-7, 284-6.). Add to this the fact that Eliot never actually took the degree the dissertation should have earned him, and we find almost no explanatory motivation for this scholarly undertaking; without a career in a philosophy department there is no professional impetus, without belief in the efficacy of philosophical discourse there is no intellectual impetus, and without an advanced degree there is no institutional impetus.

Yet in the 1964 preface Eliot does suggest, however obliquely, another possible reason for completing the dissertation. After deciding to stay in England, he explains

> I did not, however, abandon immediately the intention of fulfilling the condition for the doctor's degree. Harvard had made it possible for me to go to Oxford for a year; and this return at least I owed to Harvard. So, amongst my other labours, I completed the first draft of my dissertation and dispatched it across the Atlantic for the judgment of the Harvard Department of Philosophy. (*CPr* I.239)

The completion of *Knowledge and Experience* turns out to be less a matter of truth or practical consequence than of integrity. Eliot finished for personal reasons, from a private sense of duty to the philosophy department at Harvard, and the result is a philosophically grounded, if not philosophically justified, widening of the scope of thought to entail personal action. It is only by approaching the limit of philosophical discourse that Eliot glimpses the possibility of exceeding it, for at the moment is begins to break down it also becomes possible to break out. Working by a logic of both philosophical and personal exhaustion, *Knowledge and Experience* embodies a way forward, a *via negativa* which reframes the "entirely destructive" as transformative – abstract thought moves into the realm of personal action. By playing with absolute seriousness a game known beforehand to be thoroughly specious, the dissertation manages to demonstrate this speciousness according to the game's own rules, bringing Eliot to the point where he is able to *realize* the claim of his argument by quitting the game. Thus through its logic of absurd commitment, the dissertation pushes speculative thought to the point where risky action becomes possible. On the surface this looks simple enough, even mundane: Eliot changed careers. But there is nothing very simple about it – in the words of the *Complete Prose* editors, "it was more than a vocation that troubled him; it was life" (*CPr* I.li). As an absurdly committed and risky act, the decision to pursue a poetic rather than a philosophical career entails the development and transformation of the dissertation's concerns and not a lateral transposition onto a different register: poetry doesn't replace philosophy but subsumes it, for these philosophical concerns remain vital in both Eliot's poetry and throughout much of his other writing, though in a less abstract form.

Although Eliot spent years organizing a great many words into a philosophical treatise, because the language of philosophy can only talk about its own problems, the move beyond that

discourse could not have been justified using its language. While that discourse manages to display its own limitations, it can never convincingly articulate the need for anything beyond its scope – the possibility for poetry to better approach immediate experience within language is necessarily incomprehensible to philosophy, for it can only think in philosophical terms. The justification for this exchange must then be more intuitive than reasoned, or more a matter of experience than argument.[164] But the transition from philosophy to poetry was not just switching from one discourse to another; it was also a moment of decisive action and risky personal investment. The decision to venture a poetic career was accompanied by considerable anxiety and entailed great economic and psychological stress for Eliot personally – it was a practical transition that involved more than just disciplinary practice, for it was bound up with a life.[165] Indeed, so incapable did he feel of justifying this decision to his parents that Eliot asked Ezra Pound to write an "apologia for the literary life" to his father on the son's behalf (*LTSE* I.97). Writing to his advisor at Harvard, Eliot doesn't even *try* to justify himself: "My reason for resigning [from the teaching post]", he wrote J.H. Woods in 1915, "is that I wish to remain in London and engage in literary work. This may seem a surprising choice and is admittedly a great risk – still it is much worse to be deterred from anything by fear, and I shall try it out" (*LTSE* I.109). The economic and psychological hardship that followed only reinforces the extent to which Eliot staked his own livelihood and personal well-being on this rather uncertain endeavor.

Where the dissertation's logic of objectifying analysis confounds the very felt unity of

[164] And Eliot had been experiencing the pangs of this conversion for some time; not only had he been writing poetry for most of his adult life, and applying poetic forms to philosophical problems since at least 1911, but in 1915 he wrote to Weiner that "the beauty of a work of art is…more real to me than its ultimate …physical constituents" (*LTSE* I.88).

[165] See for instance, Charlotte Eliot to Bertrand Russell: "I had hoped he would seek a University appointment next year. If he does not I shall feel regret. I have absolute faith in his Philosophy but not in the vers libre" (*LTSE* I.139; see also I.131).

experience in which it is so heavily invested, risky action returns to experience not by reemphasizing subjectivity, but by recovering personality. In cases like *Knowledge and Experience*, where description breaks down and grinds to a halt, a sort of discursive self-awareness is achieved where radical, self-implicating evaluation is demanded. To reach such a discursive limit is thus to confront the question of decisive action, which for Eliot entailed either persisting with philosophy or abandoning it. The implicit demand for action is in Eliot's case a way out of the very problem that demands it, for to act as an individual is to step from abstract thought back into particular and personal selfhood. Søren Kierkegaard explains this dynamic in *The Present Age*: for one to "risk something on his own" is to act against the understanding of "a reflective and passionless age" that "hinders and stifles all action" and in which the individual no longer belongs to himself but instead to "an abstraction to which he is subjected by reflection."[166] But Kierkegaard makes the crucial distinction that it is not reflection itself that such risky action must overturn, but rather the leveling process that arises when reflection becomes "an abstract power" divorced from passion, enthusiasm, and personality. This process of leveling abstraction is what Martin Heidegger later calls idle talk, "the possibility of understanding everything without previously making anything one's own"; and to act is to rescue language from the "complete groundlessness" of such chatter and to restore it to world, community, and Being.[167] Risky action recovers reflection by realigning it with its proper end; it restores philosophy to what Pierre Hadot would call "a way of life*"*:

> A mode of existing-in-the-world, which had to be practiced at each instant, and the goal [of which] was to transform the whole of the individual's life.…[It] took the form of an exercise of the thought, will, and the totality of one's being, the goal of which was to

[166] Kierkegaard, Søren, *The Present Age and Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1962), 85, 53-54.

[167] Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 213-4.

> achieve a state practically inaccessible to mankind: wisdom. Philosophy was a method of spiritual progress which demanded a radical conversion and transformation of the individual's way of being.[168]

In this sense Eliot's switch from philosophy to poetry is not an abandonment of either reflection or language, but rather an attempt to treat both as a single mode of being in the world, as a fundamental part of experience rather than something separate from it. Nor is it a re-making of either, but rather a re-orienting. The move to a poetic idiom shifts the purpose of language from description to expression of experience; language becomes a medium through which the felt whole of experience might come into view rather than be contained.

2. Poetry and Philosophy

But the transition to poetry from philosophy wasn't a necessarily abrupt one, for even more than Eliot's entrance on the English literary scene, his growing into a poet was gradual and overlapped with his formal philosophical studies. Eliot had been splitting himself between poetry and philosophical inquiry well before he began dividing his time between Oxford and London in 1914. While the poetry Eliot wrote both before and after his tenure as a graduate student was philosophically oriented, there is a decisive shift in his post-dissertation poetry away from philosophical expressionism. Ronald Bush observes that the verses Eliot composed in the early teens represent the poet's initial grappling with philosophical questions he would later address in a more disciplinarily direct idiom at Harvard, and subsequent critics have extensively explored the resonance between this early work and the philosophy of Henri Bergson.[169] Philosophically

---

[168] Hadot, Pierre, *Philosophy As a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises From Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Arnold I. Davidson. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 265.

[169] Bush, Ronald, *T.S. Eliot, A Study in Character and Style* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983), 10. Others include: Gray, Piers, *T.S. Eliot's Intellectual and Poetic Development, 1909-1922* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982), 43-52; Jain, *T.S. Eliot and American Philosophy*, 70; Habib, *Eliot and Western Philosophy*, 41-2; Childs, *From Philosophy to Poetry*, 52-54. Eliot spent the year between his undergraduate and graduate work

inflected poems like "Preludes," "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" are largely experimental insofar as they attempt to express and interrogate the theories of consciousness, intellect, and perception that Eliot encountered through philosophers like Bergson. Donald Childs remarks on how the lyric consciousness of such poems corresponds to Bergson's notion of extension and dissolution of mind-body distinctions.[170] For Prufrock, the evening sky spreads like an etherized consciousness; in "Preludes," the winter evening, similarly endowed with the properties of consciousness, "settles down," "the morning comes to consciousness," and likewise an anonymous individual's "soul [is] stretched tight across the skies" (*CPP* 3, 12-13). In demonstrating how "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" engages and ultimately rejects Bergson's attempt to reconcile the *phenomena-noumena* distinction of Kantian dualism, Jewel Spears Brooker turns to a philosophical paper Eliot presented to the Harvard Philosophical Club in 1913 to show how he conceded that "dualism is intractable."[171] Of course, the question of dualism looks rather different after Eliot's engagement with Bradley and his break with philosophy, but what Brooker's argument reveals is that the poetry of this earlier period was, in a sense, subordinate to analytic philosophy. For Eliot in 1913, the discourse of philosophy could still articulate what poetry might just suggest or play with.[172]

And yet the suggestiveness of poetry nevertheless proved powerful. For while such poems might seem instrumental insofar as they offer platforms for Eliot to test, for instance, Bergson's theory of integration against Kant's dualism, the expressive capacity of poetry may

---

(1910-11) in Paris, where he regularly attended Bergson's lectures at the *Collège de France.* See Miller, James E., *T.S. Eliot: The Making of an American Poet, 1888-1922* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 141, 191.

[170] Childs, *From Philosophy to Poetry*, 69-73.

[171] Brooker, Jewel Spears, "Eliot and Bergson: 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' and the Intractability of Dualism," *Partial Answers: Journal Of Literature And The History Of Ideas 13*, no. 1 (January 2015): 2.
[172] Ibid.

also have presented to Eliot a different mode of approaching a world of experience that philosophy would only make into problems. For poems like "Preludes" do manage to present a Bergsonian fusion of mind and world, which remains discursively efficacious even if "Rhapsody" effectively impales Bergson's theory in the way Brooker maintains. "Preludes" conjures into phenomenal existence a world in which the individual consciousness does indeed melt into its surroundings, a world in which the distinction between self and world seems to disappear. It is a world trampled by "muddy feet," where "One thinks of all the hands / That are raising dingy shades / In a thousand furnished rooms" without ever seeing whole bodies or particular people, where the night reveals "the thousand sordid images / of which your soul was constituted" and where that soul might be projected onto, "stretched tight across," and mingled with the landscape. Though Eliot might come to repudiate the impersonal universe of "Preludes," the haunting fusion of soul and body is still achieved rhetorically in these verses, where thought and objective reality constantly blend with one another. The poetic method carries tremendous philosophical potential, for it begins to uncover the fact that experience happens in language, and to suggest conversely that language might be able to present phenomena expressively, without descriptively capturing and thus reducing it. Rather than wrangling language into a form that would accurately account for experience, these verses acknowledge language as the form experience takes.

While the philosophical valences of these earlier poems persist after Eliot abandoned philosophy, with *The Waste Land* we see an emphatic shift from unmediated expressivity to hermeneutic self-consciousness. [173] What is central to *The Waste Land* is neither perception nor a particular philosophical perspective, but rather the act of interpretation, which is both thematized

[173] Brooker, Jewel Spears, and Joseph Bentley, *Reading The Waste Land: Modernism and the Limits of Interpretation* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 48-52.

and transformed by Eliot's almost immediate addition of the now famous endnotes, an addition that completely transformed how the poem was understood. Laurence Rainey's insightful account of the poem's reception history shows this quite nicely, for his juxtaposition of two very different early attempts to understand *The Waste Land* demonstrates how the addition of the endnotes recast the experience of the poem by transporting it from a generalized lyric context to a scholarly one. One of the first recorded readings of *The Waste Land*, that of John Peale Bishop, reveals an initial impulse to decipher the public references and discover the personal symbolism at work in the poem. Bishop wonders not only who are Mr. Eugenidies, Magnus Martyr, and Phlebas the Phoenecian, and as whence "*Le Prince d'Aquitaine de la tour abolie"* and "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME," but also how Eliot's private life makes its way into the poem; Bishop even ventures at one point that "Thomas' sexual troubles are undoubtedly extreme." Rainey notes how Bishop never thinks to read the poem in light of the Grail legends, but is nevertheless convinced of a "highly constructed" underlying symbolism. But because Bishop's approach to the poem involves only the private personal or the contemporary public spheres, the symbolic structure is seen either to derive from Eliot's own autobiography, or a contemporary cultural analysis – "a reckoning with the modern world." For Bishop, reading without the notes, the poem's meaning owes almost nothing to its scholarly aspect, whereas the notes irrevocably situate the poem within the realm of scholarship.[174]

But in the reactions to the Liveright edition – the first to include the famous endnotes - *The Waste Land* becomes not the work of a man with extreme sexual troubles, but rather the "impressions and catch lines of a poet who has read voraciously" (Burton Roscoe) and who has constructed behind what seems "at first sight remarkably disconnected [and] confused" a "hidden

[174] Eliot, T. S., *The Annotated Waste Land with Eliot's Contemporary Prose*, ed. Lawrence S. Rainey (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2005), 102-107.

form [which] indicates how each thing falls into place, and to the reader's surprise shows that the emotion which at first seemed to come in spite of the framework and the detail could not have otherwise have been communicated" (Gilbert Seldes). Even Edmund Wilson, who dismisses the need for knowledge of this "framework" – the express anthropological "plan" of the notes – cannot help arguing that the poem fulfills the purpose of this plan even if we remain ignorant of it: "And sometimes we feel that he is speaking not only of personal distress, but for the starvation of a whole civilization."[175] Whether one need to actively decode the referential plan, or merely feel it in his bones, after the notes suggested its existence, criticism found it nearly impossible to go back to Bishop's initial naiveté. Thus even when the late great Hugh Kenner argues that "we shall do well to discard the notes as much as possible [since] they have bedeviled discussion for decades," he cannot help but proceed by deciphering and thematically explicating many of the references Eliot's own notes begin to elucidate.[176] After such knowledge, what forgiveness?

The endnotes tell us that in order to understand the coherence of "these fragments" one must approach them with a pre-established framework in mind, one that is not so much suggested by the substance of the poem itself as by the distanced perspective of either authorial authority or scholarly objectivity. Both of these forms of authority are achieved, and conflated, in the first person speaker of the notes. On the one hand, his "I" speaks from the position of author, conveying the sort of intentional information that is the sole privilege of the one who wrote the poem and who therefore ought to know just what he meant. "The collocation of these two

[175] Eliot, *Annotated Waste Land*, 112 (see note 4). Hugh Kenner later makes this same point, arguing by means of referential exposition that one needn't recognize the references.

[176] In reading the poem as "suffused with a functional obscurity, sibylline fragments so disposed as to yield the utmost in connotative power, embracing the fragmented present and reaching back to 'that vanished mind of which our mind is a continuation,'" Kenner allots himself the task of reading the oracle of tradition, which can only be done by scouring the stacks where literary tradition dwells. Kenner, Hugh, *The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot* (New York, NY: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959), 150, 159.

representatives of eastern and western asceticism, as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident," note 309 assures us with the self-possession of a meaning-intending author. But on the other hand, the notational speaker adopts the thoroughly impersonal discourse of academic scholarship and treats the poem as a specimen less of personal intention than of anthropological curiosity. The key to understanding *The Waste Land*, the notes tell us, is not biography but anthropology, not knowledge or intention of one human, but rather the meaning of humanity in the abstract, as collected and coordinated by thinkers like James Frazer and Jessie Weston. That these two apparently opposed forms of authority are conflated in the notes is at this moment less important than the fact that both the personal and the impersonal perspectives are vantages possible only from *outside* the lyrical text itself. Whether the posture is personal and biographical (what T.S. Eliot meant) or whether it is impersonal and scholarly (what *The Waste Land* means), both are in the end forms of the same distanced perspective - the notes stand outside of the 433 lyrical lines of the poem in order to connect its fragments with the wholes they partially suggest – either Eliot's mind, "the mind of Europe," or the mythic mind of humanity writ-large.

The endnotes' irrevocable contextualization of the verse-poem is essentially a recasting of the lyric's personal utterance (conventionally understood) as an abstract and generally significant object of scholarly interest.[177] We might easily characterize *The Waste Land* in the same way Jonathan Culler characterizes the interpretative posture of the New Criticism (for which Eliot's poem was so important): both urge us "to focus on the speaker rather than the poet" in a push "to

[177] The conventionality of treating the lyric speaker as disembodied and abstract is typified in Northrop Frye's introduction to *Anatonomy of Criticism*, where he gestures to a sort of critical geneology by erecting his claim that "Poetry is a disinterested use of words … [that] doesn't; address a reader directly" upon the John Stuart Mill's earlier formulation of the lyric as an utterance overheard. Frye, Northrop, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton,N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4-5.

substitute for the empirical poet an ideal poet who could sanction and be credited with the complex ironies at work in his verse."[178] The ultimate context in which the endnotes encase the verse-poem is less the Grail legend or sundry vegetation myths than the ideal field of disinterested and objective academic inquiry, whose privileged distance is able to decipher such connections. And this idealization has less to do with either an author or a "speaker" as unified poetic consciousness than with a generalized coherence that renders its fragments intelligible. The "speaker" of the notes, as ideal poet of the verse-poem, is really just an occasion for explicating and putting on display the "plan."[179] Either way – ideal speaker or ideal plan – the intelligibility and significance of the poem inheres not in its expressive verses but in their paltry contextualization – in their being viewed objectively and connected with external elements and structures.

And while the comprehending privilege of objectivity is presented by the notes in terms of a single plan, their very referential operations suggest that externality is the key to understanding the verses even on a small scale. Baudelaire and de Nerval have little to say about vegetation myths, and yet the notes' citation of these sources suggests that knowledge of them is nevertheless needed to understand the poem. Indeed, the assumption of the notes is that a much more general plan is needed than the myths collected by Frazer and Weston – they suggest that the poem ought to be viewed from the vantage of the entire Western tradition. For their spiraling metonymic logic, implying whole texts where it gives only fragments, points to ever thickening layers of context, gesturing outward in widening circles away from the initial verse-poem that

[178] Culler, Jonathan, "Changes in the Study of the Lyric," in *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 48.

[179] The preeminence of the "plan" over the poet/speaker can be seen in the sort of criticism that amplifies and multiplies annotation and in the sort that intensifies the poem's cohesiveness (as with so many early New Critical treatments). See: Williamson, George, *A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot: A Poem-By-Poem Analysis* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966).

occasions this moment.[180] And purporting to shed light on the obscurities of the poem, the very obscurity and idiosyncrasy of the notes directs us further away from its primary referent, as if to say "Oh? You don't read Latin or Medieval Italian? (For shame!) Better set this volume down and get to work on your prerequisites - and probably go through Augustine and Dante while you're at it." And of course these roads only lead to further forks and more steps outward, for how can one really read Dante without reading Aquinas? And how read Aquinas without having read Aristotle?

Following these strivings toward comprehensiveness to their suggested absurdity begins to reveal how the notes undermine the very structures they also uphold. Not only do the notes perform the conventional educative function of transmitting an intellectual and cultural tradition (Eliot's version of Arnold's "best that has been known and thought") but they also reinforce the epistemological structure of modern scholarship, whose subject-object dualism is typified by the tradition of formalized learned annotation, as Anthony Grafton so aptly charts in his "curious history" of footnotes. But the notes also parody both of these functions. For many readers of *The Waste Land* have sensed there was something duplicitous about the endnotes; their austere tone of detachment and scholarly authority is mingled with the most blatant expressions of bias and admissions of ignorance. On the one hand the notes cultivate an air of impersonal professional rigor by deploying such referential shorthand as "V." for "see" and the "subtle but deadly cf.," whose presumption of opinionated familiarity is only reinforced by the omission of referential information, as if everyone already knows that *Tristan und Isolde* is the title of Richard Wagner's 1865 opera, that it was William Shakespeare who wrote *Antony and Cleopatra*, and that Baudelaire's "fourmillante cité" is taken from "Les Sept Vieillards," which can be found in

[180] On "widening contexts" see: Levenson, Michael H., *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine 1908-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 201.

Les Fleurs du Mal.[181] Such notes read as the marginalia of one well-trained scholar written for other trained-scholars. But then among them one meets such idiosyncratic and colloquial notes as "68. A phenomenon which I have often noticed" and "199. I do not know the origin of the ballad from which these lines are taken: it was reported to me from Sydney, Australia" (*CPP* 52). While the effect of these mixed signals differs depending on where one stands, the result is often one of dissonance. To the uninitiated readers outside the scholarly loop, the presumptively academic notes appear as pompous posturing in the light of their informal and unlearned counterparts. To the initiated scholars, the casual notes suggest that the whole affair might be parodic – the poet's clever inside joke on the too straight-laced (or ignorant) reader. One early critic, F.L. Lukas, incisively articulates how easily this dissonance can shift from cute to obnoxious, even to those in the scholarly know:

> What is the use of explaining 'laquearia' by quoting two lines of Latin containing the word, which will convey nothing to those who do not know that language, and nothing new to those who do? What is the use of giving a quotation from Ovid which begins in the middle of a sentence, without reference? And when one person hails another on London Bridge as having been with him 'at Mylae,' how is a non-classical reader to guess that this is the name of a Punic sea-fight in which a Phoenician sailor, presumably, the speaker, had taken part?[182]

But aside from such perfectly reasonable objections, the fact remains that the endnotes *do* help, which helps explain why so many early critics took their interpretative model so seriously (even if they didn't regard every note as equally valuable).[183]

---

[181] Grafton, Anthony, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 8.

[182] Lukas, F.L., "Review of *The Waste Land*." *Newstatesman* 22 (3 Nov. 1923), 117.

[183] As, for instance, with: Leavis, Frank Raymond, *New Bearings In English Poetry: A Study of the Contemporary Situation* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932), 90-113; and in I.A. Richards's treatment of Eliot in Richards, I.A., *Principles of Literary* Criticism (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1926), 289-95.

3. The Epistemological and Hermeneutic Implication of the Endnotes

If all this sounds somewhat familiar, there is good reason; for not only do the "Notes to *The Waste Land*" run up against, or rather dramatize the same fundamental problem of primary and secondary phenomena that Eliot had been wrestling with seven years earlier in *Knowledge and Experience*, and the poem also follows a similar dialectic of success through failure. Where the dissertation explains how philosophical analysis always distorts experience by translating it into derivative or reductive categories of thought, the endnotes demonstrate how literary analysis does nearly the same thing. The total transformation of critical reception that followed the inclusion of the endnotes, and the ensuing functional impossibility of considering the poem apart from them, both of these effects seem to bear out the dissertation's conclusion that any description of reality fundamentally alters that reality.[184] Whether theorizing the poem or some larger field of experience, "the world of your theory is certainly a very different would from which you began," which is part of the reason Eliot, despite his best wishes, cannot excise the notes; "they can never be unstuck" because they have become integrated into the reality of the poem (*CPr* I.379). And the notes themselves seem aware that they fail to achieve the objectivity their form implies, for one might easily read the parodic quality of the notes – those moments of patent unhelpfulness, ignorance, or subjective posturing – as suggestions that the operations of scholarly explication are just as objectifying as philosophical analysis. But even for their insufficiency – whether in the production of so much "bogus scholarship," or in the willful misdirection of the naive reader – they somehow still help us make some sense of the poem, in

[184] Here we might read Laurence Rainey's entirely persuasive argument for the notes' chronological and conceptual primacy as somewhat symptomatic. Regardless of whether the notes were a first or second thought, criticism has so acclimated itself to thinking of them as primary (a tradition beginning as early as Wimsatt & Beardsley's "Intentional Fallacy"), that it must do all it can to refute Eliot's late assertion that they were a mere afterthought arising from the exigencies of publication. See Eliot, T. S., *On Poetry and Poets* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957), 121. (hereafter abbreviated and parenthetically cited as *PP*). In this sense Rainey's historical argument satisfies the felt need for an origin story that explains and justifies the notes' importance.

much the same way the "entirely destructive" dissertation manages to make a philosophical claim through its dismantling of the very philosophical system it depends on.[185] Thus while following all of the endnotes' presented trails undermines their capacity to illuminate the verses by infinitely forestalling a return to them, even so the mere list of names and works suggests what is involved in *The Waste Land*, and what is at stake in it (Western Culture, say). They tell us that we cannot read in a vacuum. So even while the constitutive parts might be more or less helpful, the effect of the whole is nevertheless useful in providing a general topography. But the similarity between the endnotes' simultaneous failure and success and that of *Knowledge and Experience* arises not from the translation of philosophy into poetry but from the former's development into poetry, a movement characterized by expansion and complication more than mere analogy. For there is an important disciplinary difference between philosophical analysis and the sort of literary explication at work in the endnotes of *The Waste Land.*

The interdisciplinary nature of the notes' approach signals that the difficulties it occasions belong not merely to a single disciplinary protocol like analytic philosophy, but to the entire epistemological structure upholding scholarly inquiry. Indeed, the notes actually situate philosophy, with none other than F.H. Bradley as its representative, as one among several discursive voices. Within the space of five pages we find a veritable smorgasbord of disciplinary representatives: biblical studies (#20, 23), philology (22), music (31), architecture (264), theology and comparative religion (307-9), ornithology (357), historical geography (360), philosophy (412), anthropology (421, intro), and of course the various sub species of literature: poetry (60…) drama (77…) myth (99…), the novel (367). But even more than its variegated discursive content, the annotative form of the notes itself embodies the epistemological structure

[185] On the misdirection of the notes, see Kaiser, "Disciplining The Waste Land," 82-99.

common to all these fields of inquiry, which is the very objectivisim Eliot found so untenable in *Knowledge and Experience*. Arising from 17th century historiography's attempt to "show history as it really was," the footnote and its brother the endnote developed as the hallmark of academic research as the university become increasingly invested in specialization and professionalization.[186] As Anthony Grafton notes, "the appearance of the footnote – and such related devices as documentary and critical appendices – separates historical modernity from tradition."[187] Their "double form" is fundamentally Cartesian, creating a "double narrative" where hypothetical claims are bolstered by reference to evidential proof; the footnote is the verifiable "outward sign" of history's inner-logic, the objective point of access to the spirit of history.[188]

In this sense the footnote is a function of the scientific method *par excellence*, pointing to a body of acknowledged facts to support an explanatory assertion.[189] It is this structural analogue between the scientific method and the documentary and evidential provenance of the modern footnote that marks scholarly annotation as the figure of university intellectual culture. For educational historians have been pointing out for some time how the disciplinary protocols of nearly all modern fields of academic research, from physics to comparative literature have their roots in the scientific method's goal of deriving objective knowledge from observed phenomena, and the generalization of that method as a model for scholarly inquiry as a whole.[190] As a tool of descriptive explanation, the footnote assumes as valid the very distinction between fact and

---

[186] The phrase belongs to the German historian Leopold von Ranke, quoted in Grafton, *The Footnote*, 43-4, 45.

[187] ibid 24

[188] ibid. 206, 24.

[189] Husserl explains this relation quite incisively in *Crisis of the European Sciences* (1936).

[190] See Veysay, *Emergence of the American University,* 68, 125-6; Reuben, *Making of the Modern University,* 49, 176, 183.

phenomena – knowledge and experience – that Eliot's dissertation worked so hard to unsettle. Its ubiquity in academic discourse suggests that this epistemological situation is more than just a question for analytic is philosophy, but is at the very heart of modern scholarly practice. Philosophy is merely a symptom.

Eliot appears to have been steadily growing aware of the universality of this situation in the years between the dissertation and *The Waste Land*. In "The Perfect Critic," a 1920 revisitation of his earlier philosophical interests, now in the context of literary culture, he traces the "abstract style in criticism" back to German idealism, where aesthetic emotion was first systematically infused with objective reality (*CPr* II.266). He christens this tendency "verbalism" and locates it most concretely in Hegel, that "most prodigious exponent of emotional systemization," who dealt "with his emotions as if they were definite objects which had aroused those emotions," and whose "followers have as a rule taken for granted that words have definite meanings, overlooking the tendency of words to become indefinite emotions. If [this] verbalism were confined to professional philosophers, no harm would be done. But their corruption has extended very far" (*CPr* 266-7). This discovery Eliot presumably made when he left the philosophical field for the greener (literary) pastures, only to find that even poetic language is subject to the objectifying impulse he first registered in *Knowledge and Experience*.

Indeed, Eliot suggests that this tendency underwrites our very conception of knowledge, which is why "the vast accumulations of knowledge – or at least information – deposited by the nineteenth century have been responsible for an equally vast ignorance" (*CPr* 267). It is possible to discern in this interruptive qualification the broad movement of modern intellectual history, for the subtle shift from "knowledge" to "information" testifies to a vast chasm between subject and object that has grown from an initial Cartesian schism. For knowledge is inconceivable apart

from a knower; etymologically, its verbal root deals with the activity of the perceiving mind, yoking the substance thought with the thinking subject: *γιγνώσκω* - discern, distinguish, recognize, perceive; to form a judgement or to think.[191] But information, the new substance of thought, has been detached from the mind it was once understood to shape: as it migrated into English, the word was decoupled from its constitutive subject, and shucking off its original educative sense (*in-formare*, to shape or form into) its gradual turn to the objects of knowledge ultimately obscured the knowing subject. From formation it came to mean "infusion with form," eventually becoming mere "data," those "facts" which are "given or granted" to no one in particular.[192] By the early twentieth century information had become conceivable as "separate from, or without the implication of, [or] reference to a person informed"; formation had become pure form.[193] The shift from knowledge to information was a shift from subject-oriented formation to the pure form of objectivity. And *The Waste Land* demonstrates how scholarly annotation concretizes this objectifying impulse, for not only do the notes imbed the lyrical utterances of the verse-poem in a referential network of contextualizing data, but they also render those utterances as information. *The Waste Land* thus embodies the epistemological framework criticized in *Knowledge and Experience* by employing a formal structure that suggests the ubiquity of that very philosophical framework. The addition of the notes doesn't just set the poem in the context of academic scholarship, it effectively equates scholarship with context; the poem is not set amidst so many monuments of Western civilization as it is set in the context of

---

[191] "γιγνώσκω," Liddell, Henry George and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon, revised and augmented throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie* (Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1940)

[192] "information, n." *OED Online*. March 2016. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/95568?redirectedFrom=information (accessed May 21, 2016); "datum, n." 2.a. OED Online. June 2016. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/47434 (accessed May 21, 2016).

[193] "information, n.". 2.d. *OED Online*.

modern scholarship, which in turn discovers those monuments.

But the endnotes do more than just critically embody an epistemological problem where the condition of knowledge is an illusory objectivity; they also begin to suggest a solution, and in a way just as radical as *Knowledge and Experience*. Indeed, it is in the most emphatic manifestation of that problem where we begin to glimpse its solution – one that hinges on the inevitability of interpretation. For the interpretation that the notes offer is not a very good one, and it is precisely its deficiencies that draw attention to the hermeneutic situation that the logic annotation threatens to obfuscate. While the authoritative tone and coherent voice of the notes suggests that they present *the* meaning of the poem, their internal dissonance and argumentative frailty reveals that what is really offered is meaning *as* interpretation. What the notes present with all the assurance of facticity turns out to be entirely contingent, which become especially clear in the famous note where the figure of Tiresias is offered as the poem's unifying principle:

> Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a "character," is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias *sees,* in fact, is the substance of the poem. The whole passage from Ovid is of great anthropological interest… (*CPP* 52)

How, we might wonder, can the knowledge of (or even the theory derived from) Tiresias' sexual metamorphosis offer a view onto the "substance" of the poem that this spectator apparently "sees," especially when the primary content offered is of mainly an "anthropological interest?" The claim of Tiresias' centrality is asserted but goes wholly unsupported, even if it *appears* to be substantiated in a long quotation from Ovid; what the "substance" of the poem is remains unarticulated and unexplained; and why precisely a unity of character would unify all other elements of the poem goes unaddressed. Much more than the importance of Tiresias as a unifying principle, what note 218 demonstrates by the very feebleness of its claim, is the

arbitrariness of interpretation and the incommensurability of contextual information with derived meaning.

This incommensurability is assuaged, if not overcome, chiefly by a logic of mediation, which in note 218 takes the form of a particular interpretative framework, but more generally rests on the inevitability of a particular interpretative agent. Between information and meaning stands the act of interpretation, and behind and inseparable from that act is the person of the interpreter. Tiresias becomes a figure for humanity precisely because the editor takes an "anthropological interest" interest in him. Merely reading Ovid is not enough to produce (or justify) the claim that Tiresias is *The Waste Land*'s everyman and no man, all characters and yet a "spectator," for such a claim presupposes certain motivating questions and investments. In fact, the quoted passage from *Metamorphoses* doesn't have "anthropological interest" in itself, but rather acquires that interest because the editor interprets the verse-poem anthropologically and urges the reader to do likewise by elsewhere pointing to Frazer and Weston. What makes the interpretative claims of note 218 so untenable is that, because its "anthropological interest" doesn't inhere in the verse-poem itself but rather is imposed upon it externally, this interest could conceivably be otherwise – philological or theological, for instance. Such interest furthermore belongs not to some abstract externality, but rather to the investments (or caprices) of the interpreting agent, meaning that interested claims ultimately rely either on the authority of the editor or the viability of the assertion. Neither of these are very solid foundations, for not only does the editor's (or author's) demonstrated ignorance undermine his general credibility as a source of information, but his failure to elaborate or explicate the claims made with such dubious information undermines his credibility as an interpreter. It is hard to swallow the importance of the Tarot when, in addition to "not [being] familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack

of cards," from which he has "obviously departed to suit [his] own convenience," the editor claims that its relevance inheres in how certain figures are "associated in [his] mind" (*CPP* 50). Indeed, all of the connections in the Tarot pack note hang on the idiosyncratic associations of this editorial mind: the Hanged Man is associated with the hanged god in Frazer, which is in turn associated with "the hooded figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in Part V," which the editor *later* associates not with the gospel passage but with Shackleton's expedition; "The Man with Three Staves," "an authentic member of the Tarot pack" which the editor is admittedly unfamiliar with, is then associated "quite arbitrarily, with the Fisher King himself." Is it any wonder that critics have discerned parody in these notes?[194] So if on the one hand the speaker is admittedly an unreliable authority, and on the other hand the claims themselves are dubious, the endnotes cannot possibly offer a key to *the* interpretation of *The Waste Land*; what they offer instead is *one of many* interpretations against the inevitability of any interpretations' insufficiency. Jewel Brooker and Joseph Bently put this quite nicely: "the only limit on interpretation is the imagination of the interpreter [and] reading a text such as *The Waste Land* sets in motion a ceaseless and never-ending activity."[195] The point here is not that the notes offer partial and imperfect information or make dubious claims but that they dramatize how the production of meaning is inseparable from the idiosyncrasies of personality.

Ultimately, the notes are helpful precisely because they fail to help in the way their form suggests they should, for this failure results in the revelation that reading and understanding are cooperative activities which operate by a logic of participation rather than explication. In the

---

[194] Perhaps most incisive assertion of the notes' parodic quality comes in the form of a parody itself – John Beer's recent collection *The Waste Land and other Poems* (2010) draws out the more absurd implications of the notes by blatantly mixing contemporary pop culture, academic philosophy, and some of Eliot's own notes.

[195] Brooker and Bentley, *Reading The Waste Land*, 8.

language of Paulo Freire, the notes' referential function implies a "banking" notion of learning, where learning consists in "receiving, filing, and storing" deposits of knowledge. This conception is then undermined by the "problem-posing" function of the notes, which by virtue of their very deficiency force readers into critical engagement. [196] By quietly demonstrating that the interpretation they offer is contingent and could thus be otherwise, the notes draw the reader into precisely the same interpretative activity that they put on display, but with as many different results are there are different readers.[197] The interpretative exertion the endnotes model merely meets the demand of the verse-poem's dense and dissonant obscurity. Thus in addition to the dichotomous structure of the work as a whole, the aporias in both the verse-poem and in its endnotes foreground the fact that both primary and secondary order phenomena – both experience and its descriptions – transpire in an ongoing and generative process of interpretation, a process that is furthermore inseparable from the persons who enact it. For the mind and sensibility of the reader is constantly moving between the parts and filling in the gaps, and this always and necessarily with some "interest" brought in from the outside, for as Heidegger maintains, phenomenal experience always transpires in time, and is thus informed by the particular historical conditions of the experiencing agent. And the notes seem to invite this sort of particular interest in all they don't say – the notational speaker *misses* references that a differently invested and differently interested reader might make much of – the first line's echo of Chaucer, the tacit nods to the *Book of Common Prayer*, popular songs, nursery rhymes, or

---

[196] Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* 30th anniversary ed. (New York, NY: Continuum, 2000), 72.

[197] This is not to suggest that interpretation is a free-for all with no limits, but rather that while bounded by certain logical rules or critical norms, the poem's ambiguity nevertheless continues to yield new prospects for interpretative activity. This situation is by no means specific to *The Waste Land*, though it is well instanced by it when we consider the mountainous and growing body of scholarship that has grown up around this poem.

indeed, Eliot's own biography.[198]

4. Interpretation, Personality, and Biography

Even as a graduate student Eliot had been preoccupied with interpretation. In a graduate paper written in 1914, where he assesses the ethical systems of Thomas Hill Green and Henry Sedgwick, Eliot suggests that both philosophers forget "that ethics is concerned not with rectification of existing morals but with their interpretation" (*CPr* I.159). He concludes by "accepting both theories, and both provisionally;" though he grants that morality is "built upon a mechanical order, [it is]…not itself mechanical," ultimately because "we cannot wholly discriminate what we mean from the meaning of our words and deeds" (Ibid.). Adumbrating the thrust of his dissertation, Eliot closes the paper by maintaining that "the world is more real than any particular meaning which we assign to it" (*CPr* I.161). A year earlier he laid the ground for such pithy assertions in "The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual," an essay that Brooker and Schuchard rightly consider "his most important Harvard Paper," since Eliot was given license to select the theme and method himself (*CPr* I.xxxix). The paper opens by brusquely stating that there are "[t]wo questions: causality and the interpretation of meaning," and maintains that purported descriptions of primitive religious behavior and its causes always involve acts of interpretation that involve psychological projection onto unknowable past subjects (*CPr* I.106, 114-115). Consequently, he concludes that not "any definition of religious behavior can be satisfactory, and yet you must assume, if you are to make a start at all, that all these phenomena have a common meaning; you must postulate your own attitude and interpret your so-called facts

---

[198] For these elided sources, see: Eliot, T. S., *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, ed. Valerie Eliot (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971); Eliot, T. S., *The Waste Land: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Michael North (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001).

into it, and how can this be science?" (*CPr* I.115). And in a stroke of unwitting foreshadowing similar to that of the earlier essay on ethics, the closing sentence of this paper retroactively echoes Eliot's future critique of Hegel's verbalism: "you cannot dissolve the imaginative and emotive element [of religious behavior] in any invariable terms." (Ibid.)

At back of his argument about the study of primitive religion is the suspicion that some things cannot be described and analyzed in an objective fashion. In critiquing one thinker, he notes that "we are given an hypothesis which owes its *vraisemblance* to the fact that we feel that this is what we should do were we in the savage's place," and notes that in such a case it is impossible to tell where fact stops and interpretation begins (*CPr* I.107). In 1913, under the explicitly scientific aspirations of academic scholarship in the social sciences, this tendency to insert oneself into a constellation of facts about the past is patently problematic.[199] But as Eliot comes to realize the ubiquity of such an interpretative posture, that facts cannot be known or experienced in any other way, such self-insertion becomes the basis for a positive view of personality.

The primacy of personality seems a strange thing to attribute to a poet who is famous for valuing just the opposite; for Eliot's influential essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" appears to offer a framework for understanding *The Waste Land* according to the principle of impersonality.[200] But it falters, for not only does *The Waste Land* appear to embody both "the pastness of the past" along with "its presence" – the "simultaneous order" of tradition that thinks "the mind of Europe" – it also seems, in its fragmented polyphony and basic decentralization, to

---

[199] For a general overview of the scientific inclinations of the social sciences, see: Roberts, Jon H., and James Turner, *The Sacred and the Secular University* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 43-61.

[200] Indeed, this is how early critics like Edmund Wilson and Cleanth Brooks read the poem. See: Wilson, Edmund, Jr., "The Poetry of Drouth," *The Dial* vol. 73.6. (December 1922): 611-16.; Brooks, Cleanth, Jr., "*The Waste Land*: An Analysis." *Southern Literature* 3, (1937): 106-136.

achieve the valorized quality of "depersonalization" – that "continual extinction of personality" which allows the poet to work as "a more finely perfected medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations" (*CPr* II.108-9). In Eliot's formulation, when such an ideally impersonal artwork comes into being, something "happens simultaneously to all the works which preceded it… [and] the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered" (*CPr* II.106). That Eliot offers a demonstrative analogy from the field of chemistry is not altogether surprising, since the essay's view art "may be said to approach the condition of science" (*CPr* II.108). However, this is telling, for like laboratory science, Eliot would have us observe manufactured phenomena as if they were natural, but just as the fragments of *The Waste Land* were gathered by a particular creative agent, so in the platinum-catalyzed reaction between oxygen and sulfur dioxide, these reagents do not mix of their own accord, but rather "are mixed" by the chemist (*CPr* II.109). Though the passive voice here gives the appearance of spontaneous natural occurrence to both artworks and laboratory chemical reactions, the metaphor itself suggests that the exertion of an agent is always involved, whether that agent is the creating artist or the catalyzing platinum (not to mention the chemist who introduces the platinum). As David Foster Wallace observes when considering the somewhat analogous structuralist debate over authorship and intention, one may very well insist on impersonality and "erase or over-define the author into anonymity for all sorts of technical, political, and philosophical reasons," and "this 'anonymity' may mean many things, but one thing which it cannot mean is that no one did it."[201] And Eliot acknowledges this inevitability of agency precisely in terms of personality at the end of the essay, for even though "poetry is not

[201] Wallace borrows these words from William Gass. See: Wallace, David Foster, "Greatly Exaggerated" in *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments* (New York, NY: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Co./Hachette Book Group, 2009), 145.

the expression of personality, but an escape from personality… of course only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape these things" (*CPr* II.111).

For *The Waste Land*, the 433 verses of polyvocal lyric utterance may have been extinguished of all personality, but a personality of the most pronounced sort – one with blatant personal investments, particularized interests, a specific educational background along with certain ignorance and fallibility – asserts itself just on the periphery of the verse-poem, in the marginal space of hermeneutic encounter. If we take the almost offensively idiosyncratic personality of the notational speaker as our point of departure, the poem appears to actually be a revision of the earlier "tradition" thesis, a revision that begins to pay more attention to the question of reception. For in the world of "Tradition and the Individual Talent," interpretative digestion *only* happens in the act of artistic creation, but the endnotes acknowledge that every act of reading involves interpretation of the sort Eliot describes in 1919, regardless of whether it is poised for some future artistic expression. Therefore it is not just creation but reception, not just writing but also reading, that participates in the chemical reactions of tradition. That Eliot employs an academic idiom only drives this point home, for the notes suggest that there are other monuments and other sorts of monuments that are at work in the great dance of tradition. It is as if Eliot gave Matthew Arnold another look and grew compelled by the latter's assertion that the work of criticism conditions all artistic production; or as if he foresaw Gadamer's later insight that all "understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event" that expands the horizon of our own narrow and limited "hermeneutical situation" or individual "prejudice" by fusing it with the different horizons of other minds and times.[202] Indeed, the hermeneutic consequence of the

[202] See Arnold, Matthew, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" in *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 26-52; Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method.* The Bloomsbury Revelations Series, ed. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London:

notes is an expansion of tradition's function to include not just acts of artistic production but all aesthetic encounters with such products. In a sense Gadamer's notion of understanding reads as a version of "Tradition" that takes account of *The Waste Land*, for it substitutes the artwork/artist for the individual in general:

> Just as the individual is never simply an individual because he is always in understanding with others, so too the closed horizon that is supposed to enclose a culture is an abstraction. The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us.[203]

It is interpretation in general and not merely the interpretations effected by certain artworks (which themselves rest on the interpretation of the artist) that alter the landscape of tradition. Though this is the very business of professional literary studies, which is always preparing and guiding the general conversations about and encounters with artworks, Eliot himself makes the point that reading affects the "ideal order" when he admits that his readers have, by their popular demand and expectation, rendered his own artistic intervention (revision) impossible (*PP* 121).

Impersonality and personality in this sense are mutually constitutive elements of the same process, which could be thought of as either writing or reading. In both activities a movement is made between thought and substance, and whether moving from the interior to the exterior (as in writing) or from the exterior to the interior (as in reading), the movement always happens *through* interpretation, a mediating term which necessarily involves a specific interpreting agent, and is thus always more personal than impersonal. The situation of hermeneutics refuses abstraction precisely because it is situated; it always involves a specific individual encounter. For all of the verse-poem's resistance to unity and coherence, for all of its abstraction of speech from speaking agents, the work nevertheless ends with the endnotes' reliance on a coherent

---

Bloomsbury, 2013), 310, 14-6.

[203] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 315.

interpretative personality, for the work can only be encountered through the act of reading – that is, by a reader. Indeed, Eliot later adjusts his theory of tradition to reflect precisely this situation: "What a poem means is as much what it means to others as what it means to the author; indeed, in the course of time a poet may become merely a reader in respect to his own works, forgetting his original meaning – or without forgetting, merely changing." And "no two readers, perhaps, will go to poetry with quite the same demands" since "our individual taste in poetry bears the indelible traces of our individual lives with all their experience pleasurable and painful."[204] That was around 1933; by 1956 he had taken this line of thought so far as to conclude that "as for the meaning of the poem as a whole; it is not exhausted by any explanation, for the meaning is what the poem means to different sensitive readers" (*Uses* 126). The speaker of the notes is one example of just such a sensitive reader. There are as many more examples as there are readers of the poem, for to encounter the work means to occupy the space of the notes oneself, bringing one's past reading and experience – which is necessarily part but not all of the "best that has been thought and said" – to bear on the experience of the poem. In the process of reading what initially is experienced as impersonal becomes assimilated into one's experience of the world and *becomes* personal.

The Waste Land's groping toward impersonality is in a sense merely the logical terminus of the poetic expression that motivates the early poems; the broad dispersal of speech across many historical moments, discourses, and lyrical speakers can be read as an attempt to convey pure experience, uncontaminated by conceptual categories and limited perspectives.[205] It is as if

---

[204] Eliot, T. S., *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies In the Relation of Criticism to Poetry In England* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1964), 130, 141 (Hereafter cited parenthetically as abbreviated *Uses.*)

[205] Brooker and Bentley offer perhaps the most compelling expiation of how this might be said to succeed. That it ultimately doesn't succeed partially constitutes our present concern. See: Brooker and Bentley, *Reading The Waste Land*, 34-59.

we get the point of view of multiple finite centers at once (within the verse-poem), or a vantage from some external perspective (from the notes), but we have seen how even if we grant such simultaneous multiplicity or transcendence, we cannot escape the fact that experience of such perspectives can only be had by a singular and situated individual, bringing us again within the limits of immanence and finitude. I have referred to this inevitability of personality and demonstrated it by discussing the various limits and idiosyncrasies of the editorial speaker. But this is somewhat misleading, for the speaker of the notes isn't so much a personality as a *persona*; it is a voice not belonging to a particular person, bur rather to the broad category of persons – not a person but an individual.[206] If this speaker is Eliot, he is Eliot playing, posturing, deploying a mask. It is thus more accurate to say that the notes function as a hermeneutical space, presenting the position of an individual reader only in a hypothetical sense. While this may seem highly impersonal, it is actually as personal as it gets, for by embodying hermeneutic self-awareness, the notes galvanize each particular reader into a particular act of interpretation. Yet for all of its philosophical force, there is something duplicitous about the "personality" the notes bring to the impersonality of the verse-poem, for they are only able to suggest the category of personality by way of a *persona*, that is, by way of impersonality.

The only way out of this philosophical imbroglio is by occupation – a person must enter into the space of personality opened by the notes, fulfilling it by filling it. In keeping with the double character of the work, there are two ways this happens. The first is biographical, for *The Waste Land* involves not just Eliot's philosophical speculation on personality and impersonality, but it also involves his personal self – a fact which he owned with increasing forthrightness as time passed. Not only does the poet's own theory of artistic creation expand to allow for

---

[206] On the distinction between person and individual, see the introduction.

authorial intention and biographical specificity, but Eliot criticism also began to discover that the same personal allowances made by the poet applied retrospectively to his own work. Criticism found Eliot's generalization in 1951 that "a poet may believe that he is expressing only his private experience" and that "his lines may be for him only a means about talking about himself without giving himself away" to be true of *The Waste Land* itself (*PP* 137). For since the early 1970s, especially since Valerie Eliot's publication of the poem's manuscript drafts, critics have discovered that among the sources the endnotes fail to acknowledge is Eliot's own private life. Not only do certain fragments of the text derive from the poet's lived experience beyond the library but entire passages reflect and were born out of Eliot's personal troubles. So the sledding scene that opens the poem was taken "verbatim from a conversation he had had" with the Countess Marie Larisch, and the bar scene that ends "Burial of the Dead" is based on the Eliots' maid; similarly, a large portion of "What the Thunder Said" derives from Eliot's time of mental rehabilitation in Lausanne.[207] The investigations of more biographically-inclined criticism suggest that always just beneath the surface of the poem lurk Eliot's short-lived marriage to Vivienne Haigh-Wood, his deep friendship with Jean Verdenal, and the complex intensity of emotion connected with both of these.[208] Thus, although "for his readers what he has written may come to be the expression of both their own secret feelings and the exultation or despair of a generation," for Eliot himself the poem appears to be, at least in part, a way of "talking about himself without giving himself away." Indeed, if we grant that Eliot took his philosophical

---

[207] In 1933's Norton lectures (collected as *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933)), Eliot describes just this experience as "The breaking down of habitual barriers…some obstruction is momentarily whisked away. The accompanying feeling is less like what we know as positive pleasure, than a sudden relief from an intolerable burden…" (*Uses* 144-5). See: Miller, James E., *T. S. Eliot's Personal Waste Land: Exorcism of the Demons* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), 23; Eliot, *Facsimile,* 126-9.

[208] Miller, *T. S. Eliot's Personal Waste Land,* 42-6; Peter, John, "A New Interpretation of The Waste Land," *Essays In Criticism: A Quarterly Journal Of Literary Criticism* 19, (1969): 140-175.

concerns seriously, we might even conjecture that epistemological problems, psychological breakdown, and lyric polyphony all have a single provenance – Eliot's own experience.

So, whether we always recognize it or not, Eliot is implicated in the poem; it issued from his particular learning, perceptions, memories, and thoughts, and he is therefore an important part of it. Indeed, a glance back at his graduate work at Harvard reveals that the anthropological interest of the endnotes is his interest; for both his "long paper" for Josiah Royce's philosophy seminar in 1913-14 and his 1916 review of Emile Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* indicate a sustained interest in sociological and anthropological developments.[209] While the notes are often thought to obscure this personal presence in the poem by suggesting an explanatory plan and an academic idiom, in light of the hermeneutic situation they embody and illuminate, I would suggest that they actually serve the opposite purpose.[210] For what the notes functionally propose is the possibility of as many plans as there are readers, and in this sense they are a corrective to both naive biographical reading (which would read *only* in terms of Eliot's life) and overtly presumptuous scholarly reading (which seeks to construct or uncover an ideal plan unrelated to the author). Both approaches are viable, but neither is exhaustive. There *is* an operative anthropological plan, just as there is a biographical one, because by the time the poet has set his inspiring experience "down into a poem it may be so different from the original experience as to be hardly recognizable" (*PP* 138). But this does not mean that the poem is *unrelated* to that original experience which produced it, for the poem looks in two directions at once: as an object made by someone, it testifies, however directly or obliquely, to the personal

---

[209] Eliot's paper for Royce, titled "The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual," presents an academic exercise in which Eliot was entirely free to select the subject matter, making it an especially outstanding example of his extracurricular reading; both it and the review of Durkheim can be found in *CPr* I.106-119 and I.420-24, respectively.

[210] See: Miller, *T. S. Eliot's Personal Waste Land*, 62.

thought and experience that gave rise to it, but as a work encountered by others, it testifies to what could be, to the experience and meaning to be hermeneutically discovered in it. The notes emphasize precisely this – that the verses are an object made by a person, which calls out to other persons; the space of personality opened by the notational speaker, which is the place of the individual, is therefore a place holder, an opportunity for personal understanding.

Hence "the poem's existence is somewhere between the writer and the reader; it has a reality which is not simply the reality of what the writer is trying to 'express,' or of his experience writing it, or of the experience of the reader or of the writer as reader" (*Uses* 30). Belonging to both, it is less a form of communication than a point of shared attention, which the reader experiences as an invitation – both to discover something of the author, and also something of him or herself. In this sense, the poem draws us into a mode of participation that inevitably involves the real person of the author, but not necessarily in the way biographical readings tend to assume. Following Benjamin Widiss's recent resuscitation of the biographical author, we can posit three common understandings of authorial engagement.[211] The first is simply to uncover the hidden historical person by decoding oblique autobiographical references, as many critics have done with figures like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. The second is closely related to the first, and involves participating in the experiences of characters, which, by a logic of displacement, subtends identification with the author. The third mode of engagement entails "tracking the conceptual games" set in place by an historically concrete author, as Vladimir Nabokov so often invites readers to do.[212] All of these modes of identification involve

---

[211] See: Widiss, Benjamin Leigh, *Obscure Invitations: The Persistence of the Author In Twentieth-Century American Literature* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011), 2-3.

[212] Zadie Smith gives a similar and compelling account of how Nabokov invites readers to cooperate in a "mimeograph of the Author's creative act," though her take is admittedly more personal, offering as it does a sort of

an imbalance of power, for the goal of each is to bring the reader into the mind of the author according to a logic of submission. Whether we are excavating a biographical narrative or playing an artfully constructed game, literary meaning is determined on the side of the author; the only difference between the two approaches is the degree of conscious intention, not the location of agency – which in either case belongs to the creator of the work. Such approaches posit a notion of understanding that privileges the impartation of knowledge, with the point being to understand something external to oneself. But what Eliot is up to is quite different, for the dynamic sketched in *The Waste Land* and fulfilled, as I will claim, in *Four Quartets*, is one in which readers are invited to think not *as* the author, moving toward some always pre-determined meaning, but rather *with* the author, groping together in thought toward what is not yet known, and what might be different for each reader. The engagement offered by Eliot points not to biographical understanding, but to self-understanding, which necessarily involves both the biographical T.S. Eliot and the biographical reader.

5. Rereading Reading Bradley

The personal hermeneutic being worked out between the verses and the notes of *The Waste Land* comes increasingly to inform Eliot's later work. The clearest instances of this turn to the personal follow from Eliot's conversion to the Anglican Church, and while there is undoubtedly a connection between hermeneutic interpolation and Christianity, I would like to suggest that personal-understanding comes to govern the act of reading well before the poet would theologize about it. While the religiosity of the later poetry seems to imply that the goal of reading poetry (at least religious poetry) is self reflection and personal understanding (and we'll return to this

---

respite from loneliness. See: Smith, Zadie, "Rereading Barthes and Nabokov" in *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2009), 53-4.

shortly) Eliot's early reflections on his even earlier engagement with Bradley suggests that self-understanding motivates all acts of reading.

In a short essay published in 1927, the year of his conversion to the Anglican Church and eleven years after finishing his highly-regarded if never-defended dissertation on F.H. Bradley, T.S. Eliot cast a careful glance back at the English philosopher. Despite the expectations its title might foster, the essay is as much about Eliot himself as it is about "Francis Herbert Bradley," for in addition to providing an overview of the philosopher's life and work, the poet uses the occasion to level a criticism of Matthew Arnold, posit the dependence of ethics on theology, and criticize the philosophical school that nurtured him at Harvard – all discussions that would preoccupy Eliot for years to come. It is perhaps unsurprising that Eliot uses his discussion of Bradley as a vehicle for advancing his own concerns, since writers do this sort of thing all the time; more startling, however, is what is revealed when Eliot is at his least instrumental, when he is most directly engaged in the subject at hand. After a brief synopsis of the philosopher's career, Eliot offers a biographical judgment that suggests, the philosophical viability of immanent teleological determinations, that somehow we might know where we're going before we arrive there. With careful deliberateness, he describes Bradley's life in fatalistic terms that reverse the directional emphasis of standard narrative progression.

> In *Appearance and Reality*, seventeen years later, he had seen much deeper into the matter; and had seen that no one 'fact' of experience in isolation is real or is evidence of anything. The unity of Bradley's thought is not the unity attained by a man who never changes his mind. If he had so little occasion to change it, that is because he usually saw his problems from the beginning in all their complexity and connections… …he perceived the contiguity and continuity of the various provinces of thought. (*CPr* III.311)

Bradley's life develops not teleologically but archeologically - rather than moving toward a yet-to-be revealed end (*telos*), his thought realizes and fulfills, in the unfolding of time, a vision that had been present from the beginning (*archē*). In effect, this appears to be a liberation of teleology

from chronology, for when the goal (*telos*) of a life is no longer coterminous with its end and can in fact be present in the very beginning of that life, the distinction seems to disappear and meaning seems to step out of time. Except it doesn't step out of time, for as Eliot implies, Bradley's unity of thought is "attained" by his changing his mind, by meanderingly and sometimes mistakenly thinking *in time*. It is a unity that is given from the beginning but must also develop to the end. If this archeological vision involves unfettering teleological meaning from rigid chronological sequence, it nevertheless insists on time as the condition of its realization; the middle and end are no less necessary because significance is concentrated in the beginning, for these subsequent moments serve to illuminate the first one in much the same way that in Aristotle the happy man's death shines back over the entirety of his life.

But what appears here to be either contradiction or sophistry – claims made in 1927 about how things would have seemed to a different person in, say, 1893 – turns out to be a complex feat of sympathetic imagination that allows Eliot to stand in two places at the same time. In a description that seems as impersonal as anyone might wish, Eliot's fingerprints are everywhere, for he is implicated by virtue of his own past investment. The depth of this description lies not only in its theoretical biographical complexity – in the ways it tacitly entails theories of significance in and for human life – but also in the particular autobiographical complexity just beneath its surface. For here is both a description and a remembering, an act of multifaceted retrospection that begins to come into focus when we recall that Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* (1893) was the central concern of Eliot's own philosophical monograph – *Knowledge and Experience* – the dissertation that marked his departure from that profession. As we have seen, *Appearance and Reality* is for Eliot the end of his career as a philosopher, for it grounds a dissertation "whose arguments amount to a demonstration of the pointless of doing, for any

traditional philosophical reason, philosophy."[213] But this end is also a beginning, for the years Eliot spent writing *Knowledge and Experience* were split between Oxford and London – the academy and the avant-garde vortex – and in addition to writing philosophy Eliot was also making the acquaintances of Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and the Bloomsbury personalities, teaching in a high school, offering two lecture series (on modern French Literature at the Oxford Extension, and on modern English literature at the university of London), and contributing to *Poetry* and *Blast.*[214] The dissertation is as much a move *from* philosophy as it is *toward* poetry. So Eliot is not merely describing an important component in Bradley's oeuvre, but in recalling a text on which he had at one point staked a future he ultimately did not pursue, he is very much looking "down the passage [he]… did not take / toward the door [he]… never opened," back on the tacit but unrealized possibilities contained in his own past.

But this backward glance also entails a sort of double vision, for it holds in view a work of significance to Eliot that retains an almost opposite significance *for Bradley*; what for the poet marks the beginning of a literary path, for the philosopher marks the apotheosis of an academic career (that is, *Appearance and Reality*). So in one sense we might say that in Bradley's end is Eliot's beginning, except that Bradley's end is also *his own* beginning, having seen "his problem from the beginning in all their complexity and connections." *Appearance and Reality* is thus a site where where individual time collapses: for Bradley the tacitly-ever present beginning is deeply realized, and for Eliot everything building up to the philosophy dissertation prepares the poet to *become* the poet he is in 1927. But it is also a site where individuals themselves converge and intermingle: when the end that is Bradley's beginning is for Eliot both an end and a

---

[213] Menand, *Discovering Modernism,* 42.

[214] Miller, *Making of an American Poet*- 260-71.

beginning, it becomes unclear just where Bradley begins and Eliot ends. One wonders what are the limits of the poet's quiet identification with the philosopher: where does the transitive property break down? Is Eliot's end Bradley's beginning? If Eliot's intellectual beginning is wrapped up in Bradley's "unity" of thought, is his end implied by it as well?

The importance of this interpersonal convergence, however, lies not in the answers to such questions, but in the possibility of the questions themselves. In viewing the beginning, middle, and end of Bradley's completed intellectual life, Eliot creates the possibility of viewing the beginning and middle of his own yet uncompleted intellectual life as more concretely teleological. The underlying analogy is this: We know Bradley's beginning and his end, and that his end is in his beginning; we know Eliot's beginning, so if the same logic holds true for both men, Bradley becomes a model, and it should be possible to discern something of Eliot's unrealized end in his own beginning. The relation between two lives is thus marked by both disjunction and continuity: while Eliot looks back at the passage he did not take, he views it from the perspective of one who did take that passage, and not only completed the journey, but was always fated to do so. What we above called a sort of double vision turns out to be triple, for Eliot is not merely looking at a text with two-fold significance, but he is looking at it through the eyes of two men for whom it is significant: Eliot looks at Bradley (1846-1924); Eliot the poet (1927) looks at himself encountering Bradley as a philosopher (1916); Eliot imagines Bradley looking back at himself ("seventeen years later" – the Bradley of 1893 looking back at himself 1876, realizing his first book, *Ethical Studies* was setting the stage for what was to come). This complex act of reflection, ostensibly an examination of the content of a life, is more profoundly an inquiry into *how* life – another's as much as one's own – can be looked at. But what makes this situation particularly powerful is not merely the analogy between lives made possible by a

general rule, but rather the particular and concrete point of connection between these specific lives. For Bradley is not an arbitrary figure - just as his life is bound up with *Appearance and Reality*, so is Eliot's, grounding the poet's act of imaginative sympathy in the *actual* sympathy afforded by common personal investment. The two share something more than time.

The common investment in *Appearance and Reality* - as the masterpiece from which Bradley recollects his first book and as the basis for a first book from which Eliot could imagine a future masterpiece – functions as a moment both in time and out of time, a sort of worm hole between 1893 and 1916. But Bradley's monograph is not merely a tacit tunnel between two lives or two points in history; its path extends right through 1927 – the moment of interpretive vitality where these points of connection are registered – and continues beyond time altogether, terminating in an Archimedean point that remains tethered to history. Within the temporally aware but atemporally positioned consideration of Bradley's finished story (the objective privilege of biography), Eliot dives back into time by moving through the objective event of *Appearance and Reality*'s 1873 publication (which exists as part of a finished whole) to the subjective event of Eliot's encounter with it (which exists as part of an *unfinished* whole). Eliot's reading of Bradley's monograph transforms an historically fixed element in a complete biographical whole into an active element in an unfinished life.

6. Immediacy and the Poetics of Self-understanding

If Eliot's work in the 1920s, both in *The Waste Land* and in his literary essays, emphasizes the inextricability and simultaneity of personality and impersonality, his work in the ensuing decades only intensifies and elaborates this concern, developing the personality-impersonality dynamic at work in 1922's poem into a self-implicating invitation to hermeneutic cooperation

that is geared toward self-understanding. And though the creative work of this middle period seems much more personal and religious than academic, a look at Eliot's other activities reveals a consistent involvement with academic affairs; before completing the last poem of *Four Quartets*, he had lectured at several major universities and had held the Charles Norton Eliot professorship of poetry at Harvard.[215] Within the poetry, particularly in *Four Quartets,* it is not the academic but the biographical concern that comes into the foreground. This is true both in terms of the poem's composition and intended display, and in terms of its reception. As Helen Gardner's comprehensive background study of *Four Quartets* testifies, "there is no attempt to disguise the personal and confessional nature of the poems. They are meditations on the experiences of a lifetime, and any study of their sources must begin with biography." Their literary quotations, "not made ironically," come to us as the "fruit of a lifetime's reading and thinking, carrying memories of events and persons, and of phrases that echoed and sang in Eliot's mind," but even so, "these are less fundamental as sources than places, times, and seasons, and, above all, the circumstances in which the Quartets were written."[216] And critics like Ronald Bush and A.D. Moody have shown that with such a biographical point of departure, we can see in these poems Eliot working through personal, philosophical, aesthetic, and religious questions that have occupied him since at least his early graduate school days.[217] But unlike the buried autobiographical elements of *The Waste Land*, *Four Quartets*' personal quality hardly requires the specialized lens of academic research to be seen – one need only to have read Eliot's

---

[215] Much of Eliot's later prose was actually written for university audiences. The year at Harvard produced *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, 1933's Page-Barbour Lectures at the University of Virginia became *After Strange Gods* (1934); likewise, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) originated in lectures delivered at Corpus Christi, Cambridge. These are only the lectures that became full-length books.

[216] Gardner, Helen, *The Composition of Four Quartets* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978) 29-31.

[217] See Bush, *T.S. Eliot: Character and Style;* Moody, Anthony David, *Thomas Stearns Eliot, Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

past (and by 1935 quite famous) work to see that these late poems involve him personally, and in view of Eliot's celebrity and cultural influence, it is likely that most readers would have fit that bill.[218] The echoing words that open "Burnt Norton" are Eliot's past words, which echo through these four poems. For anyone familiar with *The Waste Land*, it would be hard not to hear in the "tendril and spray/clutch and cling" of "Burnt Norton" an echo of that earlier poem's similarly ominous query – "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow[?]" (*CPP* 38, 121). Hard for the reader apprised of Eliot's shocking religious conversion not to hear in "the ridiculous waste sad time stretching before" a subtle indictment of his past work's nihilistic strains (*CPP* 122). And it would be hard not to hear the same indictment reinforced and echoed in the fifth part of "East Coker," where an aging poet reflects on "twenty years largely wasted, the years *l'entre deux guerres* – trying to use words, and, at every attempt/…a wholly new start"; or a new revision of "Tradition" in "The Dry Salvages"'s repetition of what has been "said before / that the past experience revived in the meaning / is not the experience of one life only / But of many generations" (*CPP* 128, 133). In short, it would be hard not to see the person of T.S. Eliot in these poems that are so emphatically continuous with the details of his work and life that had become so well known in the years between 1922 and 1935.

So when readers like Sharon Cameron assert the fundamental impersonality of these poems, we may well raise our eyebrows. To claim that "the poem as a whole represents experience and affect as independent of any person or entity to whom experience and affect could be referred" is to read with the same theoretical blinders that led I.A. Richards to assume that reading happens in the sort of vacuum where book jackets don't list the names of their

---

[218] On Eliot's reputation and its influence on the reception of *Four Quartets*, see: Cooper, John Xiros, *T.S. Eliot and the Ideology of Four Quartets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 100-110. Cooper points out that most response to these poems leveled the sort of ideology critique that took for granted the publicity of Eliot's political and religious development in the late 20s and early 30s.

authors.[219] Yet despite the fact that anyone who reads the poem will know that it was T.S. Eliot who wrote it, and despite the fact that most readers will see the commonality between that poet's past work and the singular and unified "Voice" of *Four Quartets*, there are good reasons for Cameron's insistence on impersonality.[220] For the poems do appear to preserve the discursive, allusive, and tonal breadth present in *The Waste Land*; in them speak not only the generalized languages of philosophy, mysticism, theology, and mythology, but also the specific voices of Dante, St. John of the Cross, Julian of Norwich, Rudyard Kipling, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, to name the most salient.[221] But all of these voices and registers slide into one another and bleed together without the halting stops and abrupt shifts that mark *The Waste Land.* The reason "no voice is closed off to another" is that they aren't so much multiple and discrete voices as they are many aspects of the same voice, the voice of that "composite ghost" which is Eliot himself, shaped by what Ezra Pound called the "live tradition," that well-loved "true heritage" of past voices he has heard and assimilated.[222] The voices of the past become a part of Eliot's personal voice because he speaks with them, and they help him to speak, just as Bradley's life offered a helpful model for Eliot to understand his own. Hence words that clearly belong to Dante are not only revised but also later completely recast in the light of Eliot's own life:

---

[219] One remarkable condition for the "protocols" that lead to Richards's *Practical Criticism* (1929) was the reader's total ignorance of all contexts, especially author and title. Cameron, Sharon, *Impersonality: Seven Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 145.

[220] The capital letter here belongs to Hugh Kenner, who found the speaker of *Four Quartets* to be at once selfless beyond persona, deploying "seamless" discourse in language seems to speak itself. Unlike Cameron, who insists that *Four Quartets* consists in multiple voices, Kenner grants the speaker all the unity and particularity we found in the speaker of *The Waste Land*'s endnotes, but with none of the personality. See Cameron, *Impersonality*, 148-51; Kenner, *Invisible Poet,* 291-4.

[221] To date, the most exhaustive tracing of allusions and echoes in *Four Quartets* can be found in the substantial commentary provided in Eliot, T. S., *The Poems of T.S. Eliot,* ed. Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).

[222] Pound, Ezra, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York, NY: New Directions Pub. Corp., 1995), 542.

> In the middle, not only in the middle of the way
> But all the way, in a dark wood, in a bramble
> …
> So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years -
> Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre deux guerres* -
> Trying to use words, and every attempt
> Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure. (*CPP* 125, 128)

Twenty years, that is, since Eliot articulated that first great failure of words in *Knowledge and Experience*. These words belong to Dante and to Eliot at the same time, not through the appropriation of quotation, but through the sympathy of occupation; the voice that speaks them is Eliot's, inspiring old words with new life.

That such observations are nicely in keeping with many of Eliot's own theoretical statements, both in these poems and elsewhere, is rather beside the point. And while it is true, for those readers not afflicted by paranoia or suspicion, that these propositions go some way in illuminating the poetic operations of *Four Quartets,* the achievement of these poems inheres less in what they propose than in what they effect, calling the reader to participate in their thought. In them, philosophical propositions offer a way into an experience that is not reducible to descriptive statements.[223]

This call is issued in a number of ways. In the first place, the singularity of the poems' structure, to be seen especially in their referential operations, refuses the very scholarly and objective analysis that *The Waste Land* seems to invite. Not only do the poems offer no structural position for externalized examination – gone is the objectifying posture entertained by endnotes – but their preservation of a now quiet intertextuality suggests that elements which formerly

---

[223] Certain experientially minded critics are alive to the phenomenological richness and participatory possibilities *Four Quartets* offers readers, though often without a concrete sense of the personal. Jūratė Levina, for instance, approaches the poem in terms of phenomenological sense, but also with a limited concept of the reader; by confining her apparatus to Husserl's *epoche*, she excludes both history and individual difference from her discussion. Levina, Jūratė, "Speaking the Unnamable: A Phenomenology of Sense in T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets," *Journal Of Modern Literature* 36, no. 3 (Spring 2013): 194-211.

constituted a textual outside no longer conform to such binary logic. Where *The Waste Land* visibly and joltingly shifts gears from voice to voice and calls attention to its quoted sources, effectively transporting us outside of the moment of lyric utterance and into tradition, *Four Quartets* involves past language always as its constitutive inside. To hear the voice of Mary Queen of Scots or Sir Thomas Elyot is no longer to step outside the poem into the separable otherness of tradition, and the absence of any notation or quotational insistence affirms that there is indeed no outside to step into. As we saw above with the evocation of Dante, past language lives only in the moment of hermeneutic encounter; "The words of a dead man / are modified in the guts of the living," W.H. Auden would later say of a different national poet. And this is all the more striking when we consider how common and recognizable the citation is, as Helen Gardner notes. Many readers of Eliot would recognize these lines, considering the poet's rather vocal approbation of Dante (throughout his career Eliot published numerous essays on the medieval Italian poet), but the overtness of this reference draws us not into *The Divine Comedy* but deeper into "Burnt Norton," because Dante is not being cited here but is rather being engaged.

Indeed, even if the allusion goes unnoticed, Eliot himself maintains that recognition makes little difference, for not only was the young poet deeply impressed by the language of the *Commedia* before he could even fathom its full lexical meaning, but years after those early encounters he praised Dante for making possible "a much greater range of emotion and perception for other men" by providing them with more capacious language.[224] If the "Italian of Dante is somehow *our* language from the moment we begin to try to read it," the same might be

[224] Eliot, T. S., *To Criticize the Critic: And Other Writings* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965), 134.

said of Eliot's language.[225] And considering the philosophical depth of these verses, this dynamic might easily encompass not only language but thought. Hence the invocations of St. John of the Cross or Julian of Norwich represent figures the poet himself has thought with, and whom the reader might think with presently. The overall effect of this rich one-dimensionality – this collapse of the past into the present – is a sort of dynamic discursive unity that moves fluidly between registers without the reliance on any demarcated and fixed outside. Because there is no river bank to step onto, we are thus drawn in and swept away by the current of a poem which is in the very process of digesting tradition. "All is always now" because everything is anchored in the present experience of the personal subject, and one might easily refer to Eliot's preoccupation with the past and the future as to Augustine's grounding of his own temporal mediation on the autobiographical substance that precedes and occasions it.[226] For Augustine, as for Eliot, the force of the word – whether St. Paul's or Dante's, that of children in a garden or playing a game in another room – comes from its being directed toward the listening and receptive person; both writers in effect elide and obscure original context in order to redeploy the utterance toward self-understanding.

But *Four Quartets* does more than just model Eliot's movement inward; it also encourage a similar movement in the reader. For not only does its vocal unity refuse the constitutive outside that allows for objective analysis, but that voice's speech acts to draw the reader into the poems all the more emphatically. *Four Quartets* continually implicates the reader in its meditations and observations by directly addressing him or her. Even the most apparently impersonal moments in

---

[225] Ibid.

[226] On the basic interdependence of the first and second parts of *Confessions*, see: Marion, Jean-Luc, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012), 32-40.

the poems, like those abstruse philosophical meditations on time, continually return to the ground of a present experience that is shared by both the reader and the poetic speaker.

> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in time future,
> And time future contained in time past.
> If all time is eternally present
> All time is unredeemable.
> …
> Footfalls echo in the memory
> Down the passage which we did not take
> Toward the door we never opened
> Into the rose-garden. My words echo
> Thus, in your mind. (*CPP* 117)

Here we meet a double hermeneutic invitation. On the one hand this enigmatic pondering on the nature of time draws the reader into its musing by way of its very abstruseness. The lines move from a relatively intuitive notion – that the past conditions the present and that the present conditions the future – to the more conjectural and fatalistic notion that the past contains the future, arriving finally at the almost incomprehensible statement that "all time is unredeemable." What, one wonders, is time being redeemed *from*? And what is the eternal present that conditions such redemption? Even on the level of impersonal philosophizing, already we are thinking with the poem, participating in its meditation. But then, on the other hand, Eliot directly implicates us – the footfalls echoing in the memory belong to both the speaker and the reader of the poem; and although the lines present an unrealized past possibility, an event which never transpired, here, in this passage, the footfalls do echo, and the door is opened, and we end up in the impossible rose-garden. This never happened in the past, but it happens now, again and again, because every reader encountering these lines imagines the rose-garden, and then finds it on the very next page, where birdsong responds to "The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery, /And the unseen eye beam crossed, for the roses / Had the look of flowers that are looked at" (*CPP* 118). Music

unheard yet registered because we imagine it in the silence of our reading; roses unbeheld within the poem are nevertheless looked at in our mind's eye. The substance of a possible past becomes actualized in the readerly act of cooperative intentionality – what Eliot imagines and presents, we in turn contemplate, joining him in thought, in the rose-garden.

This communal quality, both suggested and actualized in the opening of lines of "Burnt Norton," is repeatedly and variously insisted upon throughout the *Quartets*. We have already seen this in the dominance of a lyric voice that fuses the biographical poet with the tradition that formed him – Eliot's "compound ghost" – as well as is in the opening instance of a collective "we" that draws the reader into the vision and thought of that speaker. And not only is this collective pronoun a sort of refrain for the poems, appearing in nearly every section, but Eliot's employment of implicative grammatical forms extends well beyond just the second person plural. Take the deictics, both grammatical and figurative, which are sprinkled throughout the poems, as in the closing lines of "The Dry Salvages":

> Here the impossible union
> Of spheres of existence is actual,
> Here the past and future
> Are conquered, and reconciled…(*CPP* 136)

Or in "Burnt Norton," "Here is the place of disaffection." Where here? Here in the poem? Here before our eyes? These deictics have such ethereal and theoretical antecedents that the reader can't visualize them as much as grant them. And while it may well be that the poem is the place of impossible union, of eternal present, or of disaffection, it can only be such if we concede the poem's logic. Because they lack concrete referents, such deictics only work if the reader cooperatively allows the antecedent that the speaker intends. This is even true of more visual, and less grammatical moments of deixis, as in the beginning of "East Coker":

> …Now the light falls

Across the open field, leaving the deep lane
Shuttered with branches, dark in the afternoon
Where you lean against a bank while a van passes…
…
In that open field
If you do not come too close, if you do not come too close,
On a summer midnight, you can hear the music…(*CPP* 123)

Verses that offer a descriptive scene which they then validate by placing "you" not just in the landscape, but in its spectatorial periphery, end by projecting you from that vista point into the very space you imaginatively beheld. The same logic of actualization is then put to work by the subjunctive mood. Standing in this fabulous field, you begin to act, to choose – you do not in fact come too close, and you do hear something, not music so much the rhythmic cadences of Sir Thomas Elyot's description of merrymaking. And because you stand in the field yourself, you "see them dancing around the bonfire" even before Eliot's ancestor paints the scene.

This may seem almost agonizingly mundane; after all, isn't literature in the business of getting readers to visualize and imagine things? What is remarkable about these poems isn't simply that they facilitate imagination, but that they do so by foregrounding not the visual but the verbal. We are told of a world and we meet the speaker in it by creating ourselves that world of which we are told. And this is not the well-wrought verbal artifice posing as idealized utterance overheard; it is speech that repeatedly flaunts its autobiographical provenance and that is furthermore addressed mostly to "you." But it is also addressed to the speaker himself. It is this duality of address, I will suggest in closing, that constitutes the supreme achievement, and the supreme offense, of *Four Quartets.*

The speaker, who is both Eliot and not Eliot – Eliot being most himself in speaking with the chorus of voices that formed him – addresses both the reader and himself at the same time. There are certain moments where this blurring of the self and the other is explicitly displayed, as

in the darkness passages in “East Coker”:

> I said to my soul, be still and let the dark come upon you
> Which shall be the darkness of God…
> …
> I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope

Which quickly modulates into

> You say that I am repeating
> Something I have said before. I shall say it again.
> Shall I say it again? In order to arrive there,
> To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,
> You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy. (*CPP* 127)

Unlike the narrated address that comes before these and unlike the thirteen subsequent instances of the second person singular pronoun, it is altogether unclear whether here the addressee remains the speaker’s soul, or has now become the reader or some other apostrophic addressee. And ambiguity is precisely the point: because in reading the poem we are also participating in it, it is as true to say Eliot addresses himself as it is to say that he addresses us, or that we address ourselves through him.

The two poles of abstraction (philosophical musing, cryptic poeticizing) and personality (autobiography) that the poems continually vacillate between turn out to be dialectical, their synthetic product a dynamic implication of the reader’s personality. As we come to participate in the poems’ philosophical or theological speculation, we also come to inhabit the more concrete spaces of the poem, and ultimately we stand with Eliot in the place of self-understanding. We are given just enough of Eliot’s biographical self to see that the poems are personally staked, and just enough abstraction to allow us to enter the poems ourselves, to stake our own persons. We watch Eliot thinking, but at every turn he is inviting us to think with him, and also to think for ourselves. The ultimate achievement of the poem, and its real goal, is to engender in the reader the same meditative engagement that produced it

and that it models.

7. Personal Scholarship

So in *Four Quartets*, Eliot has collapsed the objective and subjective into a form of personality that solicits immediate participation rather than delayed and distanced explication. To use his own vocabulary, *Four Quartets* reverses the dissociation of sensibility that fragments experience, not by coordinating disjunct experiences but by presenting an apparatus that simply doesn't register those disjunctions in the first place: there are no notes, there is no constitutive outside – "all is always now." Without the form of epistemological dualism offered by scholarly annotation, the poem lacks the capacity for postures of objectivity, the promise of singular hidden meaning, or irony.

It is this movement *away* from the forms of scholarship that makes the final publication of *Knowledge and Experience* so strange, and so significant. For as I first noted, the dissertation is itself a work of philosophical explication presented *as* scholarship. But while it *is* a sort of scholarly annotation to Eliot's work as a poet – something ancillary and external – it is also *part* of the larger whole of Eliot's life. In presenting *Knowledge and Experience* as an autobiographical endnote, Eliot suggests that the body of poetic work is inseparable from the entire corpus of his intellectual life – everything becomes personal, and the constitutive outside disappears. What in *Four Quartets* he does with tradition, drawing all together in the immediacy of the personal encounter, in publishing *Knowledge and Experience* he does to his own life and work. If the dissertation limns the need for a more immediate and unified mode of expression, the *Quartets* meet that need in offering a participatory and personal poetic; but next to the *act* of publishing *Knowledge and Experience*, *Four Quartets* looks like a largely practical model. The

late publication serves as an instance of Eliot reading his own life according to the holistic hermeneutic suggested by *Four Quartets*; in it he is following the model. This is admittedly difficult to see at first precisely because Eliot presents the dissertation as basically an endnote – it looks like he is drawing the same sort of distinction that he has all along been resisting. But the presentation of analytic philosophy as biographically interesting is a way of insisting that even the most seemingly impersonal and objective activities are not actually detached from life. What looks like scholarship – commentary on some primary object or phenomenon, whether "experience" or Eliot's "style" – is actually the very substance scholarship would purport to analyze and describe: *Knowledge and Experience* is, as all of Eliot's subsequent work testifies, a form of life. If what the endnote presents as secondary is actually primary, the distinction established by this form is effectively nullified. Neither *Knowledge and Experience*, *The Waste Land*, *Four Quartets*, *Notes Toward the Definition of Culture*, or indeed anything else, can be read solely as a "text" when they are born out of and interrelated through a life. Rather, they are parts of a body of work, a corpus, which cannot be dismembered without violence.

THREE

"I Attended School and I liked the place–" : Marianne Moore, Moral Inquiry, and the Modern University

1. Marianne Moore, Student

Early in the summer of 1904, Marianne Moore sat in the upstairs bedroom of her home in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and toiled over the rigorous entrance exams for Bryn Mawr College. When the college was established less than two decades earlier, its founding board of trustees initially proposed that its exams be less demanding than those of similar colleges like Vassar, Wellesley, and Smith. But M. Carey Thomas, with a newly minted Ph.D from Zurich and a fresh appointment as Bryn Mawr's dean of students, vehemently resisted this intention and ultimately persuaded the board to authorize entrance exams on par with those of Harvard or Johns Hopkins.[227] Thus when Moore sat down to work in 1904, she began the first part of an exam so extensive that it would only be completed a year later, an exam that was actually fifteen discrete tests ranging from algebra, geometry, science, history, English grammar and composition, two languages selected from French, German, or Greek, and four subdivisions of Latin (grammar, composition, prose, and poetry).[228] Overseeing this intellectual performance was Mary Norcross, an intimate family friend and recent graduate of Bryn Mawr, who had labored with Moore's mother for some two years in preparing young Marianne for these exams, and who now

[227] Horowitz, Helen Lefkowitz, *The Power and Passion of M. Carey Thomas* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 194.

[228] Leavell, Linda, *Holding On Upside Down: The Life and Work of Marianne Moore*. (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 59.

administered them with lemonade and strawberries.[229]

That Moore took her college entrance exams under the observation of a close family friend, in the comfort of her own home, and with intermittent refreshments to sustain her, is quite in keeping with her household's thorough integration of the domestic sphere with the intellectual. Marianne's mother, Mary Warner Moore, was not just the young poet's tutor, but was also a pedagogue in her own right, who served as an English teacher at the nearby Metzger Institute, where her daughter spent most of her high school years. Because Mary Warner was partially compensated in board, for many years the Moores ate three meals a day at Metzger, and the rounded aesthetic education she desired for her daughter was realized through that school, both within and beyond its classrooms.[230] In addition to traditional subjects, Moore was encouraged there in more creative pursuits like drawing, piano, and singing, because, as her first biographer observes, "Mrs. Moore felt her daughter should have a wide range of aesthetic experience and appreciation, even if she couldn't attain mastery in every respect."[231] And if Moore's intellectual experience on the campus of Metzger was domesticated and exploratory, reaching beyond conventional academic subjects in a rather holistic manner, so too was her home life intellectualized by her mother's teaching position.

When both Marianne and her older brother Warner were away at college, Mary Warner continued to play the teacher to them, writing them about various Shakespeare plays and giving them tips on composition. Indeed, if the complex domestic mythology and highly stylized witty

---

[229] Mary Norcross, who graduated in 1900 with an A.B. in History and Political Science (notably, the same subjects Moore would ultimately settle on), spent a total of seven years at Bryn Mawr, working from 1901-3 as the Assistant Bursar. *Bryn Mawr College Calendar: Register of Alumnæ and Former Students 1908. Part 1. Vol.1* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Bryn Mawr College, 1908), 66; Leavell, *Holding On Upside Down,* 59.

[230] Level, *Holding On Upside Down*, 44.

[231] Molesworth, Charles, *Marianne Moore: A Literary Life* (New York, NY: Atheneum, 1990), 16. Moore continued to sketch, Ruskin like, for most of her life, though she gave up on playing the piano, which she wasn't very adept at.

correspondence of that family is any indication, Mary Warner's investment in the literary deeply permeated the Moores' idiosyncratic family culture, influencing the poet for the rest of her life. And although Moore recalled reading Milton in her mother's English class with "little enthusiasm," somewhere beyond that classroom an abiding interest must have taken root, for at Bryn Mawr, Moore would spend her sabbaths reading his work in the leisurely out of doors.[232] In her recent biography of Moore, Linda Leavell considers the poet's abiding fascination with scrutinizing objects from multiple angles and perspectives, tracing the institutional conditions of this interest even further back than Metzger by locating it in the late Victorian cultivation of childhood through play. Kindergarten, Leavell observes, was the mainstay of this cultivation, especially in the "object lesson, during which the children would sit in a circle while the teacher presented for their scrutiny a natural object such as a seashell, quartz crystal, or flower."[233] Such lessons would often be integrated with activities like gardening and nature walks, which "directed the child toward close observation of the natural world and toward a sense of connection with its forces." Such a hands-on and integrative education continued at Metzger, where Elizabeth Forster, who taught German and art, and who was particularly beloved of the young Moore, encouraged her students to approach the natural world with a sense of wonder. In later years she recalled how Forster invited a scrutinizing eye that "made us think we liked teasels and milkweed pods, jointed grasses and things with buds that had died on the stem."[234]

---

[232] Moore, Marianne, *The Selected Letters of Marianne Moore*, ed. Bonnie Costello, Celeste Goodridge, and Cristanne Miller (New York, NY: Knopf, 1997), 47. (Hereafter cited parenthetically and abbreviated as *SL*.); Leavell, *Holding On Upside Down,* 45. At Bryn Mawr Moore made a point of resting on Sundays, a practice encouraged by her mother and generally viewed askance by her college peers.

[233] Level, *Holding On Upside Down*, 33.

[234] See: Hall, Donald, *Their Ancient Glittering Eyes: Remembering Poets and More Poets: Robert Frost, Dylan Thomas, T.S. Eliot, Archibald Macleish, Yvor Winters, Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound* (New York, NY: Ticknor & Fields, 1992), 300.

The corpus of Moore's poetic work is testament to the persistence of this fascination, and the manner in which Mary Warner also thrills in the scrutinizing collecting impulse suggests that Marianne's mother continued to cultivate this sensibility in her daughter throughout her life. The pair's 1910 excursion with Karl Baedeker throughout the museums of England and France, for instance, continued Moore's "extended lesson in the art of observation," and both mother and daughter "brought home an abiding Anglophilia and an appreciation not just for travel but for maps, museums, and travel guides" that evinces itself later in Moore's poetry.[235]

If Moore's work can be described as poetry of experience, that experience is of a very special breed, where academic and intellectual interests are both integrated with and often grow out of an eclectic and evocative domestic life. It is no wonder that when she got to college, Moore's interests continued to grow in all directions, and with its particular blending of curricular innovation, intellectual rigor, and social and ethical concern, Bryn Mawr was perfectly suited to refine and cultivate those interests. The following pages explore how Moore's education at Bryn Mawr particularly encouraged and allowed her to integrate intellectual curiosity and moral inquiry in a remarkably personal manner; in taking to heart the ongoing nature of the liberal educational enterprise, Moore continued, through writing and revising her poetry, to work on herself as both an intellectual and a morally responsible person.

2. Life and Learning at Bryn Mawr College

When Bryn Mawr College was founded by a group of orthodox Quakers in 1885, higher education in the United States was undergoing significant transformations. Only a year earlier, Charles William Eliot had introduced the elective system at Harvard University, a radical and

---

[235] Leavell, *Holding On Upside Down*, 115.

influential reimagination of the undergraduate curriculum. And less than a decade before that, in 1876, Johns Hopkins University opened its doors as the first institution of higher education to be founded explicitly and primarily as a research university. Both the overt research concern of Johns Hopkins and the research specialization that followed from Eliot's elective system were perhaps adumbrated by the Morrill Act of 1862, which provided federal land for establishing universities that would focus heavily on agriculture and engineering, though "without excluding other scientific or classical studies."[236] Whereas many of the earliest colleges founded in the United States had been sectarian in nature and often had the express vocational purpose of training ministers, lawyers, and doctors, the public universities founded after 1862 were often more abstractly invested in knowledge, as is perhaps typified by the pronouncement of Ezra Cornell about the university he founded under the auspices of the Land Grant Act, and which later became the motto of the institution: "I would found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study." Coincident with the rise of the intellectually democratic research university was the relative decline of religious influence in higher education, a dynamic which Julie Reuben traces in metonymic fashion by examining the gradual secularization we can see at Harvard just by looking at its changing crest.[237]

Though founded as an overtly religious institution which required of all its professors to express adherence to the tenets of orthodox Quaker belief, Bryn Mawr soon fell under the general zeitgeist of the modern university's emergent secularism. Indeed, it was none other than a graduate of Cornell University who pushed Bryn Mawr's board of trustees hardest to abandon

---

[236] *Land-Grant College Act, U.S. Code 7* (2016), chapter 13, § 304: (https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/7/304)

[237] Reuben, Julie A., *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago, IL: the University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1-15; see also Roberts, Jon H, and James Turner, *The Sacred and the Secular University* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

that original religious stipulation for faculty. M. Carey Thomas, raised in a devout Quaker family, abandoned her own Quaker faith not at Cornell, however, but at the University of Leipzig, where in the early 1880s, her biographer explains, "she replaced it with positive, evolutionary science," and where, through the study of comparative literature and historical philology, she "she brought her longings for scientific truth to the study of literature."[238] But because that university had earlier pronounced a moratorium on the granting of Ph.D.s to women, Thomas ultimately moved to the University of Zurich, where in 1882 she took her doctorate *summa cum laude*. When she returned to the United States, her Quaker connections put her in the ambit of Bryn Mawr's founders, and, seeing the college as something of a blank slate on which to realize her intellectual and institutional ambitions, she fiercely pursued its presidency. Though it came only belatedly, and through her serving first as college dean under president James E. Rhoads, Thomas did eventually attain the coveted post; but even as dean it was her vision that guided the formation of the college. Like so many influential American educators in the late nineteenth century — notable among them Thomas' friend Daniel Coit Gilman, the first president of Johns Hopkins — Carey Thomas brought back from Germany a zealousness for the research model of higher education, which fueled her aspiration to form Bryn Mawr into an institution like Leipzig, one characterized by rigor and specialized scholarship.[239] But it is important to note that although the guiding principles of the research university, as it was being translated from Germany to the United States and England, were often positivist and scientific, the appeal of that model remained for Carey Thomas principally humanistic. As her

---

[238] Horowitz, *Power and Passion,* 114.

[239] Ibid, 158-9; Muller, Steven, "German Influences on the Development of American Higher Education" in *A Spirit of Reason: Festschrift for Steven Muller*, ed. Jackson Janes (Washington, DC: American Institute for Contemporary German Studies. 2004).

biographer observes, Thomas discovered in the scientific study of languages, literatures, and cultures, the intellectual and aesthetic transcendence that she had earlier failed to find in Christianity.[240]

Guided by the same balance of scientific rigor and humanist concern that was later manifested in the early work of I.A. Richards, Carey Thomas's curricular proposal for Bryn Mawr accordingly struck a balance between Eliot's elective system and the traditional classical curriculum.[241] Though students at Bryn Mawr were required to take certain core courses, they were also offered electives and asked to concentrate their coursework into "groups" of certain prescribed concentrations, a system adapted from that of Johns Hopkins. Thus each student graduated with a focused knowledge of two subjects, like biology and chemistry, or in Moore's case, history and politics (which also included economics); and because of the size of the college and the close connections between its faculty, students were encouraged to draw connections between their subjects in a sort of reverse-engineered interdisciplinarity.[242] Yet Bryn Mawr arose at a time when academic professionalism was not yet standardized, and with its combination of curricular groupings and social and ethical investment, it avoided both the undirected generalism of Harvard and the hyper-specialization of John's Hopkins.[243] This schema, combined with Thomas' rigorous screening of faculty appointments – she would stand for only the best teachers

---

[240] Indeed, Thomas' humanist impulse was so strong that in her initial proposition she was overtly opposed to a heavily scientific curriculum, a position from which Gilman dissuaded her. Horowitz, *Power and Passion,* 160, 194.

[241] Horowitz, *Power and Passion,* 193.

[242] Leavell, *Holding On Upside Down,* 66; Horowitz, *Power and Passion*, 194.

[243] Of the influence of Eliot's Elective system at Harvard, Louis Menand explains that "By 1900 he had eliminated virtually all requirements at Harvard, with the unintended result that over half the students who graduated had taken nothing but introductory courses for four years." Comparatively Johns Hopkins, four years after opening, "had more than a hundred graduate students (to Harvard's forty-one), and its faculty had published almost as much research as had been published during the previous twenty years by the faculties of all other American universities combined." Menand, Louis, *The Metaphysical Club* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 256-7.

and scholars – positioned Bryn Mawr somewhere between a research university and a liberal arts college. As the first women's college to establish a graduate school, Bryn Mawr maintained an unswerving devotion to the ideals of research, while nevertheless upholding the traditional mission of a liberal arts institution, where the academic program is intended to develop personal character and intellectual curiosity together, with the aim of cultivating thoughtful and engaged democratic citizens.[244] Among its graduate institutions arose the Carola Woerishoffer Graduate Department of Social Economy, the first to offer a Ph.D. in social work, an accomplishment that was adumbrated by Thomas' establishing of the Bryn Mawr School, an experimental secondary school not unlike John Dewey's Laboratory School in Chicago.[245] While this concern with social engagement is a reasonable extension of the character formation encouraged by the traditional liberal arts curriculum, Bryn Mawr's particular investment in civic responsibility was heightened by Carey Thomas' own energetic feminism, which was in turn drawn out by the women's suffrage movement of the early twentieth century.

***

Having received an eclectic and expansive education from the hands of highly educated and liberally minded women, Moore naturally found herself sympathetic to both the social and intellectual tendencies of Carey Thomas, and it is this famous president of Bryn Mawr that most lays bare the continuity between Moore's Carlisle and college educations, and the importance of both for her poetry. Indeed, it is in the context of discussing women's political and intellectual rights that Moore had her most memorable encounter with Thomas, in the winter of 1909. In a

---

[244] Carey Thomas recalled in some thirty years later that "A college without graduate students…never occurred to us." Meigs, Cornelia, *What Makes a College?: A History of Bryn Mawr* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1956), 28; On the American liberal arts college, see: Lang, Eugene M., "Distinctively American: The Liberal Arts College" in *Distinctively American: The Residential Liberal Arts* College, ed. Steven Koblik and Stephen Richards Graubard (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2000), 134.

[245] Horowitz, *Power and Passion*, 380.

long letter of that year, where she recounts to a friend a suffrage lecture she'd attended and her own reasoned support of that movement, Moore describes how "Pres. Thomas had us at the Deanery after the lecture (the Suffrage Society) and I was struck dumb, the place is so beautiful. It's more educational than an art course. It rambles a little and there is a narrow passage I don't like, but the whole, is an Elysian garden" (*SL* 65). The ensuing description enumerates the wondrous features and decorations of the dean's rooms, bringing to mind the lists of some of Moore's later poetry. In the Thomas' museum-like home the young poet observes a "bed, square, Indian brass (square posts and low head and foot boards) with a pale silk spread (embroidered flat) across it…Antique, capacious chairs, inlaid with gilded legs…lamps — Favrile glass… [a] chandelier a bunch of (five) pale pepper shaped, conical lobes, greenish yellow…" (*SL* 65). If the deanery seemed like a museum to Moore, that is because Carey Thomas and her long time companion Mary Garrett consciously curated it to be one. As Cornelia Meigs explains in her mid-century history of Bryn Mawr, these two women, for whom "the ownership of beautiful things was such a delight," made the deanery into "a museum of all the taste and art of the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth."[246] Recalling Leavell's conjectures about the influence of the kindergarten object lesson on Moore's poetics, the Deanery presents the college edition — a veritable hoard of exotic and dazzling curios to turn over and examine from all angles, which is precisely what the young poet does with the recurrent parenthetical specifications and details of her letter.

As Carey Thomas' actual residence, this space of intellectual and aesthetic intrigue is fundamentally domestic, and if we recall the European museum tour Moore would take with her mother only a year later, the whole scene further suggests the convergence of aesthetic,

---

[246] Meigs, *A History of Bryn Mawr*, 95

intellectual, and domestic concerns. And that the visit was itself precipitated by a matter of urgent social concern sheds some early light on Moore's later concern with politics and ethics. While the aesthetic ecstasy Moore experienced at the deanery appears remarkably consonant with both her early upbringing and her poetry of the teens and twenties, to fully appreciate these continuities we must recognize the resonances between that experience and Moore's entire education at Bryn Mawr. For the eclecticism and care that Moore alights on in the deanery is typical not just of Carey Thomas' aesthetic taste, but of her attitude toward the intellectual life – codified in the curricular design of the college. We have already remarked briefly on the focused relationality of Bryn Mawr's undergraduate curriculum, but just as important is the innovative scope and intensity of its offerings. In order to graduate, each student was required to take, in addition to the group requirements, two years of English, one year of philosophy, one year of science, and either one additional year of science or a year of History, Economics and Politics, Law, or Mathematics.[247] While Bryn Mawr was among the first colleges to offer survey courses in English literature, more formative for Moore (whose marks, incidentally, were not high enough for the English major) were the science courses it offered not just to advanced students, but also to freshmen.[248] For, as we shall see, the methods of scientific inquiry offered Moore a particular and dynamic method for turning over objects and curiosities. The few English courses Moore did take focused on linguistic history, composition, elocution, and imitative writing, and were drawn from what today would be the core requirements rather than offerings for the major, though Bryn Mawr had no lack of more specific literary offerings.[249] Rather than examining

---

[247] *Bryn Mawr College Calendar 1908,* 57.

[248] Meigs, *A History of Bryn Mawr*, 41; *SL* 26.

[249] Among the courses offered while Moore was in residence were "English Critics of the Nineteenth Century" "Anglo Saxon grammar and reading of Anglo-Saxon Texts" "Chaucer" "Critical Reading of Shakespeare"

Chaucer or Milton in detail, Moore focused her intellectual (and literal) microscope on small animals. For more than half of her time at Bryn Mawr, Moore was enrolled in some biology course or another, where the topics ranged from vertebrates, embryology, comparative anatomy, zoology, animal physiology, and the central nervous system, most of which required additional laboratory work.[250] Though she ultimately concentrated in History and Politics and Economy, her transcript appears as heavily weighted toward the biological sciences as toward her major grouping.

***

In the first decade of the twentieth century, when Moore was an undergraduate at Bryn Mawr, the scientific disciplines were undergoing the process of radical expansion that today allows college students to major in, say, molecular cell biology, or genetics and plant biology. In the nineteenth century disciplines like biology, chemistry, and physics tended to be lumped together under the general heading of natural sciences, but with new theories and advances in instrumentation, combined with a steadily growing capacity for factual accumulation, the natural sciences branched into the specialized fields we know today.[251] There was a strong positivist strain in much of this development, which began as early as the late sixteenth century, with Francis Bacon's initial formulation of the scientific method as an exercise in observation and attribute isolation, and which in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries exerted tremendous

---

"Classical and Romantic Prose" "English Letter Writers" two semesters of "English Fiction in the Nineteenth Century" *Bryn Mawr College Program, Academic Year 1904-5* (Philadelphia. John C. Winston Co. 1904). The *only* non required English course Moore took was "Imitative Writing" in her final semester. Such institutional discouragement did not stop more from steeping herself in literary culture, as her well documented and extensive private reading suggests. See: "Reading List " Marianne Moore Newsletter 5, no.1 (1981): 15-18.

[250] "MM's Course Record, 1905-1909." Marianne Moore Newsletter 5, no. 1 (1981): 13-14, cf. *Bryn Mawr College Program 1904-5,* 145.

[251] See Veysey, Laurence R., *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 142; Roberts & Turner, *Sacred and Secular University,* 27.

impact on educational practice. Herbert Spencer, for instance, insisted, in the interest of moral direction, that instruction must always begin with objects rather than abstractions, a conception that opened a clearing for Dewey's later investment in experience as the building block of education.[252] But there is a sense in which Spencer's formulations were more epiphenomenal and descriptive than prescriptively theoretical, for even twenty years before he published his treatise on education (1861), naturalists were out in the field, even in what would become Marianne Moore's own backyard. For in the 1840s, Spencer F. Baird, professor of natural philosophy at nearby Dickinson College, was known to take his students of field trips in the Carlisle area, where they would examine biological specimens in their natural landscape.[253] And while there was a strong Victorian impulse to gather and remove specimens from these landscapes for the purposes of collecting and cataloging them under the roofs of natural history museums, only toward the end of the century were such objects deposited and decontextualized in the scientific laboratory, where isolation and advanced instruments allowed for more intense scrutiny.

The foundational connections between such natural history collections and laboratory inquiry in the university were established most influentially in the 1870s by the naturalist Louis Agassiz of Harvard. After Agassiz' death, the next significant attempt by higher education to organize the life sciences was made by Johns Hopkins University, where H. Newell Martin, former assistant to T.H. Huxley, was appointed professor of biology. Unlike Agassiz, who was a great proponent of natural history collections, Martin, in the 1880s resisted the university's plans

---

[252] Cremin, Lawrence A., *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism In American Education, 1876-1957* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1964) 93.

[253] Kohlstedt, Sally Gregory, "Curiosities and Cabinets: Natural History Museums and Education on the Antebellum Campus," *Isis* 79 No. 3 (1988): 79.

to establish a museum, and instead pushed for a biology laboratory, which he oversaw himself.[254] Indeed, the considerable influence German research models were exerting on American universities in that same decade was attended by an increased interest in laboratories across the board, though Hopkins was a significant forerunner and exemplar in this regard.[255] It is unsurprising, then, that when E.B. Wilson, student of Martin and later professor of biology at Bryn Mawr College (1885-1891), published the first American biology textbook for undergraduates in 1886, he designed it to be "useful as well in the class-room as in the laboratory."[256] Indeed, so central was the laboratory to the burgeoning importance of science not only as a field of research but as a morally exemplary way of engaging with the world, that it achieved a sort of symbolic purchase, where carefulness in the lab entailed the formation of careful citizens.[257] Hence, in the same year that Wilson published *Biology*, Henry A. Rowland, in an address to Johns Hopkins university that was subsequently published in *Science*, urged instructors to "let the student be brought face to face with nature; let him exercise his reason with respect to the simplest physical phenomena, and then, in the laboratory, put his opinions to the test" and he decries schools where "words – mere words – are taught… without even a class experiment to illustrate the subject and connect the words with ideas," forcing "the student to learn what he does not understand."[258] As educational historians have remarked, such scientific

---

[254] Pauly, Philip J., 1984. "The Appearance of Academic Biology in Late Nineteenth-century America". *Journal of the History of Biology* 17 (3).

[255] Singer, Susan R., *America's Lab Report: Investigations In High School Science*, ed. Margaret L Hilton and Heidi A Schweingruber (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2005), 19.

[256] Sedgwick, W. T, and Edmund B Wilson, *General Biology* (New York, NY: H. Holt and Co., 1886).
iv. See also Pauly, "The Appearance of Academic Biology," 381.

[257] On the moral mission of scientific discourse, see Reuben, *Making of the Modern* University, 133-175, and also Pauly, "The Appearance of Academic Biology," 381.

[258] Rowland, Henry A., "The Physical Laboratory in Modern Education," *Science* 7, no. 177 (June 25, 1886): 573.

moralizing was quite common at the turn of the century, and matched Bryn Mawr's double investment in scientific research and humanist concern. So Wilson's later development of the college's comprehensive biology program around intensive laboratory work was both *au courant* for his discipline and humanistically charged, a double investment which conditions Marianne Moore's entire career.

The creatures one might encounter in reading through Moore's oeuvre include a plumet basilisk, a chameleon, a frigate pelican, some monkeys, an elephant, a jellyfish, snakes, mongooses, fish, peacocks, a loon, a pangolin, a wood-weasel, an ox, a jerboa, and a rat. In a collection of poems that somewhat resembles a zoo, it is not difficult to imagine the impact Moore's study of zoology had on her poetry. But while this creature concern has preoccupied readers of Moore for many years, there has been very little inquiry into her scientific education and its continued influence in her work, beyond passing and superficial remarks. In Grace Schulman's *Marianne Moore: The Poetics of Engagement*, for instance, with its discussion of Moore's emphasis on perception, the microscope is never mentioned, and science more generally are discussed only briefly, in order to distinguish the poet's metaphorical treatment of metamorphosis from the literal sense of the biologist.[259] For Schulman, Moore is poet and not scientist. And while some are interested in Moore's engagement with technology and others in Moore's enthusiasm for science in general, biological science itself is for the most part neglected in Moore scholarship, which is somewhat surprising, as the poet herself, late in her career, compared the pleasure, toil, and "quest" of poetry to that of biology.[260]

---

[259] Schulman, Grace, *Marianne Moore: The Poetry of Engagement* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 80; Moore, Marianne, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, ed. Patricia C Willis (New York, NY: Viking, 1986), 572.

[260] On technology, see: Kenner, Hugh, *A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1974), xiv; Bazin, Victoria, *Marianne Moore and the Cultures of Modernity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate,

There are of course good reasons for this relative neglect, for as we mentioned above, biology was only just coming into its own as an academic discipline in the decade when Moore was in college, and this transitional state perhaps explains why the closest critics often come to this subject is natural history. Srikanth Reddy makes this connection most compellingly in his linking of Moore's discursive style to both the natural history public lecture (or demonstration), and to her collective, archival sensibility characterized by "methodological excavation of the curious and uncommon," which in the early twentieth century became situated "within common public resources" like the lending library.[261] This idiosyncratic collective quality, which Reddy partially attributes to "the cosmopolitan eclecticism in American intellectual life of the early twentieth century," can be traced further back to the Victorian collective impulse that grew out of the early modern *Wunderkammer* tradition, of which the natural history museum is but one iteration. All of which Reddy tacitly suggests by noting Moore's interest in early modern curiosity encyclopedists like Thomas Browne and Richard Burton. In the nineteenth century, Carey Thomas herself serves as an example of this impulse, for that dazzling array of objects beheld by Moore in 1909, which at the end of Thomas' life comprised the fruit of nearly four decades' gathering, ultimately became the college's Decorative Arts collection. And while Thomas was accumulating ornamental artifacts from around the world, Florence Bascome, founder of the Geology department at Bryn Mawr, was steadily amassing a hoard of rocks, minerals, and fossils that would later constitute the college's impressive Geology collection.[262]

2010), 63-94; on general science, see: Steinman, Lisa Malinowski, *Made In America: Science, Technology, and American Modernist Poets* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 113-120.

[261] Reddy, Srikanth, "'To Explain Grace Requires a Curious Hand': Marianne Moore's Interdisciplinary Digressions." *American Literature: A Journal Of Literary History, Criticism, And Bibliography* 77, no. 3 (September 2005): 453.

[262] Meigs, *What Makes a College,* 217*;* "Decorative Arts," *Bryn Mawr College*. Accessed 29 April, 2016. http://www.brynmawr.edu/collections/decorative.html; "The Bryn Mawr College Geology Collections," *Bryn Mawr College*. Accessed 29 April, 2016. http://www.brynmawr.edu/collections/geology.html.

But this collective sensibility, which would persist in the public enterprises Reddy discusses, in the university was in the process of changing from the taxonomic to what we might call the penetrative impulse of laboratory experiment, where curious objects were not merely gathered and arranged, but were examined, probed, and dissected. This goes some way toward illuminating Moore's coupling of an accumulative sensibility with a descriptive penchant for "precision."[263] In Marianne Moore's undergraduate experience, the late Victorian collective impulse and the emergent laboratory impulse converge with a humanist ethos which, though slowly receding from the transforming American university, was kept vital at Bryn Mawr partially through Thomas' own aesthetic predilections and political commitments, partially from the school's status as a rigorous women's college.

Indeed, unlike Harvard or Johns Hopkins, Bryn Mawr found itself politically situated by the social nature of its academic enterprise, a feature that becomes remarkably visible against the backdrop of first-wave feminism and the suffrage movement. Thus while the moral sciences at Cambridge tended to abstract questions of action into formulae, and while the slow rise of analytic philosophy at Harvard often obscured experience, students at Bryn Mawr, through both the curriculum and the very person of the president, were continually reminded of the continuities between academic study and committed action. And while the research concerns of such universities was leading to an increasing specialization and narrowness of focus that slowly eroded a past sense of unified knowledge, the size, curriculum, and humanistic concern of Bryn Mawr maintained a clearer vision of disciplinary coordination. What is so remarkable here is that the overlapping of these sensibilities enabled Moore to ingeniously coordinate fields of knowledge that were increasingly drifting apart. While educational historians argue that the

---

[263] Bazin, *Marianne Moore and the Cultures of Modernity*, 63-4.

epistemological assumptions reinforced and promoted by an emergent scientific paradigm dissolved a sense of the unity of knowledge, it is precisely the methods of science that enable Moore to achieve moral poignancy in her work.

3. "An Octopus," a Mountain, a University

I.A. Richards and T.S. Eliot encountered science in the modern university not as a discipline in itself, but as totalizing approach that tacitly imposed materialist assumptions onto other disciplines; in philosophy and literary studies, science makes its appearance not as a field of knowledge, but as a methodology often informed by positivist epistemological assumptions. Indeed, we have seen how the careers of Richards and Eliot grapple with the problematic application of the scientific method to non-empirical fields. But Marianne Moore's encounter with the methods of science was situated not within a humanistic field, but within an actual scientific discipline - biology. In short, she was using empirical methods to interrogate material rather than conceptual (immaterial, metaphysical, psychological) phenomena.

Because science for Moore was encountered not as symptomatically registered philosophical assumptions, but as a materialist mode of approaching the physical world, the scientific aspects of her poetry are most immediately felt in substance and form. Her numerous creature poems realize the zoologist's fascination with the animal kingdom, and her penchant for lists and catalogues of the natural world betray a scientific enthusiasm for taxonomy and precise identification. In "An Octopus," which covers the vast and diverse terrain of Mt. Rainier, we encounter, for instance, some "conspicuously spotted little horses" that are

> hard to discern among the birch trees, ferns, and lily pads,
> avalanche lilies, Indian paintbrushes,
> bears' ears and kitten tails

and miniature cavalcades of chlorophyll less fungi…"[264]

This list bears little resemblance to the travel-guides and naturalist works that Moore so self-consciously cites in the poem — the appendix points us directly to John Muir, specific field guides, and the general archive of "government pamphlets on our national parks" — and which have led many critics to remark upon the environmentalist qualities of the poem.[265] For one would be hard pressed to find a government pamphlet or travel guide that rattles off lists of flora and fauna with no descriptive elaborations. In fact, such lists, along with the poem's other technical and scientific qualities, are among the poem's small quantity of un-borrowed (or un-cited) language. Indeed, compare the bear's dens, which the poem's own language tells us are "Composed of calcium gems and alabaster pillars, /topaz, tourmaline, crystals and amethyst quartz," to the lines she filches from Clifton Johnson's *What to See in America* (1919) to describe the same: "'blue forests thrown together with marble and jasper and agate as if whole quarries had been dynamited'" (*BMM* 127). Here it is the travel guide, with its hyperbolic simile, active verbs, and metaphoric rendering of the geological in terms arboreal, which strikes one as more poetic.

Of course throughout "An Octopus" Moore rather wildly outdoes Clifton Johnson in terms of poetic visualization, but even the poem's most striking descriptions are functionally rooted in scientific language and optics. If it is the defamiliarizing quality of metaphor that makes Johnson's grotto description seem more poetically charged than Moore's catalogue of its geological wonders, we must acknowledge the poem's incredible capacity for such

---

[264] Moore, Marianne, *Becoming Marianne Moore: The Early Poems, 1907-1924*, ed. Robin G Schulze (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 128-9. (Hereafter cited parenthetically and abbreviated as *BMM*.)

[265] For instance: Cull, Ryan E., "'Complexities Which Will Remain Complexities': The Environmentalist Epistemology of Marianne Moore's 'An Octopus'," *Paideuma: Studies In American And British Modernist Poetry* 33, no. 2-3 (2004 Fall-Winter 2004): 3-27.

defamiliarizing metaphors. The whole poem is, in fact, erected on the foundation of one such metaphor; it is

> AN OCTOPUS
>
> of ice. Deceptively reserved and flat,
> it lies "in grandeur and in mass"
> beneath a sea of shifting snow dunes;
> dots of cyclamen-red and maroon on its clearly defined pseudopodia
> made of glass that will bend — a much needed invention —
> comprising twenty-eight ice-fields from fifty to five hundred feet thick,
> of unimagined delicacy. (*BMM* 125)

With this icy cephalopod, whose "pseudopodia" are comprised of many immense ice fields, we encounter something like a scientifically informed metaphysical conceit, for what the poem presents as an enormous octopus is in fact the glacial surface of Mt. Rainier, which when viewed aerially, resembles that leggy creature. While the comparison between bird's eye view of the mountain and an octopus is itself disorienting, the initial dissonance of the poem is furthered by the precision and scientific tenor of its language. In describing the outstanding dots on its "pseudopodia" as "cyclamen-red and maroon," the poem gestures toward a specificity of color while at the same time shifting the scale from the massive to the relatively minute. Having moved within the space of two lines from the "grandeur and mass" of whatever is buried beneath this "sea of shifting snow dunes" to dots of cyclamen color, the poem dwarfs its mountainous subject by construing the massive as miniature. Before they are resituated in their original expansiveness on the mountain's glacial ice fields, the poem even further shrinks these dots, which are likely entire fields of cyclamen, to the microscopic level by locating them on "pseudopodia," a term whose original application was microcellular, referring to a particle-gathering protrusion of part of an amoeboid cell's protoplasm.[266] Telescoping back out again,

from the vitreous slide of the microscope to the bending glass of Sir William Bell, the poem returns once more to its original aerial view, encompassing the entirety of the glacier, with its "twenty-eight ice fields from fifty to five hundred feet thick."

Such abrupt optical shifts are a hallmark of Moore's poetic technique. Hugh Kenner has described them as "optical puns," where the incongruous or otherwise unrelated objects are yoked together by a sort of visual association (red the color of cyclamen produces flowers in the poem); more recently, Ben Reizenstein has explained that such optical puns give rise to "cross-categorical language" that blurs the distinction between material reality and imagined associations.[267] Wondrous and technically impressive as is Moore's perspectival shuttlecocking, it is also in a sense quite natural, following directly from the optical range she encountered in her study of biology. In the Spring of 1906, Moore would move from a general course on vertebrates, which outlined "general classification, and the relations of the biological sciences to one another and to other branches of science," to a focused study of "the Embryology of the Chick." In the Spring of her junior year, Moore would vacillate between the all-encompassing scale of general zoology and the minute focus of comparative anatomy of mammals, which was supplemented with the direction work of the laboratory, with focused special attention to "the study of the sense organs."[268] The easy movement between the microscopic focus of the lab, the

---

[266] "pseudopodium, n.". OED Online. March 2016. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/153784?redirectedFrom=pseudopodia. Accessed March 31, 2016. The word was ushered into the English language by the British naturalist Gideon Mantell, and which Huxley and Martin employed in their own biology textbook, *Course in Elementary Biology*, which was published the year after Wilson's. It was subsequently adopted by botanists before Kingdon Ward made use of it in a 1916 *Geographical Journal* issue to describe glacial phenomena in Tibet. Kingdon's language sounds remarkably like Moore's, though it is more than likely that the poet, having studied in a biology department heavily influenced by Huxley and Martin, had encountered the word first as a biological term. Ward, Kingdon, "Glacial Phenomena on the Yun-Nan-Tibet Frontier," *Geological Journal* vol.48 no.55 (July, 1916): 55.

[267] Kenner, *A Homemade World,* 92-3; Reizenstein, Ben, "Perspicuous Opacity: Marianne Moore and Truth in a Fallen World," *Cambridge Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2007): 319-20.

general study of particular species, and sweeping views of not just biological taxonomies, but of their relation to other scientific fields prepared the way for the radically shifting optics of her poetry.[269]

The pertinence of Moore's scientific education becomes even clearer when we consider how unnatural the perspectives in her poems are, how unlike the environmental descriptions of past nature poets like Shelly or Wordsworth, for whom the naked-eye and soul of the perceiving human subject are so central. In the case of "An Octopus," it is impossible for a human subject to organically *see* the mountain in such a way that it would suggest the optical pun that initiates the poem. Moore's icy octopus only is conceivable from the perspective of either the airplane passenger or the cartography enthusiast; it is an image that would present itself to the technologically assisted eye, or to the scholar drawing on the composite eyewitnesses of numerous geographical surveyors, but not to the naked-eye. Indeed, what Moore presents in terms and images readily apprehensible to human perception would, without the assistance of technology, scholarship, or poetry, be impossible to register.

The rapid and extreme scalar shifts of the poem are not only metaphorical (as when the appearance of cyclamen effectually reduces the poem's scale from the mountainous to the floral) and actual (as when the poem moves from such heights to a literal catalogue of the park's flora), but they are also temporal, for "An Octopus" repeatedly collapses different speeds. Like the other scalar shifts, the poem's odd construal of temporal movement owes something to perspectival relativity; the flow of a river that would appear as rapid to the up-close observer is presented as "winding slowly through the cliffs," precisely because "the eleven eagles of the

---

[268] *Bryn Mawr College Calendar 1908*, 151-4; *Bryn Mawr College Program 1904-5,* 140-4; cf. "MM's Course Record, 1905-1909," 13-14.

[269] *Bryn Mawr College Calendar 1908*, 151.

west …supervise the water" from high atop those cliffs. But a perspectival relativity that here could easily be conceived of in the human terms of, say, a hiker atop the same cliff, is elsewhere pushed to inhuman extremes. Observe, impossibly, the glacier "killing prey with the concentric crushing rigor of the python, / it hovers forward, "spider fashion / on its arms" misleadingly like lace" (*BMM* 125). On average glaciers move at about ten inches per day, and while this weighty movement flattens trees and destroys other vegetable qualities of the landscape, these could hardly be considered "prey" (as if the glacier gained some sort of sustenance from the herbage it crushes); and while the glacier's destructive "rigor" might be likened to a python's in terms of power, considered temporally, the instantaneous action couldn't be more unlike the snail's pace of the ice. The analogy of force breaks down at the level of temporal association, but is all the more striking and evocative because the association persists. The same is true of the glacier's hovering movement, for insofar is as the ice moves forward in a solid mass, and is unlike a liquid river, in a sense suspended above the rock beneath it, it is certainly not "suspended in the air *over* or *about* a particular spot…as a winged creature" would be.[270] And while its ice fields extend, arm-or-leg-like in eight directions from the center of the mountain, it moves with the speed of neither a spider nor an octopus. Where with the water, the eagle provides the spatial distance that effectively slows time, here geology provides the perspective, for no creature actually *experiences* glacial movement in these terms, though they are scientifically comparable if we take force rather than acceleration as the common denominator (i.e. if the glacier exerted the same force and were shrunk to the size of a snake, it would move about as fast as one). To call these associations "optical puns" is thus somewhat misleading, for while they certainly create visual connections, they are not always visually motivated. Or rather, their visuality is influenced

[270] "hover, v.1". *OED Online*. March 2016. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/88986 (accessed May 25, 2016).

by a certain technical and scientific mediation. Such comparisons are impossible without prior knowledge of glacial movement, and this knowledge is only attainable through large-scale and long-term geological surveys. Such poetry is built up from a scientific education.

Common to all of these renderings – of the massive as the microscopic, of geologic time as sensorily instantaneous, or of monolithically disbursed force as focused and directed – is the removed reflection of scientific analysis, whether it be the isolation of the laboratory or the data collecting abstraction of the field survey. These two methods are in fact analogous insofar as they enable the viewer to take in more than the bare human perceptive faculties can fathom. "An Octopus" is then a nature poem that brings to bear on its subject the tools and methods of scientific analysis. But this is not to say that is a strictly scientific poem, for Moore throughout joins such scientifically inflected observations and shifts together with similar images and movements that are limited to an unenhanced and immediate human register. We might think of these as humanist rather than scientific shifts, or mammalian rather than geological or cartographical. We see, for instance, "'[t]houghtful beavers / making drains which seem the work of careful men with shovels'" (*BMM* 126), where animal activity that readily presents itself to the naked human eye is slightly enlarged to a human scale. In fact, once humans make their appearance, the poem tends to favor human scale analogies over the more mountainous or minute. Upon the mountain's "shelving glacial ledges / where climbers have not gone or have gone timidly," we also see the blue jay, "'hopping stiffly on sharp feet' like miniature ice-hacks." While an ecocritical reading might reasonably discern here the troubling tendency of humans to impose their own image on the natural world - a concern not foreign to Moore - in perspectival terms, the poem's rendering of blue jay feet as "miniature ice-hacks" is as much an epistemological acknowledgement as an environmentalist critique. Like Michael Polyani, Moore

recognizes in these moments that, however scientifically mediated, all human observation is inevitably situated with personal prejudices and commitments.[271]

***

Thus caught up in human history and culture, the scientific observations of "an Octopus" pivot into larger questions of language, philosophy, and ethics, and by exploring these issues the poem doubles back on itself in a complex critique of empirical notions of descriptive precision. For all of its apparently exact descriptions and measurements of the mountain's natural environment, "An Octopus" remains resolutely circumspect about the capacity of language to accurately encompass and name reality, a posture that is perhaps most pronounced in the poem's refusal to directly name its subject. And the poem draws explicit attention to this refusal, offering a demonstrative theoretical defense of circumlocution by contrasting its own verbosity with the mythic notion of perfect nomination. Before introducing the Biblical fall as an explanation for linguistic poverty, the poem first makes us feel this lack by pushing its descriptive volubility to the point of exhaustion. "The Greeks," we are told, once ascribed

> … what we clumsily call happiness,
> to "an accident of a quality,
> a spiritual substance or the soul itself,
> an act, a disposition, or a habit,
> or a habit infused to which the soul has been persuaded,
> or something distinct from a habit, a power —"
> such power as Adam had and we are still devoid of. (*BMM* 130)

At first glance this power that we fail to share with Adam appears to be the capacity for happiness itself, yet the ambiguous syntax of these lines suggest that the power in question might also be that of "ascribing," which nominative power Adam amply displays when, in the third chapter of Genesis, he gives names to all the flora and fauna of Paradise. And though the words

---

[271] Polanyi, Michael, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1964).

Moore quotes in this passage are taken, piecemeal, from Richard Baxter's *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (1650), here they are deployed to describe not the blessed state of the saints, but rather the Aristotelean concept of *eudaemonia*. This term, which is often misleadingly translated as "happiness," refers more properly to the human flourishing that comes from habituated and virtuous pursuit of the good, though adequately explaining the concept requires virtually the entirety of *Nicomachean Ethics*. That the poem admits defeat in this descriptive endeavor by recourse to the figure of Adam charges its other moments of linguistic circumspection with a certain prelapsarian concern that becomes all the more pronounced when we consider that Moore's two actual experiences at Mt. Rainier were confined mostly to Paradise Park, the lush meadow that faces the Nisqually Glacier.[272]

Throughout the poem there are other moments of linguistic circumspection, both overt and implied. Toward its stormy conclusion, the poem queries, "is tree the name for these strange things / "flat on the ground like vines," and repeatedly its language reflects the slippery changeability of its subject, as with the variously "indigo, pea-green, blue-green, turquoise" color of a lake, or simply the poem's hesitation in actually naming its mountainous subject directly. Such moments suggest a sort of basic linguistic bankruptcy that accords with broken or fallen language, a postlapsarian perspective that John Slatin discovers in the poem's contradictory metaphors and dissonant comparisons, which, taken together with its concluding avalanche, suggest that the whole poem repeats the Biblical fall.[273] And from this perspective, the optical shifts of focus seem to underscore all the more the incomprehensibility of the subject. Not only

---

[272] Willis, Patricia C., "The Road to Paradise: First Notes on Marianne Moore's 'An Octopus'," *Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly And Critical Journal* 30, no. 2-3 (1984 Summer-Fall 1984), 242.

[273] Slatin, John M., *The Savage's Romance: The Poetry of Marianne Moore* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), 160-170. Slatin reads "an Octopus" much like Stanley Fish reads *Paradise Lost*, as a textual performance of the fall; Bonnie Costello reads power as referring to language: Costello, Bonnie, *Marianne Moore, Imaginary Possessions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 89.

can it not all be taken in at once, but what from one remove look like flowers are actually enormous fields of color. Hence a poem that appears to be built on scientific precision and focused observational techniques ends by undermining the possibility of such precision in any manner but a tentative one — the image blurs at the edges. Thus the technical terms and abrupt focal shifts that appear to achieve descriptive precision produce only the illusion of comprehensiveness; while such techniques can be suggestive, they can't be exactly accurate. Its glaciers might look like an octopus, but there are certainly no octopi on Mt. Rainier.

Of course only the most dogged of literalists would insist on concretizing all metaphorical comparisons; the point here is merely that empirically exact description, while it is gestured to in "an Octopus," is both functionally and theoretically undermined. But in the realm of poetry, such alarming suggestiveness is incredibly productive; comparing the glacier to an octopus provides a striking sense of a dynamism that is very real, but very subtle, moving ten inches per day as it does. The effect of the poem's disparate and surprising comparisons and scalar shifts seem somehow to offer a vision of the unbounded life of the mountain. And this aggregate effect is produced by an epistemological vision that directly links the material and the immaterial. Moore's mountain is home not only to a great variety of plants, animals, and adventuring humans, but also to the Greeks, Adam, and Henry James; it is home to geography, geology, and geology as well as anthropology, history, and philosophy, and these diverse fields of knowledge are not only presented but they are integrated. We might well wonder what the Greeks have to do with the ecosystem of Mt. Rainier. Indeed, like Henry James and Adam, they seem rather out of place in the natural landscape of the mountain, where when humans do enter, it is as tourists, not as philosophers or novelists. Technically, it is the blue jay that ushers in the Greeks, for after observing its ice-hack-like hopping, the poem declares this little bird to be

> "secretive, with a look of wisdom and distinction, but a villain,
> fond of human society or the crumbs that go with it,"
> he knows no Greek,
> "that pride producing language,"
> in which "rashness is rendered innocuous, and error exposed
> by the collision of knowledge with knowledge." (*BMM* 130)

Here the language of moral evaluation first introduces the ancient Greeks, and even then they are ushered in not as a group, but rather as bearers of a language to which the poem ascribes certain intellectual and moral power. Having already adopted the anthropocentric lens described above, the poem tempers the "secretive" look of the blue jay with other qualifying judgements — a look of wisdom, a friendliness whose motivation might just be hunger, but who can say? Indeed, if Greek here is the space in which "error is exposed by the collision of knowledge with knowledge," the bird is mute, incommunicative, unable to stipulate whether it likes your company for its own sake, or for the sake of "the crumbs that go with it." We might say, then, that is the moral and communicative questions that attend the problem of other minds that initially usher the Greeks into the poem, where they at first serve merely as a metonym of their language, which is in turn a metonym of judgement, wisdom, and discretion. But in a poem where comparative terms become concrete realities, "that pride producing language" quickly produces its speakers, who, true to metonymic form, are concerned with "delicate behavior / because it was 'so noble and so fair.'" Indeed, the language of ethics and moral evaluation undergirds the entirety of the Greek digression; in this view, the forest is "essentially humane," as it "'affords wood for dwellings and by its beauty stimulates / the moral vigor of its citizens.'" And though the Greeks were "'emotionally sensitive, their hearts were hard'; their wisdom was remote" from that of the parks service representatives and field guides, which themselves offer practical instruction that takes the form of moral directive - "one must do as one is told," if one hopes to ascend the main peak of the mountain.

From the vantage of the Greeks, the entire poem appears to have been ascending to the subject of moral philosophy much as the curriculum of the nineteenth century university was organized toward and unified by that discipline. For "An Octopus" progresses from optical observation and recorded fact to first beauty and reverence and then to moral reflection. Its varied landscapes bursting forth with a stunning array of plant and animal life, the mountain maintains "many minds, distinguished by a beauty / of which 'the visitor dare never fully speak at home / for fear of being stoned as an imposter" (*BMM* 127). This beauty, the experience of which borders on the ineffability of the mystical, gives way to the badger's quasi-moral "struggle between curiosity and caution," and finally to the elusive question of human happiness and the good. This movement loosely mirrors the progress of the traditional liberal arts curriculum in the nineteenth century, which placed moral philosophy as the capstone of the college education. Offered only to seniors, and often taught by the college president, the course in moral philosophy was offered as a supremely integrative endeavor that encompassed and unified all aspects of human nature, society, and the natural sciences.[274] Like theology for the medieval university, moral philosophy was thus the queen of the sciences. And though the *fin de siècle* saw the gradual decline of this organization as it gave way to the more specialized and less unified framework of the modern research university, at Bryn Mawr it survived residually enough that, combined with the social justice ethos of the college and her own deeply ingrained ethical and religious sensibility, Moore's education was nevertheless pointed toward moral philosophy. In her senior year at Bryn Mawr, in addition to biology, psychology, and imitative writing, Moore took courses on the history of philosophy, the history of Christian doctrine, and systematic ethics, all intellectual endeavors that dovetail with the religious sensibility she brought from

---

[274] Reubens, *Making of the Modern University*, 20-22.

home and the dogged moral sensibility she maintained throughout her career.[275]

While we cannot be entirely certain that Moore was consciously resurrecting an older curricular order in her course selection at Bryn Mawr, we can be more or less sure that she was thinking about traditionally structured universities when she was writing "An Octopus," for the poem affects its most radical shift - from the blue jay to the Greeks - by quoting a phrase of John Henry Newman's, which, in its original context, describes the fundamental operation of a university. The phrase Moore filches from the Newman comes at the end of "What is a University?", a short essay that introduces his first volume of *Historical Sketches* (1872), the entirety of which is dedicated to an historical overview of "the Rise and Progress of Universities." Here is the phrase is in its original context:

> In the nature of things, greatness and unity go to gather; excellence implies a centre. And such, for the third or fourth time, is a University… It is the place to which a thousand schools make contributions; in which the intellect may safely range and speculate, sure to find its equal in some antagonistic activity, and its judge in the tribunal of truth. It is a place where inquiry is pushed forward, and discoveries verified and perfected, and rashness rendered innocuous, and error exposed, by the collision of mind with mind, and knowledge with knowledge.[276]

While in his most popular treatise on higher education, Cardinal Newman maintains that the object of the university is intellectual rather than moral, Moore seems to suggest otherwise by connecting the eradication of error first with the Greek language, and then with *Nicomachean*

---

[275] *Bryn Mawr College Calendar 1908*, 128-9, 117, cf. "MM's Course Record, 1905-1909." Marianne Moore Newsletter 5, no. 1 (1981): 13-14.

[276] Newman, John Henry *Historical Sketches, vol.1.* (London: B.M. Pickering, 1872), 16.

Ethics, that most influential work of Greek moral philosophy.[277] Rather, Moore suggests the essential continuity between intellectual inquiry and ethical practice, offering the Greeks as a corrective to Newman's view that the proper domain of the university is knowledge dissemination rather than moral formation. For the Greeks understood education to be morally directed, as Warner Jaeger's extensive study of Greek *paideia* so compellingly demonstrates, and the work of thinkers like Pierre Hadot and Hannah Arendt details how Greek philosophy in particular was practiced in a context of political and moral activity.[278] Like Jacques Maritain, she presents the basic continuity of scientific knowledge and specialized inquiry with moral qualities like humility and religious sensibilities. Indeed, Moore's poem appears to follow the development sketched in Maritain's modern reflection on education, which strikes a balance between the modern curriculum and ancient coordination of leading with formation:

> Physics and natural science, if they are taught not only for the sake of practical applications but essentially for the sake of knowledge, with reference to the specific epistemological approach they involve and in close connection with the history of the sciences and the history of civilization, provide man with a vision of the universe and an understanding of scientific truth and a sense of the sacred, exacting, unbending objectivity of the humblest truth, which play an essential part in the liberation of the mind and in liberal education.[279]

Though these sentences describe the integrative thrust of the liberal arts curriculum, they might as easily be applied to "an Octopus," for, as we have seen, the poem's deployment of the natural sciences integrates these fields of knowledge with history and philosophy in a gesture of

---

[277] Newman, John Henry, *The Idea of a University*, ed. Frank M Turner (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1996), 3.

[278] See Hadot, Pierre, *Philosophy As a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises From Socrates to Foucault*, trans Arnold I Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition, Charles R. Walgreen Foundation Lectures* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 248-326. There is a sense in which Newman himself gestures toward this mutual cooperation, for although he rejects the university as in institution of moral formation, he acknowledges that it "cannot fulfill its object duly…without the Church's assistance… the Church is necessary for its *integrity."* Newman, *Idea*, 3.

[279] Maritain, Jacques, *Education At the Crossroads* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1943), 69.

epistemological self-consciousness that is both the moral and religious aspects of human encounters with nature. But if this analogy holds any water, how, we might ask, might we understand Moore's poem as contributing to '"the liberation of the mind"? Is the moral unity of "An Octopus" achieved merely by a different breed of description that subsumes several smaller descriptive fields of knowledge?

Not exactly. For "an Octopus" presents moral philosophy as more than merely a unifying subject around which all other subjects cohere. In fact, moral philosophy isn't *presented* at all, at least not in the way we might say geology is presented through the poem's inclusion of the discipline's specialized terms or informational measurements. If we discern moral philosophy at all in the poem, it is avowedly *not* as a field of knowledge, but rather as a sort of activity. For moral inquiry is introduced at just the moment when the poem throws into question the possibility of adequately naming not only an abstraction like "happiness," but anything in the material world as well. Collapsing this distinction between concepts and things, neither of which we are able to adequately name, the poem actively coordinates linguistic impotence with the evaluative ambiguity involved in moral inquiry. For linguistic impotence, introduced clearly enough by reference to Adam and the vagaries of translation, is then aligned with Greek aesthetics, ancient and modern attitudes toward nature, and the craft of Henry James, all in a manner that is clearly evaluative in tone, but rather elusive in judgment. This ambiguity is clearest when the digression culminates with a reflection on Henry James coupled with something like moral condemnation of the mountain itself that nevertheless flickers with ineffable reverence, though we may not be sure what exactly is revered:

> … Mount Tacoma
> this fossil flower
> concise without a shiver,
> intact when it is cut,

damned for its sacrosanct remoteness —
like Henry James "damned by the public for decorum";
not decorum, but restraint;
it was the loving of doing hard things
that rebuffed and wore them out — a public out of sympathy with neatness
neatness of finish! Neatness of finish!
relentless accuracy is the nature of this octopus
with its capacity for fact (*BMM* 131)

How, we might wonder, can the mountain be damned for being sacrosanct and remote, qualities that might as easily apply to a transcendent deity? According to most economies of salvation, it is sacrosanct remoteness which suggests that one is saved (i.e. set apart, holy) from damnation. Following upon this lexical tension we find several referential ambiguities. Henry James, we learn, is "damned by the public," but is it that public that damns the mountain? And in qualifying that the grounds for this damnation is "not decorum, but restraint," are we to understand that the public is mistaken in its damnation, or that it is restraint rather than decorum that is damnable? The public's "love of doing hard things" seems to align them with the Greeks, but is this then the same public that condemns James? Such questions suggest the general confusion this passage elicits, a confusion that critical treatments of these lines reflect. In Margaret Holly's view, the poem lauds the Greeks, with their "acceptance of paradox," as prototypical of the artist, and Laurence Stapleton pushes this positive view to explicitly include Henry James, who "becomes a symbol of man's capacity for art."[280] Bonnie Costello too reads Moore as generally approving, for "admiring James, [she] imitates his precision," together with whom she follows the example of the Greeks, who "turned over terms in a persistent search for accuracy, but knew, in their ceaseless search for knowledge, that they failed to achieve that Adamic power of naming

[280] Holley, Margaret, *The Poetry of Marianne Moore: A Study In Voice and Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 65-6; Stapleton, Laurence, *Marianne Moore, the Poet's Advance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 44.

correctly."[281] But others find this passage dismissive and critical of both the American novelist and the philosophers of ancient Greece. Jeanne Heuving sees the Greeks' "benevolent conclusiveness" as arrogant and reductive, while John Slatin follows a similar line, denouncing Greek conclusiveness as delusional, which delusion he maps onto James' "restraint," reading "Neatness of finish!" as an "impatient, sardonic interruption " of "the increasingly desperate eloquence of Richard Baxter."[282] And if such divisiveness weren't enough, more recently Victoria Bazin has opposed James' restraint to "the Greek desire to appropriate the object world through an accumulation of knowledge," claiming that the poem endorses the former and denounces the latter.[283]

Divided as these readings are, they all agree on one point — in one direction or another, the poem is certainly engaged in an act of judgement or qualitative evaluation, with the implication that one figure or set is more exemplary than the other. In one sense this isn't the least bit surprising, for the interlude's ambiguity follows directly from the ambiguous presentation of *eudaimonia* that Moore ekes out of Baxter's reordered language, and which, in its Aristotelean origin, is so dependent upon the good.[284] As Costello so aptly observes, the repeated exclamation "Neatness of finish! Neatness of Finish!" appears to be the pivotal climax of the poem, for not only does its ecstatic exultation break a heretofore descriptive tone, but the poetic "'sound like the crack of a rifle'" sets in motion the poem's climactic avalanche. Unlike Slatin, Costello reads this as positive, a moment of arrested wonder, but more important than her

---

[281] Costello, *Imaginary Possessions,* 89-90.

[282] Heuving, Jeanne, *Omissions Are Not Accidents: Gender In the Art of Marianne Moore* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 133; Slatin, *The Savage's Romance*. 162-3.

[283] Bazin, *Marianne Moore and the Cultures of Modernity*. 136.

[284] Kappel, Andrew J., "The Verba Artendia of Richard Baxter in the Poems of Marianne Moore*," Christianity and Literature* 41 (Summer 1992): 426.

affirmative view is her assertion that "we cannot conclude inconclusiveness" - whether or not "the description gives way to appreciation, our focus, which until now had been carefully deflected, is thrown onto the writer's energies." And insofar as this moment solicits engagement or identification with the writer's own endeavor, it also compels investment. The question of tone becomes crucial. "Neatness of finish!" we chant with the poem, but are we applauding or condemning this neatness? As the critical reception of the poem itself demonstrates, "the public" is of little help in settling such a question, which, it turns out, is precisely the point. For the energy with which the exclamation is pronounced suggests a sort of conclusiveness that the poem refuses to furnish; and moved by the force of its enthusiasm, the reader looks back and forward in a desperate attempt to glean just where the poem itself might fall on these issues of decorum, restraint, and neatness. The divided critical treatment of the interlude bears witness to this. In this quest to answer a fundamentally evaluative question, the scientific and cultural descriptions of the poem become in a sense morally charged, insofar as they might themselves be instances of decorum, restraint or neatness, and may thus be either exemplary or deplorable. How, from all of these categories, are we to understand the opening "unimagined delicacy" of the glacial ice fields, or the "glassy octopus, symmetrically pointed" in the final lines? Are these decorous or restrained? Sacrosanct or damnable? Are they neat? Are they accurate?

The answers to such questions are perhaps less important than the fact they are solicited, for in pursuing their answers the reader finds herself swept up in the process of coordinating the poem's heteroclite disciplinary registers, running all of the poem's raw data through the machine of evaluative inquiry, and organizing it around a question of the good that includes environmental, scientific, aesthetic, anthropological, and moral concerns. Above we suggested that Moore, by coupling Newman's idea of the university with Aristotle's notion of *eudaemonia*

was offering a corrective to the Victorian intellectual; read as a whole, "an Octopus" might be understood as similarly expanding that ancient Greek concept, as if suggesting that, encompassing as it is, *Nicomachean Ethics* is somehow imbalanced and incomplete, negligent of entire intellectual and natural ecosystems. It is the activity of moral philosophy or evaluative intellectual inquiry that associates these apparently discrete fields of knowledge, and it is the reader who does the work by uncovering the connections between, say, geology, aesthetics, leisurely vacations, environmental ethics, and human happiness. Impelled by a search for what is worthy of approval, moral inquiry realizes coherence by offering teleology that is grounded in the reader. While this unity of knowledge might conceivably exists in an abstract theoretical sense, it is only accessible to the reader through such pointed inquiry; the reader realizes the coherence of nature, culture, and art only when these spheres are put in direct relation to the most urgent concerns of human life in both its material and immaterial capacities. But to any reader familiar with Moore's oeuvre, it might seem strange to isolate "an Octopus" as an example of her ethically directed poetry, for of all her poems, this might seem the least preoccupied with such questions. Yet more than others, this poem lays bare the many fields and questions that would continue to concern Moore throughout her career – scientific observation, intellectual discovery, aesthetic wonder, and institutional education – and is the first place in which these concerns become organized by the activity of moral inquiry. It is a space for moral inquiry where diverse fields are coordinated and directed in an activity that for Moore becomes increasingly personal in the following decades.

4. A Three Cornered Hat: Poetry, Educational Philosophy, Moral Inquiry

Moore had been preoccupied with the concerns presented in "an Octopus" well before that poem's initial appearances in 1924, first in *The Dial*, and then in *Observations.* As early as 1916's "Critics and Connoisseurs," she can be seen relating her (and others') observations of natural phenomena to both moral value and aesthetic discretion. "There is a great amount of poetry in unconsciousness / Fastidiousness," that poem opens, before it then offers examples of this virtue's opposite — "ambition without / Understanding in a variety of forms" — in the begrudged strivings of a black swan and the pointless labor of an ant. The poem's tacit equation of these creatures' misguided endeavors to the activities of its addressee — "I have seen this swan and I have seen you," the speaker declares — ushers in a direct indictment of the titular critics and connoisseurs, whose aesthetic postures are as domineering and as pointless as the endeavors of ant and swan. Here the observation of nature provides a negative analogue, a way for the poet to articulate the moral shortcomings of aesthetic braggadocio and imperiousness. (*BMM* 215-16) Inversely, creature poems like "Peter" and "To a Snail" discover the aesthetically illuminating and morally exemplary in their subjects. Regarding Peter, the "black-and-white cat owned by Miss Magdalen Hueber and Miss Maria Weniger," Moore's Manhattan neighbors, "[i]t is clear that he can see the virtue of naturalness"; he is in fact the very embodiment of it. The life of this cat, spent leaping, lengthening out, purloining, and chasing hens around the yard, is the very height of feline naturalness, and is, as such, exemplary of honesty, the poem concludes (*BMM* 93-4). Likewise the snail, whose "Contractility is a virtue / as modesty is a virtue," in modeling "'compression…the first grace of style'" teaches us that "what we value in style…is the principle that is hid" (*BMM* 65). Moore is able to derive moral insight from such creatures even in spite of their sometimes misguided and uncharitable cultural associations. In "A Fool, A

Foul Thing, A Distressful Lunatic," she pointedly questions why the gander should be made "to play the fool" in the cultural lexicon, or why the loon is "styled / in folly's catalogue" as the lunatic? (*BMM* 60). In such poems we see the pervasiveness of Moore's interest in moral virtue and aesthetic taste, two humanistic categories that are both illuminated and coordinated by her careful examination of the animal kingdom. But although these poems are involved in acts of critical investigation, for the most part they present moral inquiry as axiomatic, and aesthetic value as deterministic. In them unbiased scrutiny of animal activity recalls rather than reveals moral insights about human behavior and culture. In pithy and poignant terms, we are told that naturalness and hiddenness are virtues, or that, like the ant and the swan, the critics's flaw is "ambition without understanding." They lack the evaluative ambiguity that characterizes the moral and aesthetic postures of "an Octopus," and are therefore precursors to that mountainous poem more in terms of categorical concern than poetic function.

Standing between these morally axiomatic poems and the more ambiguous and interactive space created by "an Octopus," Moore's famous "Poetry" serves as an important point of transition, where in bringing lexical and syntactic ambiguity to bear on morally charged aesthetic questions, she takes a step toward the evaluative ambiguity we find in the long poem. First published in a 1919 issue of *Others*, this poem is infamous for the numerous revisions to which Moore subjected it, and while the import of that almost obsessive editorial practice will become increasingly apparent in the course of my argument, at present we shall approach it in its original form. "Poetry" anticipates "an Octopus" in its discomfort with naming, for the surface of the poem works toward a definition of the categorical term "poetry," while ultimately eschewing such a definition and frustrating attempts at taxonomic certainty and stability of meaning. From the outset "Poetry" is set against itself. "I too, dislike it: there are things that are important /

beyond all this fiddle," the poem declares of its titular subject, though it is quick to qualify this precarious statement by suggesting that despite its distaste, value might be found in poetry, for by reading it "with a perfect contempt for it, / one discovers that there is in / it after all, a place for the genuine." But what exactly "the genuine" is (and by extension, what exactly "poetry" is) remains an open question that the bulk of the poem appears to address. Immediately following the introduction of "the genuine" come two sets of apparently illustrative lists. The first of these includes: "Hands that can grasp, eyes/that can dilate, hair that can rise," all of which defy "high sounding interpretation" and derivation. The second list contains a bat, a horse, and a wolf, as well as a literary critic, a baseball fan, and a statistician. And like the first list, these items must not be "dragged into prominence by half poets," for then "the result is not poetry." Inferentially, then, "the genuine" seems to consist of concrete, living things that either respond to stimuli, or generally act, and have not suffered poetic interpretation, thus remaining "useful." Even at this point an operative paradox is apparent: "the genuine" occurs in "poetry," yet must somehow stand aloof from it, thereby resisting interpretation and publicity. By the end of this poem, this paradoxical impossibility comes to the fore and exiles "the genuine" from the text. For it is not until "autocrats…can be/ 'literalists of the imagination'" and "can present/…imaginary gardens with real toads in them" that we shall "have it". As it turns out, then, 'poetry' doesn't even exist yet, or at least we don't have it. And if poetry does not yet exist, this must not be a poem, and must therefore *not* create a space for the genuine. The text is beginning to reveal its deception.

> …In the meantime, if you demand on the one hand,
> In defiance of their opinion -
> The raw material of poetry in
> All its rawness and that
> Which is on the other hand,
> Genuine then you are interested in poetry. (*BMM* 205)

With this final stroke, the establishing of a category of "raw material" in which all the content of

the earlier lists fits perfectly (bats, statisticians, even toads), and which is distinguished from "the genuine," all illusions of concretely grasping the latter are dispelled. We are left with the conclusion that this text, titled after what it cannot be (poetry), does not define the genuine, but instead simply presents "the raw material of poetry" and urges us to demand both that material and the nebulous "genuine" in order to be "interested in poetry." Thus, when read with the goal of stabilizing the categorical elements that the text initially destabilizes, "Poetry" offers an illusion of stable meaning, only to ultimately upset it and leave the reader no closer to grasping the meaning of either "poetry" or "the genuine."

Like "an Octopus," the ambiguity written into the very syntax of "Poetry" demands the dogged engagement of the reader, opening a space for inquiry and exploration, though the search that earlier poem solicits is geared more toward parsing out Moore's own idiosyncratic aesthetic vocabulary than toward the larger aesthetic and moral concerns of "an Octopus." Indeed, the progress from the one to the other can be understood in terms of a deepening ambiguity, where terminological undecidability grows into philosophical and evaluative ambiguity. But beyond the development of just this one quality, "an Octopus" stands even more concretely as a poetic realization of the aesthetic theory advanced in "Poetry." For in collapsing Mt. Rainier's Paradise Park with the Paradise of Genesis, and in populating this quasi-mythological garden with non-native peoples and cultures as well as with indigenous plant and animal life, the poem literally "present[s] for inspection / imaginary gardens with real toads / in them," fulfilling that condition paradoxical condition whereby "Poetry" avows "we shall have it" (*BMM* 205). The aesthetically charged space of moral inquiry opened by "an Octopus" is precisely the "place for the genuine" that "Poetry" claims for its subject. But "an Octopus" is not only a practical realization of the poetic theory advanced by "Poetry," for it also lays bare that theory's condition of possibility -

the university, the institution that gathers together the heteroclite "raw material" that are deemed poetry's domain. Having articulated this esemplastic constellation of human knowledge that mimics the structure and teleology of the nineteenth century university, from "an Octopus" onward, Moore's work maintains a steady interest in the function of education in coordinating intellectual wonder, aesthetic creation and consumption, and moral development, as well as in the highly personal and self-reflective nature of this educational enterprise.

***

In 1932 Moore published a series of three poems in *Poetry*, which were gathered together under the title "Part of a Novel, Part of a Poem, Part of a Play." At both the literary and conceptual core of this triptych stands the figure of the student. As "Part of a Novel," the student reclines in the middle of the first poem, "The Steeple-Jack," providing the poem with a narratological or focal center. This landscape poem first presents a small but lively American town in the manner of an artistically evocative travel guide. "Dürer would have seen a reason for living / in a town like this," where "you can see a twenty-five / pound lobster" and where with its diversity of plant life (the poem provides an exhaustive catalogue) "you have / the tropics at first hand." Such things *could be* seen in this town, and insofar as the poem presents them, they are seen:

> …The college student
> named Ambrose sits on the hill-side
> with his non-native books and had
> and sees boats
>
> at sea progress white and rigid as if in
> a groove… [285]

Ambrose the college student is the only figure who actively sees in the poem, and it is he who

[285] Moore, Marianne, *A-Quiver with Significance: Marianne Moore, 1932-1936*, ed. Heather Cass White (Victoria, BC: ELS Editions, 2008), 52. (Hereafter cited parenthetically and abbreviated as *A-quiver*.)

sees *everything*. For upon encountering his mechanized figuration of the boats' progress, we realize that the earlier likening of the scene to a Dürer print, where "water [is] etched / with waves as formal as the scales on a fish," is a product of just this poetic imagination (*A-quiver* 50). Ambrose, with his "non-native books," which may well be a collection of Dürer's etchings, is precisely the tourist whose perspective has produced the travel-guide-like quality of the poem. It is this same literary imagination which, upon observing the "man in scarlet" atop the church's steeple, who "lets / down a rope as spider spins a thread" conjectures that "he might be part of a novel, but on the sidewalk a / sign says C.J. Poole, Steeple-jack" (*A-quiver* 52). Though the particularities of reality correct Ambrose's speculation, the poem nevertheless remains caught up in the perspective of the student, who doesn't just behold the steeple-topping star of the final stanza, but presents it as a symbolic object that "stands for hope" (*A-quiver* 53).

"The Student" springboards from this figure into a general consideration of educational philosophy; it is a poem that hinges on distinctions, and the most significant of these, the difference between "undergraduates and students," provides a basis for thinking about education not just as learning but as formation. The same elements and dynamics present in "an Octopus" are reframed more explicitly in terms of education, and like that earlier poem, it is moral formation which coordinates the diverse investments and interests of the poem. Just "an Octopus" paints Mt. Rainier's Paradise Park with broad strokes of prelapsarian nostalgia, "The Student" presents the college in Edenic terms, where

> In each school there is a pair of fruit-trees like that twin tree
> in every other school: tree-of-knowledge—
> tree-of-life — each with a label like that of the other college:
>
> *lux,* or, *lux et veritas, Christo et ecclesiae, spiet*
> *felici…* (*A-quiver* 54)

And in keeping with the democratic impulse of that earlier poem, which discovers beauty as

easily in National Parks brochures as in the prose of John Ruskin, "the Student" insists outright that "these apple-trees are should be for everyone," maintaining, against the French opinion that not everyone must go to college, that although "five kinds of superiority / might be unattainable by all…one degree is not too much" (*A-quiver* 53-4). College, for this poem, is geared not toward awarding social distinction or cultivating superior knowledge, but rather toward training the student to experience the intellectual and aesthetic fullness of common experience, to carefully draw distinctions, and to approach others with humility and charity. The student asks Albert Einstein when his experiment will be finished, "and is pleased when Doctor Einstein smiles and says / politely 'science is never finished'" (*A-quiver* 55). The student's pleasure arises from his understanding that because phenomena are so interconnected, inquiry is more of an orientation toward the world than a discrete activity; always "there is more to learn" as "[n]o fact of science — /theology or biology — might / not as well be known" (*A-quiver* 54). Discerning that "the football huddle in the vacant lot / is impersonating calculus and physics and military books," the student sees that there is intellectual and aesthetic "vitality in the world of sport" (*A-quiver* 55). The point of such keen insight, which the intensely feeling student cultivates through patience and concentration, is ultimately a sort of morally sensitive heroism, for

> …Education augments our natural forces and
> prompts us to extend the machinery of advantage
> to those who are without it. One fitted
> to be a scholar must have the heroic mind, Emerson said. (*A-quiver* 56)

The student, then, is a variety of hero. While his interpretative and imaginative perspective framed "The Steeple-Jack," having been philosophically rounded out, the figure of the student now provides a conceptual foundation for reading the poem that follows directly on the heels of his attested heroism.

"The Hero" is perhaps the most elliptical of these three poems, and its deliberate ambiguity

is a realization of the student's cultivated ability to see always two sides of a matter, which affords him a fundamental humanity and an illuminating aesthetic sensibility. It turns out that the hero is, in at least a conventional sense, rather unheroic. For one thing, he is somewhat common, like the rest of us; "we do not like some things and the hero doesn't," and what the hero finds distasteful are situations wherein heroic bravery and self-disregard might be expected to most shine forth:

> …deviating head-stones
> and uncertainty;
> going where one does not wish
> to go; suffering and not
> Saying so; standing and listening where something
> is hiding…. (*A-quiver* 57-8)

Ironically, the hero reacts to such circumstances just as we would expect one lacking heroism to - "The hero shrinks / as what it is flies out on muffled wings…" Rather than a particular sort of action or response characterized by stalwart fearlessness, which Moore might just as easily read as frigid inhumanity, heroism here consists in a particular orientation toward the world that is indomitable, sympathetic, and alive to inner mystery. Though a bat flying out of a bush might startle him, the hero is "tired but hopeful" at precisely those dire moments "when all ground for hope has vanished;" he is "lenient" and sympathetic beyond his experience, "looking / on a fellow creature's error with the feelings of a mother - a woman, or a cat," none of which categories he occupies. When we see an example of such heroism, it is embodied by a "decorous frock-coated Negro" who

> answers the fearless sightseeing hobo
> who asks the man she's with, what's this,
> what's that, where's Martha
> buried, "Gen-ral Washington
> there; his lady, here"; speaking
> as if in a play —not seeing her; with a
> sense of human dignity

and reverence for mystery, standing like the shadow
of the willow. (*A-quiver* 58-9)

Though we might most readily identify the sense of reverence and human dignity as heroic qualities, aligning as they do with the sympathy and kindness seen immediately prior, beyond that, this syntactically oblique stanza raises more questions than it answers. How many people are on the stage here - certainly the "frock-coated Negro" and the "hobo," but who is "the man she's with," and who is she - the hobo or the negro? Is the man a third actor in this scene? One possibility is presented by Cristanne Miller, who reads this scene as an exchange between the male Negro and the "'fearless sightseeing hobo,' who, surprisingly, is a woman." In Miller's reading, while the hobo comes closer to stereotyped notions of heroism, it is the "maternally lenient 'Negro' man," responding with "gracious dignity," who most fully embodies that quality.[286] But this reading perhaps too easily elides the oblique phrasing of this stanza's opening lines, where the referential antecedent of "the man she's with" are anything but clear. While Miller assumes that the "she" refers to the hobo, thereby taking the Negro to be the man, and making the two a pair, one might just as easily understand the "she" as referring to the Negro, making the "man she's with" a third character in this scene in which a hobo approaches the pair with his tourist questions. This reading seems at least equally plausible, since it is not immediately clear why a hobo and a "decorous frock-coated Negro" would be out seeing the sights together, though neither readings can be conclusive. The series of subject-less phrases that follow the scene seem to ensure this ambiguity. We are no more sure of who's "speaking as if in a play — not seeing her" than we are of who harbors this "sense of human dignity and reverence for mystery," since the fearless sightseer might be motivated by a sense of mystery as easily as

---

[286] Miller, Cristanne, "Marianne Moore's Black Maternal Hero: A Study in Categorization." *American Literary History* 1, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 790.

the frock coated Negro, whose cool answers seem to connote those qualities as well. The student, that "thoughtful pupil [who] has two thoughts for the word valet" and who is able to see from a multiplicity of angles, might see it both ways at once.

The Hero, who we already know bears a certain resemblance to the student, is, like the poem that bears his name, rather unstable and difficult to pin town. Mired in referential ambiguity, the poem's one illustration of heroism frustrates attempts to locate any particular hero; while we can be certain of *what* heroism looks like - it is lenient, maternal, dignified, reverential of mystery - we can't be quite sure *who* is heroic. And this holds perhaps even more strongly for "the hero" himself, who not only "shrinks" from the winged creature early on in the poem, but who at the end of the poem evaporates as a person altogether. Of the hero, the poem concludes,

> He's not out
> seeing a sight but the rock
> crystal thing to see — the startling El Greco
> brimming with inner light — that
> covets nothing that it has let go. This then you may know
> as the hero. (*A-quiver* 59).

Like the Negro, the hero is above sightseeing, and like the hobo, he is unfettered by possessiveness, and like both of these, he is attached to an ambiguous pronoun. *What*, exactly, may we know as the hero? The first impersonal pronoun of the stanza suggests that it is "the rock crystal thing" that demonstrates a heroic quality, "that covets nothing that it has let go," and the second suggests that what "you may know as the hero" is actually "the rock crystal thing," or the act of seeing it, rather than the particular spectator. The final sentence's sweeping and inclusive "this" welcomes all of these possibilities - the hero as the sight, as the act of seeing, as the inner light, or even as the easy openhandedness "that covets nothing that it has let go." From the vantage of these final lines, it appears that the entire poem has been working toward a notion

of heroism that is less an identity or an ontological state than it is a particular orientation toward the world or an attitude.[287] But what is perhaps most remarkable is that in the end the hero is likened both to the perspicacious beholding of a work of art, and to the work of art itself.

***

If the student is like the hero, and the hero is like the artwork, art becomes a sphere for being a student of virtue and becoming a hero. It is moral training ground. And Moore's career bears this out. Like the hero, Moore becomes both the subject and the object of her work. Of course Moore recognizes art can obscure "inner light" as much as it might draw it out, a question she addresses in a creature poem published the same year as the "Part of a Novel, Part of a Poem, Part of a Play" series. In "The Jerboa," Moore sets the humble and noble desert rat against the pompous and reductive artistic practices of antiquity, in order to suggest not only that artistic grace requires a sort of ecological symbiosis and mutual respect between subject and object, but also such a situation is only possible through personal sympathy and engagement. The craftsmen who labor in the first half of the poem take an instrumental and domineering approach to nature, and the result is "too much" — a grotesque and excessive product that only "passed for art." These pseudo-artists "use[d] slaves, and kept crocodiles and put / baboons on the necks of giraffes to pick / fruit" and "[t]hey looked on as theirs, / impallas and onagers, the wild ostrich herd…," metonymically, the entire natural world (*A-quiver* 64-6). Against the highly-wrought artifice of this world stands the "Pharoah's rat," which though tamed, nevertheless manages to escape the aesthetic bondage suffered by so many other creatures — "no bust / of it was made, but there / was pleasure for the rat…and the jerboa, like it, / a small desert rat" that was "not famous, that / lives without water, has / happiness." (*A-quiver* 67). In fact, the very asceticism

---

[287] David, Elizabeth H., "Moore's 'The Hero'." *Explicator* 49, no. 3 (Spring 1991): 173-175.

that characterizes these rats launches the poem into rhapsodic enthusiasm:

> …Oh rest and
> joy, the boundless sand,
> the stupendous sandspout,
> no water, no palm-trees, no ivory bed,
> tiny cactus; but one would not be he
> who has nothing but plenty. (*A-quiver* 67).

The relative poverty of the rat is exultantly figured by the poem as "plenty" because in escaping the materialist aesthetic economy described in the poem's first part, that creature enjoys a naturally sympathetic and mutually respectful relationship with its environment. The Jerboa's "abundance" is not unlike the hero's covet-less openhandedness, for the desert rat mimics the formal and aesthetic qualities of its fellow creatures with an associative impermanence, which points outward rather than self-ward. Its back is "buffy-brown like the breast of the fawn-breasted / bower-bird. It hops like the fawn-breast but has / chipmunk contours - perceived as /it turns its bird head…" the pattern of its hair is "fish-shaped" and as it moves it "makes fern-seed / foot-prints with kangaroo speed." This little rat, simply by being itself, reminds one of the entire natural world which surrounds it, and it enacts these visual resemblances with reverence, as it "honors the sand by assuming its color" (*A-quiver* 68-9). [Though aspects of the rat's appearance might resemble those of other creatures, it is never anything other than the desert rat.] But the rat honors non-native things as well — its hopping "by fifths and sevenths, / in leaps of two lengths" are like the "uneven notes of the Beduin flute," its feet are like "wheel castors," its torso like a "pillar" and its feet and tale together like "a three-cornered smooth-working Chippendale / 'claw,'" and with its "match-thin hind legs" might even remind us of Marianne Moore's own slight frame. An association that exceeds mere material resemblance; for ever since 1914, when Kenneth Graham's *The Wind in the Willows* first entered the Moore's cultural repertoire, the poet had been referred to as Rat by both herself and her family (*SL* 76). It seems only reasonable that

Moore's self-referentiality in this poem should draw no attention to itself, for the aesthetic qualities lauded by "the Jerboa" honor their subject matter rather than their creators. In this sense the poem honors the jerboa by assuming its name, and although the poet herself is at the center of the poem, it isn't quite about her, at least not in a descriptive sense. We might say that Moore isn't so much the subject as the object of this poem, for while as the artist, she is directly implicated in the poem's aesthetic meditation, this poem works to abide by its own wisdom. The obliqueness of its self-reference is an aesthetic realization of the very humility so praised in the desert rat.

What we have here is the beginning of a moral self-indictment that perhaps makes its most pronounced appearance in the direct moral self-reflection of 1944's "In Distrust of Merits," though the vocative collectivity of that poem preserves some degree of indirection. Very much a wartime meditation, "In Distrust of Merits" presents a roundly skeptical vision of human moral agency; and the hope it preserves in any generally pacific vision is located in the individual. Registering and reacting to a socially and culturally charged situation of global scope, the poem vacillates between a general refrain and a startlingly personal moral interrogation. "They're fighting, fighting, fighting," the poem repeats, "

> …They're
> fighting in deserts and caves, one by
> one, in battalions and squadrons;
> they're fighting that I
> may yet recover from the disease, My
> Self; some have it lightly, some will die. "Man's
> wolf to man, and we devour
> ourselves. The emery could not
> have a greater breach in our
> defenses…[288]

[288] Moore, Marianne, *Nevertheless* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1944), 12-13. (Hereafter cited parenthetically.)

Here we see the various scales between which the poem is constantly shifting - from "they," the abstract and multiplicitous crowds off fighting elsewhere, to the defensive collective amongst which "we" stand, to the solitary self, the "I" whose disease is somehow implicated in this violent conflict. In startling overt terms, the poem as a whole sketches a moral universe in which violence and hatred issue from within the responsible individual in a manner reminiscent of Dostoyevsky's Elder Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*, who insists that every person is responsible for the state of the world and everyone in it. Like the old Russian monk, the uncharacteristic first person speaker of "In Distrust of Merits" maintains that

> There never was a war that was
> Not inward. I must
> fight till I have conquered in myself what
> causes war, but I would not believe it.
> I inwardly did nothing.
> O Iscariotlike crime! (*Nevertheless* 14)

There are of course problems with directly identifying Moore with this penitent and reflective speaker, though her own Presbyterian inclinations at least suggest that the religious idiom of this moral reflection would not be alien to the poet. Nevertheless, it is true that as her career progressed, Moore increasingly used the influence of her growing fame to stir up public support for causes she believed in; indeed, Cristanne Miller notes that "In Distrust" is the beginning of Moore's socially-minded poetic endeavors, which in later years expanded to matters of local concern.[289] In light of Moore's growing civic-mindedness, this speaker might easily be read as demonstrative, the first person pronoun serving as a morally reflective space for the reader to occupy. And yet we know, not least through her preponderance of poetic meditations of

---

[289] Miller, Cristanne, "Distrusting: Marianne Moore on Feeling and War in the 1940s," *American Literature: A Journal Of Literary History, Criticism, And Bibliography* 80, no. 2 (June 2008); Gregory, Elizabeth, "'Still Leafing': Celebrity, Confession, Marianne Moore's 'The Camperdown Elm' and the Scandal of Age," *Journal Of Modern Literature* 35, no. 3 (Spring 2012).

aesthetics and taste, that Moore's poems often touch on matters of deep personal concern to her. Indeed, Linda Leavell, in her recent and exhaustive biography of Moore, suggests that in her poetry she is at her *most* personal.[290] While the poetic form of "In Distrust of Merits" opens the possibility that its speaking "I" is a nationally infused democratic persona - a sort of collective conscious - attention to Moore's poetic practice casts the penitent humility of this speaker in the light of the poet's own postures of self-examination and correction. From the perspective of her incessantly edited oeuvre it appears that the morally reflective speaker of "In Distrust" actually *is* Moore herself.[291]

5. "Poetry" and Practice: Revision as Moral Formation

Looking only at "The Jerboa" and "In Distrust of Merits," it appears that Moore gradually cultivated a poetics of moral self-examination that moved from figurative self-inclusion to the directness of a morally reflective first person speaker. And looking even beyond these poems, the more simple and direct style of her late work does appear to abandon the impersonal idiom of her earlier work, a movement that coincided with her increasingly pronounced concern for personal morality and civic virtue.[292] But just as many readers have noted that Moore's work had been morally engaged all along, so the personal implication of that moral concern has operated since her earliest publications, though because it takes the form of practice rather than description, it is more elusive. The ethics of aesthetic production were worked out for Moore not on the published page but in the never-ending act of composition.

---

[290] Leavell, *Holding on Upside Down*, 111.

[291] Though this needn't exclude the demonstrative function of the speech. In speaking to herself, Moore is also addressing everyone. Cf. her late politically geared work.

[292] See for instance: Gregory, "'Still Leafing,'"

Though in her later years the poet would earn renown for her idiosyncratic ways — from her photographic enthusiasm for baseball and her trademark cape and tricorn, to her grandmotherly and saintly public persona — readers of her poetry locate her most outstanding (and confounding) oddity in her incessant revision and ruthless amputation of her own work. Often new printings of collections or poems served not just to sell more copies, but to allow the author to make textual changes; but this editorial impulse was not limited by publishers - Moore was happy to make changes with pen and ink to her printed work. Grace Schulman recalls how Moore once received from the poet a signed copy of *Nevertheless* "with textual insertions and deletions she had made in ink," an anecdote that might stand metonymically for Moore's textual practice; because revision is never-resting, composition is never entirely complete.[293] The textual instability produced by Moore's untiring revision gives scholars the difficult responsibility of determining which edition is, or even can be, *the* text. But far from a *problem* to be overcome by textual scholarship and variorum editions, Moore's practice of revision is actually the central feature of her poetic form; as a practical form of active engagement and self-scrutiny, it lays bare the telos of her work as moral self-formation.

The textual history of "Poetry" is so fraught with deletions, emendations, and rearrangements that, even in light of the insistent completeness of 1967's *Complete Poems* — "omissions are not accidents," its epigraph tells us — a scholar might exercise reasonable reluctance in declaring even the final authorized version to be *the* text. First appearing in the closing edition of *Others* (1919) as a five stanzas of syllabic verse, "Poetry" underwent twenty-seven subsequent printings (many with variations), and four more overhauls. While the first run of *Observations* (1924) included the same version as *Others*, the second edition published a year

---

[293] Schulman, Grace, introd. *The Poems of Marianne Moore.* (New York, NY: Viking, 2003), xviii.

later saw the poem significantly downsized from thirty to thirteen lines of free verse. Seven years later, in Harriet Monroe's anthology *The New Poetry* (1932), Moore restored the poem to its syllabic structure, but this time in three rather than five stanzas. In 1935, with the publication of *Selected Poems*, those two missing stanzas reappeared and "Poetry" looked once again like it had some sixteen years prior - similar, but not the same, for it nevertheless underwent certain slight alterations. Though this same version would appear in *Collected Poems* (1951), for Louis Zukofsky's *A Test of Poetry* (1948) Moore resurrected the three-stanza version she had given Monroe. Just when a pattern seems to emerge wherein Moore's own collections get the original and anthologies get the three stanza version, in 1961's *A Marianne Moore Reader*, she completely excludes "Poetry" altogether. Finally, in 1967, for *Complete Poems*, Moore famously shaved the poem down to a mere three lines, while nevertheless including the five-stanza "longer version" in the endnotes, a gesture that "saves the serious reader from looking these things up as they were."[294] Jeffery Peterson observes that this "final" gesture acts as "a radical enactment of [its textual] movement," animating, if not representing, the poem's protean history .[295] But this metonymic inclusion of an alternate version directs "the serious reader" to examine not just the included alternate, but all alternate versions, and even more broadly, the practice and significance of revision itself. When read in light of its original poetic statement, which we only began to limn above, each major overhaul of "Poetry" functions as an enactment of not only Moore' poetic ideal of restless self-effacement and reconfiguration, but also of her moral ideals of humility and changeability.

---

[294] Schulman qtd. in Peterson, Jeffrey D, "Notes on the Poem(s) 'Poetry': The Ingenuity of Moore's Poetic 'Place'" in *Marianne Moore: Woman and Poet*, ed. Patricia Willis (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine, 1990): 223. See also: Honigsblum, Bonnie, "Marianne Moore's Revisions of 'Poetry'" in *Marianne Moore: Woman and Poet*, ed. Patricia Willis (Orono: ME, National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine, 1990): 185-222.

[295] Peterson, "The Ingenuity of Moore's Poetic 'Place'," 238.

We will recall that in 1919, "Poetry," which aligned itself with "the genuine," invoked that category only to mystify it, concluding that all the things we would have thought to be genuine (the bat, the baseball fan, the wild horse taking a roll) were actually just the raw material of poetry. We can "demand" the genuine, even though we aren't quite sure what it is, just as we can be "interested in poetry," even if we don't yet "have it." Part of the reason for this dearth, the poem suggests, is that poetry as a concrete object (like "Poetry" as a single text) isn't really something one can possess, but is rather, like "the genuine," almost impossibly relational. For the poem tells us we will only "have it" when our autocrats become "'literalists of the imaginations'" who present "imaginary gardens with real toads in them." The enigmatic topography presented in this statement suggests that the genuine is ontologically opposed to stable categories, and is less an object to be defined than a relational state to be enacted. The text stipulates that when it is held in contempt poetry can create "a place for the genuine." Poetry also requires "raw material," which might involve but does not guarantee "the genuine." As the stuff of which it is apparently composed, this "raw material" necessarily occupies a space in poetry, meaning that raw material *becomes* genuine only when held in contempt. While it offers little in the way of strict definitions, "Poetry" does, as Bonnie Costello observes, illustrate a relationship between its ambiguous elements, and we see this exemplified not only by the terminological algebra the poem demands of us, but also in the "imaginary gardens" formulation, where the raw materiality of "real toads" occupied the genuine space of "imaginary gardens," where the croakers become relationally but not ontologically "genuine." Like God to the apophatic theologian, or like Mr. Rainier to Marianne Moore, the fluctuating genuine can only be invoked or experienced, it can never be named.[296] "Poetry" is able to cast the "raw material" of its lists as

"genuine" only by insisting that it not be high-soundingly interpreted or "dragged into prominence" — the final schism between these two categories preserves "the genuine" by insisting that it not to be mistaken for the material itself. "The genuine" cannot be embodied, though embodied can be genuine. Poetry, in this equation, becomes problematic insofar as it encourages the erroneous equation of raw material with the relational or conditional quality of "the genuine." The poem, we might conclude, is a means rather than an end, and contempt is a method for ensuring that we keep the distinction clear. What exactly is entailed by reading "with perfect contempt," however, remains an open question.

Because it presents itself as a poetic manifesto, "Poetry" is often read in prescriptive or theoretical terms. Approaching the poem in its descriptive capacity, however, sheds light on both its theoretical assertions and its subsequent history of revision. For even in 1919, "Poetry" itself enacts the contempt it prescribes - "I too, dislike it," we are told, as our brains search for an antecedent that might as easily be poetry in a generic sense as this poem in particular. In fact, the later reading is much more consonant with Moore's actual attitudes toward that broad literary genre called poetry, which her own reading and reviewing prove she certainly did not dislike. Indeed, when we consider the numerous critical revisitations Moore would make to "Poetry," we might well suspect that what she really dislikes is this poem itself, which never seems to get quite right (or never should). "Contempt" might then involve the exercise of discriminating aesthetic judgement, which Moore both assumes and encourages in the reader, who "too" occupies this discriminating posture.[297] Patrick Redding attributes Moore's revisions of the poem

---

[296] I owe parts of this reading to the insights of Elizabeth Gregory: See Gregory, Elizabeth, *Quotation and Modern American Poetry: Imaginary Gardens with Real Toads* (Houston, TX: Rice University Press, 1996), 156.

[297] Such discrimination is the hallmark of not only Moore's poetry, but also her editorial work, as Evan Kindley points out: Kindley, Evan, "Picking and Choosing: Marianne Moore among the Agonists," *ELH* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2012).

to this cooperative posture, arguing that many of her most radical changes reflect a sort of participation in public taste where Moore amended her work in accordance with negative reviews.[298] While such an argument assumes that Moore took negative criticism so personally that she altered her work in response, attention to the original theoretical assertion of the poem suggest that such a response might be for the sake of integrity rather than mere accommodation. For if poetry's capacity for the "the genuine" is threatened by "high-sounding interpretation" and "prominence," "Poetry"'s delicate presentation of it would certainly have been threatened by the prominence into which it was dragged, along with all the other poems in *Observations*, when in between its first and second printings, that collection won the prestigious Dial Award. If we read "Poetry" as an aesthetic credo, Moore's drastic overhaul of the poem for the second edition of *Observations* comes as little surprise, in that effort the poet is practicing the contempt (both of "Poetry" and of "prominence") that was preached in the original composition. If within the text of the original poem the "place for the genuine" is endangered by its near equation with a set of stable referents, the prominence accompanying the receipt of the Dial Award has similarly endangered the entire poem. Where in 1919 the stabilizing category of poetry was held in contempt and deliberately eschewed (perhaps only) within the text in the interest of honoring the fluctuation of "the genuine," now the poem as a whole is held in contempt, for real-life prominence has officialized it as poetry. Operating by the poetic logic set out in the original version, revision becomes theoretically realized aesthetic practice, and the function of the poem shifts from explication to active illustration. The original poetic presentation of ornately fashioned syallabics is thus repudiated by the move to more direct free verse.[299] And because the

---

[298] Redding, Patrick, "'One Must Make a Distinction, However': Marianne Moore and Democratic Taste," *Twentieth Century Literature* 58, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 323.

poem is no longer concerned with delineating a relationship, but instead with radically enacting it, the discussion of "the genuine" and "the raw material of poetry" have no place – they are abandoned. And in accordance with the dialectic of the original, the formula of "imaginary gardens with real toads in them" is offered its antithesis. "Enigmas are not poetry," for the same reason that "raw materials" are not "the genuine;" while the enigmatic "imaginary gardens" and "real toads" may illustrate the relationship between material and "the genuine," the moment the formula becomes stabilized as "poetry," it becomes resistant to the latter, and collapses.

The precedent established by the relational dynamic of these two versions, where the text must be perpetually reconfigured in the interest of "the genuine," sheds much light on the ensuing publication history of "Poetry."[300] Of course, by the time of its next publication, 1925's free verse iteration has become overwrought, and 1932 sees a reversion to syllabics with a significant downsizing to three stanzas. Continuing to read the poem's textual history through the lens of dialectic, the radical negation enacted in 1925 has allowed for a synthetic return to categorical discussion, but now integrating the general suspicion of poetry of the original with the focused self-castigation manifest in the first revision. Here we are again prompted to read with "perfect contempt," but the "half poets" who formerly "dragged [poetry] into prominence" now drag it "into conscious oddity" – a phrase difficult not to read as self-indictment from the poet interested in snails and steamrollers, "Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns." This fusion of suspicion of categories and suspicion of the self progresses the poem from a mere "interest" in "poetry" to a "liking" for it. The third version also inaugurates a new dynamic between multiple texts in circulation. Where the second revision functioned essentially as a replacement for the

---

[299] Honigsblum, "Marianne Moore's Revisions of 'Poetry'," 207.

[300] Ibid.. Bonnie Honigsblum has helpfully compiled a variorum of the poem's many instantiations. See Honingsblum, "Marianne Moore's Revisions of 'Poetry'," 203-222.

first, a new edition to take the place of an old one, the third version is published in a volume not intended to supplant but to supplement. Subsequent revisions follow this pattern, five-stanza syllabics in 1935, three-stanza syllabics in 1948, and five-stanza syllabics again in 1951, all in autonomous editions. Instead of finite destruction and recreation then, Moore now juggles multiple versions at the same time, allowing for synchronic fluctuation that resists stabilization by rejecting singularity. This cyclical process of incessant revision, or movement from one extant text to another, is threatened in 1952, when the five-stanza version is again dragged into prominence with Moore's receipt of the Pulitzer Prize for 1951's *Collected Poems*. If the Dial award prompted the initial radical revision, the prestige of the Pulitzer calls for an even more extreme act of antithetical negation – in 1961's *A Marianne Moore Reader*, Moore excludes entirely what has become her most anthologized poem.

After this act of radical exclusion, the stage is set for Moore's most drastic revisional reduction and innovative inclusion to date; in *Complete Poems* (1967) the poem is slashed down to its first three lines, with the explanation that "the rest of it seems to be padding," and a rendition of the five-stanza original is appended in the endnotes.[301] With the inclusion of not one but two versions of "Poetry," Moore encapsulates a microcosm of textual interplay in which the fluctuation of "the genuine" is manifest but not isolated. In this interplay, the hierarchy that the two texts establish is telling, for the poem presented as primary (as opposed to addenda) is merely the epigram that produced the bulk of the original poem. As the above discussion has indicated, everything that follows the original epigram is only an attempt to clarify and exemplify it, and this effort, because of the very nature of "the genuine," must forever renew itself. Thus the epigram is the most stable element of the poem, for it is a directive which, when

[301] Schulman, qtd. in Peterson, "The Ingenuity of Moore's Poetic 'Place'," 223.

followed to its logical conclusion, will always destroy its own illustration. According to Moore's aesthetic, then, and in defiance of detractors like Hugh Kenner who rue her violent destruction of the original, the final version is the truly the most successful, for it is the lasting kernel that produces illustration, destruction, creation, and revision ad infinitum.[302] Of course, this would not be evident without enacting the actual destruction of the illustration, and thus the longer version is included only for the sake of its own undoing. It is relegated to the endnotes because it is only one iteration of an illustration that is necessarily transient, and in this respect is inferior to the isolated utterance that produces it. While isolation has been clearly demonstrated to be the enemy of "the genuine," the epigram is able to be isolated because it is not itself an isolating mechanism, but one that will rather perpetuate the eschewal of isolation. Rather ironically, the thing Moore finally pins down in her pursuit of "the genuine" is the one element of the poem that ensures and facilitates its movement, and the operation of this pinning down is only valuable insofar as the excised version remains in dialogue with its previous counterparts. And strangely, the lacuna of the three line version where illustration was once presented may indicate the closest Moore has yet come to "the genuine;" for where "perfect contempt" creates "a place for the genuine," here is contempt at its pinnacle, utterly destroying the now ossified and fallacious illustration of "the genuine" in order to create its perfect place. It is the blank page, then, whose blankness is underscored by comparison to the addendum, which perfectly facilitates "the genuine" by representing a space of endless possibility that is impossible to stabilize. If "the genuine" is a paradoxically elusive quality, which is least present when it is most represented, then conversely, when instead of concrete attempts to illustrate it, the poem embraces a void of sheer potentiality, we most nearly have it. At this point we might recall a much later poem of

---

[302] Kenner, *A Homemade World*, 107.

Moore's which expresses this very relationship; the myriad attempts at reworking "Poetry" in an attempt to approach "the genuine," an effort that ultimately satisfies itself in a silence closer to the thing itself than any words could be, is not unlike the sea in a chasm in "What Are Years?" which "in its surrendering/Finds its continuing" (*Complete Poems* 95). It is the moment Moore follows her own advice most rigorously, and contemptuously destroys her poetically constructed "place for the genuine," that "the genuine" comes most fully into being.

Reading the revision history of "Poetry" with an eye to its own proclaimed poetic standards, Moore's practice turns out to be much more concentrated and complexly intentional than previous critics have indicated. Contrary to Hugh Kenner's indictment that Moore merely "fussed with" "Poetry," frequently "deprived it" of its original contents and schema, and ultimately offered a "calamitous reworking" in 1967, when reading the protean textual history of the poem as not mere revision, but as poetic practice, the truth appears much more multifarious.[303] And while Robin Schulze reads at least one of Moore's revisions as a manifestation of changing attitudes toward a poem's subject (in the case of "The Frigate Pelican," to Wallace Stevens), and while Andrew Kappel sees in Moore's reductions a deference arising out of mourning for her mother's prizing of the succinct, the creative choices involved in each revision of "Poetry" do not merely mark changes in the historical poet's attitude arising from personal circumstances, but illustrate a general sensibility concerning poetry's function and responsibility.[304] And insofar as "Poetry" might speak to Moore's entire *oeuvre*, revisions and all, one might wonder whether these changes are also an expression of a much more far-reaching

---

[303] Ibid.

[304] Schulze, Robin Gail, "'The Frigate Pelican's Progress: Marianne Moore's Multiple Versions and Modernist Practice," in *Gendered Modernisms: American Women Poets and Their Readers*, ed. Margaret Dickie and Thomas Travisano (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Kappel, Andrew J., "Complete with Omissions: The Text of Marianne Moore's Complete Poems," In *Representing Modernist Texts: Editing as Interpretation*, ed. George Bornstein (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 140.

sensibility, a valuation of Moore's conception of poetry as an essentially liquid art.

If Moore's unrelenting revision asserts a poetry that is fundamentally dynamic and necessarily protean, this posture works its way back to the poet herself, establishing a view of authorship that values intentional and continued involvement as a way of resisting the same petrifaction that threatens poetry (in both senses) as well as the genuine. As Elizabeth Gregory explains in her discussion of Moore's relationship with authority, by repeatedly revising "Poetry" the poet "puts herself in play. The woman who felt free enough to relegate "Poetry," her most authoritative poem, to the notes in the back of the book … then did the same with herself. …Moore moved in an arena where she was the text, open to multiple readings."[305] And of course when we recall how Moore's most drastic rewritings coincide with public recognition, we must acknowledge that that recognition is of both the poetry as well as of the poet; if fame threatens to petrify the poem, how much more the author, who becomes attached to the single work written at a particular time and published at specific moment. But Moore's revision of "Poetry," the one poem above all that we might expect to "define" the poet, confounds attempts to fix the biographical self at some moment in time – we cannot simply describe the Moore of "Poetry " as early or late in the sense that we might speak of a number of other writers (Eliot, Pound, Joyce, Woolf, etc.). These revisions establish both the poem and the poetic self as always under the mark of change, always about to be rewritten, so at the same time that its textual history offers a sort of biography of the poem, it also renders it ever open and future looking. ~

***

When Moore revised "The Student," for inclusion in 1941's *What Are Years?*, she likewise excised much of the illustration, though certain key phrases remain. The student still moves

---

[305] Gregory, Elizabeth, "Stamps, Money, Pop Culture, and Marianne Moore." *Discourse: Journal For Theoretical Studies In Media And Culture* 17, no. 1 (Fall 1994), 242.

among the same lofty college mottoes, still smiles when told that "'science / is never finished,'" though now we're not told who says this, still is rendered heroic, and still bears intensity of feeling with reticent aloofness. Of the three poems that made up "Part of a Novel, Part of a Poem, Part of a Play," "The Student" is the only one to be republished in a discrete collection (as opposed to a comprehensive selection), giving it the appearance of lateness that belies the fact that of the three, it was the most revisited.[306] In 1956 Moore returns again to the student and the school. In "In the Public Garden," Moore, on a taxi-ride from Back Bay neighborhood of Boston to Cambridge, is told how fine young men are made at Harvard, and reminiscing on "the summer when Faneuil Hall / had its weathervane with gold ball and grasshopper, gilded again by a –leaver and –jack," she recalls her own triptych about college towns, students, heroes, and steeple-jacks.[307] If this self-referentiality that opens this late poem makes it seem that Moore is talking to herself, the vocative description of the ensuing lines literalize that impression. "Despite secular bustle, let me enter King's Chapel" the poet says to herself, "to hear them sing: 'My work be praise while / others go and come…'"[308] From this space Moore meditates on a confluence of occasions - the Arts Festival that brought her to Boston, the chapel in which she sits, the school that was earlier invoked, and her own existence:

> A Chapel or a festival
> Means giving what is mutual,
> Even if irrational:

---

[306] "The Steeple-Jack" and "The Hero" make appearances in 1935's *Selected Poems* and that collection's 1951 reframing, *Collected Poems*, in both cases with little change.

[307] As shall become increasingly clear, the remarks and observations of this speaker are so continuous with the speaking persona of Moore's oeuvre we shall dispense with the critical convention of author/speaker distinction in favor of an identification that Moore's own body of work suggests we make. Linda Leavell suggests that Moore's poetry is the best place to look for personal information, though many the preponderance of critics tend to think of Moore as fashioning a persona rather than a self in her poetry.

[308] Moore, Marianne, *O to Be a Dragon* (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1959), 20. (Hereafter cited parenthetically and abbreviated *Dragon*.)

Black sturgeon-eggs — a camel
From Hamadan, Iran;
A jewel, or, what is more unusual,

silence — after a word-waterfall of the banal —
as unattainable
as freedom. And what is freedom for?
For "self-discipline," as our
Hardest working citizen has said — a school; (*Dragon* 20-1)

This school seems almost monastic, wherein the freedom of self-control and perhaps silence can be cultivated; it is almost like the chapel in which Moore sits. Appropriate both to the locale and to Moore's own esteem for humility, the poem reports that "this" particular utterance is "no madrigal — no medieval gradual," but a "grateful tale —

without that radiance which poets
are supposed to have —
unofficial, unprofessional. But still one need not fail

to wish poetry well
where intellect is habitual —
glad that the Muses have a home and swans —
that legend can be factual;
happy that Art, admired in general,
is always actually personal. (*Dragon* 21)

In the chapel, her reflections turn from the morally formative power of the school ("What was I studying? Values in use" Moore pithily remarks in another poem) to her own career as a poet, which has been a space for habituating intellectual rigor and generosity in a manner that she frankly admits has been personal. From the vantage of Moore's entire career, this convergence — of the chapel, the school, freedom, self-discipline, and art — appears as personal as the revisions of "Poetry," for all along she has been turning over the chapel, the school, the poem; morality, knowledge, art. Indeed, *O to be a Dragon,* asserts the fundamental personality of Moore's art not just in its poetic utterances, but in the editorial decisions behind it. Where poems like "In a Public Garden" present a complex of concerns that have preoccupied Moore since her

earliest years as a poet, her decision to publish “A Jellyfish” presents that young poet herself. This little number, with its simple, elegant, and naturally inspired movement between the material and immaterial, metonymically suggests the thrust of Moore’s entire career — “visible, invisible;” nature, spirit; world, self. She wrote it in 1909, during her final semester at Bryn Mawr, and in 1956 published it alongside such personality asserting poems as “In a Public Garden,” leaving little doubt that the personality Moore is describing here is her own, which she had been revisiting, revising, and reforming all along through her ever-changing poetry.

FOUR

"the dogma of the self at work": Melvin Tolson's Poetics of Autobiographical Address

1. Institutional Tolson, Biographical Tolson

Melvin B. Tolson spent virtually his entire life in educational institutions. His father Alonzo, an autodidact who taught himself Hebrew, Greek and Latin and later became a Methodist minister, understood learning and morality to be inseparable, even if his "independent educational efforts…made him skeptical of the value of a formal education."[309] Though in his own lifetime, Melvin Tolson went on to pursue formal education at the advanced level, spent his entire career teaching college and even received two honorary doctoral degrees, the son nevertheless inherited his father's ambivalence toward the university. While he recognized the economic value of advanced degrees, Tolson remained dubious about the value of such achievements as anything other than mere credentials. This ambivalence was born out not only in his personal behavior, but also in his expressed opinions. Though having completed course and thesis work toward an M.A. in English at Columbia University in 1932, Tolson apparently didn't hold his degree in very high regard; it took him nearly a decade to file to receive the degree, and only then because his then employer Wiley College became concerned enough about accreditation to pressure him into acquiring the document.[310] What Tolson practiced, he also preached. Though he urged all of his sons to pursue "that union card, the Ph.D.," he never

[309] Farnsworth, Robert M., *Melvin B. Tolson, 1898-1966: Plain Talk and Poetic Prophecy* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1984), 7.

[310] Farnsworth, *Plain Talk and Poetic Prophecy,* 40.

allowed them to mistake their institutional achievements for intellectual ones; as his biographer Richard Farnsworth remarks, "[l]ater in life, Tolson, proud of his sons' academic achievements, would still boast that no matter how many Ph.D.'s they got, they would never catch him."[311]

But if Tolson's expressed attitude toward higher education pictures him as his father's son, dubious about the intellectual need for formal education, his lifetime of affiliation shows, if not a streak of rebellion, then certainly a difference in orientation and approach. While Alonzo's circumspection was built upon institutional remoteness, having altogether avoided institutions of higher education, Melvin's issues from the intimate knowledge that comes of institutional participation; for from his early teens onward, Tolson both enjoyed and was profoundly indebted to formal educational structures. Though like his father he was ever the autodidact, unlike the Reverend Alonzo, Tolson learned his Latin and Greek at Lincoln High School, an institution "thoroughly in the black liberal arts tradition, steeped in classics, religion, language, and oratory," which ably prepared him for success at his homonymic *alma mater* in Pennsylvania, where four years' training in either ancient language were required for entrance.[312] Both Lincoln University, where Tolson earned a degree in theology and journalism (with honors), and Fisk University, where he spent his freshmen year, were also steeped in this black liberal arts tradition.[313] Like many similar historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), these schools were remarkable both in their preservation of a classical curriculum and in their infusion of this tradition with contemporary social, economic, and religious concerns.[314] Exploring

---

[311] Farnsworth, *Plain Talk and Poetic Prophecy,* 101.

[312] Gold, David, "'Nothing Educates Us Like a Shock': The Integrated Rhetoric of Melvin B. Tolson," *College Composition And Communication* 55, no. 2 (December 2003), 230.

[313] Farnsworth suggests that Tolson's move from Fisk to Lincoln wasn't academically but financially motivated. Farnsworth, *Plain Talk and Poetic Prophecy,* 23-24.

Tolson's biography as an educator, David Gold remarks that at schools like Lincoln, "the classical liberal arts tradition [not only] persisted well into the 1920s, with Latin and Greek retained as part of the standard curriculum long after such courses had been dropped from the requirements at elite white schools," but this tradition was directed toward the cultivation of communal and civic responsibility. Educational historians Julian Roebuck and Komanduri Murti discern this social orientation in contemporary campus literature, observing that "the goals described in black college catalogs, unlike those of white schools, stress preparation for student leadership and service role in the black community;" they emphasize the maintenance of "the black historical and cultural tradition (and cultural influences emanating from the black community) by preserving and acting as a repository of material records…" and the provision of "black role models in the black community who can interpret the way in which social, political, or economic dynamics at the general society level impact on black people [sic]."[315] The nearly four decades Tolson spent teaching and writing at such institutions, first at Wiley College then at Langston University, is itself a testament to how these goals were synthesized with the Western intellectual tradition in historically black colleges. As Gold argues, Tolson's "blend of racial pride, radical Christianity, philological rigor, and liberatory rhetoric changed student's lives" by shocking, unsettling, and engaging them in a manner as indebted to Socrates and Diogenes as it is to the African American rhetorical tradition.[316] Or as Lena Hill remarks, Tolson's "classroom was home to strains of his radical politics and evolving aesthetic, ideas that mingled seamlessly

---

[314] Roebuck, Julian B. and Komanduri Srinivasa Murty, *Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Their Place in American Higher Education* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 1993), 22, 24. Lincoln was founded by the Presbyterian church, and Fisk by the American Missionary Association.

[315] Ibid.,10.

[316] Gold, "'Nothing Educates Us Like a Shock'," 228, 236.

with his instruction and praise of Western Literature."[317] Though the teacher-poet took a rather different career path than his preacher-father, the vitally social and personal concerns toward which Tolson directed ancient texts and traditions strikingly mirrors the way his father translated his own scholarly pursuits into a vocation similarly invested in effecting communities and changing lives.

This persistent concern with the urgent personal and communal matters of what we might call "real life" that Tolson stressed in his teaching was thus inherited from the earlier religiously inflected sensibility of his father and cultivated by the socially minded liberal arts programs of HBCUs. And the poet's dedication to such concerns fittingly extended well beyond his rhetorical strategies and classroom persona. Just how much Tolson blurred the division between the classroom and real life can be seen in his years coaching the Wiley Forensic Society, the college debate team which he also founded. For most of the 1940s, when he wasn't teaching, Tolson was traveling up, down, and across the country with the Wiley debaters, not only rigorously preparing for their numerous triumphs, but also navigating precarious racial tensions and practically demonstrating the social attitudes he conveyed in the classroom. Hobart Jarrett, the debater who spearheaded Wiley's famous victory over USC in 1935, later that same year described how Tolson's coaching cultivated social equality across the board. On the one hand, Jarrett observes that "though there was a time when white colleges thought that debating against a Negro institution was mental dissipation, that has passed forever. Negro teams have shown that they are as capable as their white opponents despite the library handicaps which limit research." On the other hand, he recounts how "[o]n a debate tour out in West Texas, Coach Tolson and the white mentor [traveling with the team] sleep and eat together. The white coach is passing as a

[317] Hill, Lena M., *Visualizing Blackness and the Creation of the African American Literary Tradition.* Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 153.

mulatto and having great fun. Then the colored hostess discovers that he is white and asks coach Tolson if he wants to get all three of them lynched for practicing social equality…"[318] The intellectual social equality that Tolson practiced on the institutional field of intercollegiate debate was thus also practiced personally, both in the private spaces of paper-strewn hotel rooms and in public ones like diners.

It is no wonder that many members of these teams - including Jarrett, Benjamin Bell, and James Farmer - became lasting friends of Tolson's. And this influence was not limited to the debate team; Farnsworth describes the lasting effect Tolson had throughout the entire college:

> Tolson made sure that the college and his students were part of his family life as well. Many of Tolson's students speak of him has a strong father figure, and he treated them often as if they were family. His courses were seldom confined to narrow professional topics. He scolded and cajoled his students about their manners and attitudes, their ambitions, and particularly their self perceptions.[319]

These postures and practices made him so famous that in the mid forties Langston Hughes declared Tolson to be "the most famous Negro professor in the Southwest. Students all over that part of the world speak of him, revere him, remember him, and love him….It is not just English he teaches, but character, and manhood, and womanhood, and love, and courage, and pride."[320] Education for Tolson entails much more than either detached intellectual inquiry or pragmatic vocational preparation; what he offered in and out of the classroom is more akin to the ancient notion of *paideia* as social, ethical, and cultural formation than academic training.

But to the extent that it is pervasive, this concern for "real life" also gave way to a certain tension in Tolson's relationship to institutional study; for while his work in and beyond the

---

[318] Jarrett, Hobart, "Adventures in Interracial Debates" in *Crisis* (New York) August, 1935, 240.

[319] Farnsworth, *Plain Talk and Poetic Prophecy*, 102, 51; see also: Gold, "'Nothing Educates Us Like a Shock'," 238.

[320] Hughes, Langston, "Here to Yonder," *Chicago Defender* (Chicago, IL), Aug. 15 1945.

classroom opens out onto life (action?), the paradigm of the modern university, as we have seen in the preceding chapters, tends to foreclose, circumscribe, and dissect it. This tension is registered both in Tolson's own observations about his college education, as well as in his literary endeavors. We see it, for instance, in *Caviar and Cabbage*, where in one article he recollects the shock of the real world beyond the hallowed halls of the university:

> College economics taught me nothing about everyday economics. Yet the late Justice Brandeis commended me as a college debater. Something was wrong! …Negro misleaders hadn't told me anything about the class struggle. I'd thought that whites were always arrayed against blacks. I didn't know that the class struggle between Capital and Labor breaks down racial barriers. Then years later I understood. But I didn't learn the lesson in either college or the university. Now I know WHY the workers strike. They want to live.[321]

Later in the same article he asserts that it isn't "Reds" but "bad working conditions [that] start strikes," tacitly suggesting that college economics considered strikes to arise from workers' ideological commitments, and overtly suggesting that such movements are rooted more in active natural responses to experienced conditions than ideological explanations of them. Despite its explanatory power, the abstracted opposition between capital and labor fails to adequately translate into human categories, and it is this failure that betrays the spuriousness of such oppositions as black and white. Such racial dichotomies, Tolson came to believe, were mostly functions of material inequality; that the opposition of such falsely-idealized categories could be overcome by experience he learned precisely through his experience organizing sharecropper unions in Texas, where he witnessed directly their flimsiness.

But we cannot fail to recognize that this attitude was also voiced within the academy by Oliver Cromwell Cox, who joined the Wiley faculty in 1938, carrying a still-warm doctorate from the University of Chicago. Cox's first major monograph, *Caste, Class, and Race* (1948),

---

[321] Tolson, Melvin B., *Caviar and Cabbage*, ed. Robert M. Farnsworth (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1982), 263-265. (hereafter cited parenthetically and abbreviated as CC).

which argues that race is an economic category that derives from the capitalist need to designate a large people group as a source of cheap labor, was the fruit of ten years' discussion between its author, Tolson, and three of their Wiley colleagues.[322] That this book, which Tolson naturally held in high regard, was generated under the auspices of the same institution that perpetuated the conceptions Cox refutes suggests that higher education is at once the locus of a faulty superimposition of the ideal onto the real *and* the venue for correction of this error. The sundering of illusory oppositions Tolson experienced working with share-croppers in real life can thus operate within the fraught structures of higher education which initially advance those distinctions. Fittingly, not only in his career as a teacher and poet, but in every aspect of his life, Tolson worked to undermine not only the false oppositions between high and low, black and white, native and foreign, but more importantly the opposition between thought and life of which, as I argue his work demonstrates, the others are merely a symptom.

2. The Gradual Recollection of Melvin B. Tolson

It is not terribly surprising that with the exception of Farnsworth's exceptional biography and the earlier effort of Joy Flasch, literary criticism has been woefully unconcerned with Tolson's remarkable life, preoccupied as criticism have been with the conditions and implications of the poet's reception. Happily, and not insignificantly, one aspect of that life - Tolson's careers as the Wiley debate coach - has recently been reawakened to public interest, and without the help of either Farnsworth or Michael Berubé, Tolson's most notable recent critic.[323] In 2007 Oprah Winfrey's production company Harpo released *The Great Debaters*, a film that

---

[322] Cox, Oliver C., *Caste, Class & Race: A Study In Social Dynamics* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1948).

[323] Though criticism itself has recently reawakened to Melvin Tolson, (as will soon be shown) Berubé is not only the first writer to dedicate much of a monograph to his work, but he is also the one most responsible for that critical revival. See: Bérubé, Michael, *Marginal Forces/Cultural Centers: Tolson, Pynchon, and the Politics of the Canon* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

narrates the institutional, racial, social, and personal triumphs that Tolson achieved as he led the Wiley team to the repeated victories that culminated in their besting of USC in 1935 (though in good Hollywood fashion, that school is refashioned as Harvard for greater pathos). The film was nominated for several Image awards, as well as the Golden Globe, grossing some thirty million dollars. Those who would never have heard of Melvin Tolson now knew him not as the author of *Harlem Gallery* or *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia*, but as the coach of the Wiley Forensic Society. If any writer is to take credit for this explosion in recognition, it would be Tony Scherman, whose 1997 article about Tolson's debate career was published in *American Legacy Magazine*, and subsequently read by professional speech writer Jeff Porro, who teamed up with his old college buddy and sometime screen writer Robert Eislele to transform the article into a film script that brought Denzel Washington to tears.[324] Naturally, he decided to direct and star in the piece. And despite its industry-standard factual deviations, the final product portrays with much accuracy the spirit of Tolson's personality recorded by his biographers Farnsworth and Flash - a garrulous, quick-witted, intense, polymath , a social and educational idealist with a great sensitivity to language and justice.

Though he had been writing poetry for five years before the events depicted in *The Great Debaters*, and although his chief legacy is a literary one, nowhere in the film is it suggested that whatever future fame Tolson would enjoy owes to the poetry he was then beginning to produce. Indeed, in all the talk around the movie, no one seems much interested in the fact that the central energies of Tolson's life, as he himself conceived of them, were directed toward the literary. In one sense this omission is entirely understandable, since Melvin Tolson's life is nothing if not

---

[324] Eboch, Douglas and Ken Aguado, "Tales from the trenches: Robert Eisele pitches 'The Great Debaters,'" *Hollywood Journal*, last modified September 5, 2014, http://hollywoodjournal.com/industry-impressions/tales-from-the-trenches-robert-eisele-pitches-the-great-debaters/20140905/

various. We have seen already his dynamism, innovation, and influence in the classroom, but in addition to being a teacher Tolson was also a scholar. The first to address in academic and substantial fashion the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance, the thesis Tolson worked on from the early 30s to 1940, *The Harlem Group of Negro Writers*, remains illuminating both as an historical and as a scholarly document, "historicizing a movement contemporary with its own creation," as its editor Edward Mullen points out.[325] *The Great Debaters* captures the academic intersection of Tolson's scholarly rigor, dynamic rhetorical posture, and his political convictions by paralleling his debate career with his activities organizing and attempting to unionize share-croppers, but this point of convergence opens out onto several endeavors that the film overlooks. His concern for social justice, for instance, was underscored and expanded by Tolson's extended journalistic output; the seven years of his *Washington Tribune* column *Caviar and Cabbage* range from socialist visions of Christianity and political and economic reflections, to moral philosophy and literary criticism.

And his collegiate and political engagements continued to develop in later decades, often dovetailing and merging with his literary interests. In the late 1930s, when Tolson was composing plays and becoming increasingly interested in the theater, he founded The Log Cabin Players at Wiley, helped organize the Southern Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts, and later at Langston University brought all the demanding energy that propelled the Wiley debaters to directing Langston's Dust Bowl Players in productions like Sartre's *No Exit* and Hughes' *Simply Heaven* (111, 212).[326] That same summer of 1947 when Tolson moved from Wiley to Langston, Oklahoma he was also installed as the Poet Laureate of Liberia, a title which

---

[325] Tolson, Melvin B., *The Harlem Group of Negro Writers*. Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies, ed. Edward J. Mullen (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 2001), 11.

[326] Farnsworth, *Plain Talk and Poetic Prophecy*, 111, 212.

occasioned one of his most remarkable poems, *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia*. The year following its publication saw not only several positive reviews of the ode, but a recognition of Tolson's civic dedication - he was elected mayor of Langston, an office to which he would hold for four consecutive terms. Amplifying Hughes' earlier praise of Tolson's teaching, an article published in the *Oklahoma Black Dispatch* just before his third election proclaimed

> It is not often that a city is fortunate enough to have as its mayor an individual of international importance. Mayor Melvin B. Tolson, author, playwright, and poet laureate of Liberia, is well known on three continents. Last year he was the invited guest of President Tubman and was given acclaim by thousands who visited Monrovia at that time…[Yet] Mayor Tolson honors the town rather than the town honoring Dr. Tolson [sic], whose erudition and learning have been turned during the past two years to sound municipal planning and urban growth… [327]

Both Tolson's nomination as Liberian Laureate and his election as Langston's mayor are closely bound up with his literary interests, for as the article suggests, these titles owe something to his achieved notoriety, and in turn they serve to advance his literary reputation by increasing his general distinction and thereby enlarging his circle of potential readers. But influence flows also in the other direction, as the following pages will discuss, for Tolson's later poetry is marked by an increasing interest in political and social orders, from nationhood to racial, aesthetic, and cultural systems.

Because for the several decades following his death in 1965, what legacy Tolson had arose from his poetic corpus, it naturally fell to literary critics to both preserve and champion that legacy. Though his work was generally met with critical accolades at the time of its publication, for reasons that are in part historical and in part institutional, it fell into relative critical neglect after his death. Though scholars have been steadily calling for increased attention to Tolson's exceptional work since the late 1960s, not until the 1990s did that attention begin to swell, when

---

[327] Farnsworth, *Plain Talk and Poetic Prophecy*, 211.

critics like Michael Berubé began examining the conditions and possible causes of earlier critical disregard. The past twenty years have seen a relative explosion of work on Tolson, and in a very real sense the sheer fact of *The Great Debaters*, for all its rather understandable and historically reasonable neglect of his poetry, is a sign of criticism's success in establishing Tolson as the major figure his work has always suggested he was. Indeed, what the film's epilogue tells us, that [Tolson became a great poet], is the very condition this film's possibility; without his poetic achievement, and the critically guarded and promoted reputation that followed it, popular music and culture writer Tony Scherman would never have happened upon this other, earlier aspect of the poet's life. Which is to say, the recently blossoming and markedly non-academic interest in Tolson's extracurricular, non-poetic activities was made possible only by the dogged efforts of scholars to preserve Tolson in cultural memory.

But if the popular biographical interest in the poet depends upon the continual and accretive literary interest of academic critics, this popular interest also offers an incisive corrective to criticism's reduction of Tolson not just to a handful of his poems, but to the terms and conversations surrounding his reception. By and large, critical discussions of Tolson have tended to eschew the personal by reducing his work to racial, political, or discursive generalities. For early readers of Tolson, this reduction was affected by reading aesthetics solely in terms of racial politics with the implicit goal of either advocating or denouncing him as an ideological representative. One can see this as clearly in the plaudits of Allen Tate and Karl Shapiro as in the heated criticism of Sarah Webster Fabio; where the first extol Tolson as a racial hero whose synthesis of black folk idioms and modernist style somehow marks him as more authentically Negro, the second decries his academic style for not being Negro enough.[328] Michael Berubé's

---

[328] Introducing *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia*, Tate explains: "It seems to me that the main thing is the poetry,

later observation that such debates tend to revolve around the terms of Tolson's reception rather than the substance of his poetry emphasizes how criticism often subordinated his work to the concerns of identity politics.[329]

In foregoing the transparently evaluative terms of such early critics, contemporary readers of Tolson have nevertheless continued in this racial-political tradition. In recent decades, the racial value and significance that Fabio hotly contested is largely assumed, and critical business has moved on to exploring how Tolson's politically charged racial aesthetics directly affect institutional or discursive change at a systemic level. For some this has been an historical or institutional question. Aldon Nielsen, one of the first to shift Tolson criticism away from political evaluation, asserts that "Tolson's later style, far from being a mask adopted simply to gain entry into the master's house, is a means by which Anglo-American claims to the ground of modernism are set aside," and that more than literary reputation or academic acceptance, Tolson's work attempted "a decolonization of American letters" that ultimately displaced "White hegemony not only over modernist aesthetics, but also over the idea of America and its history."[330] More recently, Kathy Lou Schultz continues this reading of Tolson as historical

---

if one is a poet, whatever one's color may be. I think Mr. Tolson has assumed this; and the assumption, I gather, has made him not less but more intensely *Negro* in his apprehension of the world than any of his contemporaries…" Tate, Allen, introd. *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia*, by Melvin B. Tolson (New York, NY: Twayne Publishers, 1953) 3-4; Shapiro, in his introduction to *Harlem Gallery*, echoes: "Tolson writes and thinks in Negro, which is to say a possible American language. He is therefore performing the primary poetic rite of our literature. Instead of purifying the business of the Academy, he is complicating it, giving it the gift of tongues…" Shapiro, Karl, introd. *Harlem Gallery: Book I, The Curator*, by Melvin Tolson (New York, NY: Twayne, 1965), 13; Fabio, suspicious of both Tolson and Tate's valorization of academic style, asserts that "Melvin Tolson's language is most certainly not "Negro" to any significant degree. The weight of that vast, bizarre, pseudo-literary diction is to be placed back into the American mainstream where it rightfully and wrong-mindedly belongs. Fabio, Sarah Webster, "Who Speaks Negro?" *Negro Digest* 16.2. (1966), 54-8. For others players in this particular game, see: Dove, Rita, "Telling It Like It I-S IS: Narrative Techniques in Melvin Tolson's Harlem Gallery," *New England Review And Bread Loaf Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (Autumn 1985); McCall, Dan, "The Quicksilver Sparrow of M. B. Tolson," *American Quarterly* 18, (1966).

[329] Berubé, *Marginal Forces*, 62-5.

[330] Nielsen, Aldon L., "Melvin B. Tolson and the Deterritorialization of Modernism," *African American Review* 26, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 244, 250.

revisionist, suggesting that late works like *Libretto* "write back" against cultural hegemony and erasure by deploying the poem as an archive that records and preserves endangered marginal histories.[331] Such critical endeavors move easily from histories and institutions to the imaginaries and discourses that enable them. So for Schultz, Tolson's work not only reimagines history and the literary canon, but also those limited habits of mind that produce myopic histories and traditions. Contending that Tolson's work resisting dichotomous reasoning, "deconstructs and reenvisions [the] binary oppositions" that lead to untenable racial and literary polarities, she joins the rank of critics like who treat Tolson as a consummate dialectician of discourse.[332] The investment of such readers in Tolson's politically charged aesthetics derives from its presumed power to precipitate large-scale transformations at the levels of identity, affect, literary culture, and community.[333]

If we consider the payoff of Tolson's work to be always political or discursive, such positions are not only plausible, but are on the whole intelligent and perhaps inevitable; for Tolson is undeniably invested in questions of political engagement, racial identity, discursive resistance, and even cultural dialectics. But to read his work solely in terms of social commentary or discursive revolution is to neglect the centrality of the personal, both in Tolson's own work, and in the structural transformations that are ascribed to it.[334] The view that critics

---

[331] Schultz, Kathy Lou, *The Afro-Modernist Epic and Literary History: Tolson, Hughes, Baraka* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 109.

[332] Ibid., 124

[333] See respectively: Schroeder, Patricia R., "Point and Counterpoint in Harlem Gallery," *College Language Association Journal* 27, no. 2 (December 1983): 152-168; Dejong, Timothy, "Affect and Diaspora: Unfashionable Hope in Melvin B. Tolson's Libretto for the Republic of Liberia," *Research In African Literatures* 45, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 110-129; Hart, Matthew, *Nations of Nothing But Poetry: Modernism, Transnationalism, and Synthetic Vernacular Writing* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010): 142-9; and Werner, Craig, "Blues for T. S. Eliot and Langston Hughes: The Afro-Modernist Aesthetic of Harlem Gallery," *Black American Literature Forum* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 453-472.

often derive from his work is one where both the self of both authorial production and individual reception is elided, and agency is transferred to the general, systemic, or discursive planes. This is not altogether surprising when we recall that critical attention to Tolson swelled on the wane of poststructuralism, as we see clearly in Berubé (ex?). But a concerted examination of Tolson's own notion of selfhood, together with the blatantly autobiographical nature of his magnum opus points us back to the personal not only in a theoretical, but in a concrete historical sense.

3. *Libretto*: Tridimensionality and the Discrusive Reduction

Throughout his career Tolson developed a notion of the self that asserts common sense against abstract theories, emphasizing human moral agency while also acknowledging the profound influence of social, cultural, and historical formations. Throughout his career he articulated the self as tripartite: "Every person is a tridimensionality: biological, sociological, psychological."[335] The personal responsibility entailed by the social aspect of this this tridimensionality peeks through in Tolson's indictment of T.S. Eliot and Claude McKay for their late tendency toward a spirituality he considered inbent and politically detached:

> During the great crises and struggles for human rights, many intellectuals get cold feet, and to warm them they climb into an ivory tower, like T.S. Eliot and Claude McKay. They become 'spiritual'. They talk about 'spiritual' values. That's a form of hypocrisy that keeps them from fighting these dirty battles, these bloody struggles, for racial justice and social democracy.[336]

The target of this critique is no more self-reflection than it is spirituality, properly speaking; as Tolson's scare quotes suggest, the disengaged postures of Eliot's Anglicanism or McKay's late

---

[334] Though some critics recognize the role of the personal, though they make little of it. See: Russell, Mariann B. "Evolution of Style in the Poetry of Melvin B. Tolson," in *Black American Poets between Worlds, 1940-1960*, ed. R. Baxter Miller (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 2.

[335] Flasch, Joy, *Melvin B. Tolson*. Twayne's United States Authors Series 215 (New York, Twayne Publishers. 1972), 37.

[336] Farnsworth, *Plain Talk and Poetic Prophecy*, 194.

Roman Catholicism represent spirituality in name more than in fact. For Tolson too was invested in Christian spirituality, though his radical Jesus might be more recognizable to liberation theologians like Gustavo Gutierréz or the late Kierkegaard than to the mystics so beloved by Eliot. In a 1938 *Caviar and Cabbage* article, Tolson paints "A Portrait of Jesus, the Young Radical," denouncing the commitments of quiescent "mouth-Christians" as fundamentally incompatible with the gospel (*CC* 23, 37). His is a spirituality that hinges on the social, calling responsible and situated persons to active participation in battles for justice, and refusing to cordon off interiority from external affairs. In discussing Tolson's national ode, *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia*, Dan McCall attributes the poet's preference for communal forms and themes to this vehement concern for the social, arguing that Tolson rejects the poetics of privacy that characterizes the work of contemporaries like Eliot.[337] Indeed, even in those poems that seem more overtly autobiographical, Farnsworth observes that they are "not personal in the sense that *I* closes off all matters social and historical…Tolson is almost never personal in that sense… [for] his assumption of the tridimensionality of the self - the self as a product of biology, sociology, and psychology - had become so ingrained that he could not imagine a private ahistorical self."[338] To be personal, for Tolson, means to be engaged with and concerned for other persons.

That Tolson's concept of personality should ultimately entail a sense of historicity is not readily apparent from the tripartite formulation itself. But the consistent historical emphasis of his poetic handling of the social suggests that history both determines and renders intelligible contemporary social formations. His almost Poundian desire to write poems "including history"

---

[337] Though it is hard to take this generalization too far if we consider the late civic work of Williams or the highly politicized work of Pound. See: McCall, "The Quicksilver Sparrow," 538.

[338] Farnsworth, *Plain Talk and Poetic Prophecy*, 184.

is apparent even in Tolson's first published volume, *Rendezvous with America,* and this sensibility only matures as he moves toward late works like *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia*. In that most social of odes, which takes the optimistic beginning of a nation-state as its subject, Tolson presents an insistent, and at times oppressive sense of historical continuity. Though a relatively recent socio-political formation, the history of Liberia reaches back well before the American Colonization Society (ACS) established a republic of that name in the 1820s; "Before Liberia was, Songhai was," the poem tells us; and Songhai was one of the largest empires in African history, which thrived in West Africa in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, tracing its national roots as far back as the eleventh.[339] In presenting the history of the Songhai empire, Tolson charts both its political economy, where "the law of empathy set the market price", and the intellectual commerce it facilitated with Spain, Italy, and the Eastern Roman Empire through its University of Sankoré, all before the empire, weakened by civil war and Portuguese invasion, was overthrown by the Spanish born Moroccan Judar Pasha.[340] Tolson suggests that the empire's collapse followed directly from its dealings with foreigners: "And the locust Portuguese raped the maiden crops,/ And the sirocco Spaniard razed the city states…"; and it is upon the ruins of this lost empire that new foreigners, now American colonists, established the nation of Liberia. Not all, however, were quite as foreign as others; crossing the same middle passage that carried his ancestors Westward to bondage, history doubled back on itself when Africa American Elijah Johnson, colonial agent for the society, traveled Eastward "in the whale's belly" to the African coast in 1820, where he would serve twice as governor of Liberia (*HG* 165). The expansive

---

[339] Tolson, Melvin B., *Harlem Gallery, and Other Poems of Melvin B. Tolson*, ed. Raymond Nelson (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 161. (Hereafter cited parenthetically and abbreviated *HG*.)

[340] See Du Bois, W. E. B., *The World and Africa; an Inquiry into the Part Which Africa Has Played in World History, by W. E. Burghardt Du Bois* (New York, NY: The Viking Press, 1947), 35.

historical narrative in which the account of Johnson's voyage is situated occupies the first half of *Libretto,* setting the stage for the polyphonic, transhistorical, and multicultural presentation it will offer of Liberia in the twentieth century. The allusive range of the second section is as vast as the geographical ambit of the first, presenting what Eliot might call "the mind of Europe" before then integrating it with the mind of Africa in the final section's historical and cultural mashup including references to sources like Gogol Apollinaire, Cavafy, Milton, Thomas Browne, Kipling, Swift, Toissant L'Ouverture, Newman, Luther, Shakespeare, Voltaire, Napoleon, a Negro Spiritual, and Beethoven; to disciplines like anthropology, literary criticism, ancient and modern history, political science, and journalism; and in such languages as French, German, Japanese, Latin, Spanish, Medieval Italian, Russian, Ancient Sumerian, Afrikaans, Hindi, Arabic, Anglo-Saxon, and Arabic. As a point of historical and cultural convergence between Europe, the Americas, and the rest of Africa, Liberia gathers into itself these various discursive threads; Tolson's allusiveness, difficulty, and hybrid form embodies the variegated and tumultuous history of the land.

Liberian society, which *Libretto* heralds as the socio-political beacon of hope for "the Futurafrique," is thus presented from an historical-global perspective as an ongoing product of developing temporal and international forces. If society is so emphatically an historical phenomenon, the socially situated person must therefore be similarly historical — a being in time — and *Libretto* realizes this theoretical necessity in a manner most concrete, even if elusive. Ostensibly, there seems to be very little of the individual in this African ode, and what individuals we do see are presented more as the names of historical causes than as dynamic persons: Robert Finley, Henry Clay, Bushrod Washington — these men are merely agents of the ACS whose actions contributed to the founding of Liberia. While there are historical figures

whose stories are more or less fully presented in *Libretto*, the central personage of the poem, who gestures to the individual's complex situation within society and history, is not actually *in* the poem. This crucial player, rather, is the organizing consciousness around which all of the poem's referenced or listed historical persons are constellated - the poet himself. For while *Libretto*'s historical actors do not overtly exhibit their own personality, each of them tacitly point at the person of Melvin B. Tolson, for the author of *Libretto*'s own biography is situated within the broader context of Liberian history. We have mentioned already Elijah Johnson and his voyage across the Atlantic to the continent of his ancestors; Tolson enacts this journey allegorically as he symbolically returns to Africa both in station, as poet Laurette of Liberia, and in practice, by composing the *Libretto.*

Though never mentioned, Tolson himself is the condition of possibility for the whole poem; his life is the venue in which these historical and cultural events continue to reverberate, and it is the ode that fittingly registers that resonance. In the next section, "LA," we meet Johnson's friend and fellow ACS member, the "Prophet Jehudi Ashmun" who declares that "The lion's teeth, the eagle's /Talons, shall break!" Ashmun served as governor of Liberia from 1822 to 1828, and this riddling prophecy likely refers the abolitionist spirit in which he wrote the Liberian constitution, which crushed the eagles' talon of American slavery by enabling black men to hold government office. Given the significance of Ashmun's political achievements for Tolson's vision of the Futurafrique [quotes], it is somewhat startling that his endnote provides none of this information. Rather, it tells us that

> Lincoln University, the oldest Negro institution of its kind in the world, was founded as the Ashmun Institute. The memory of the white pilgrim survives in old Ashmun Hall and in the Greek and Latin inscriptions cut in stones sacred to Lincoln men. The annual Lincoln-Liberian dinner is traditional, and two of the graduates have been ministers to Liberia. (*HG* 195)

The note also fails to mention that another graduate, namely, Melvin B. Tolson, served Liberia as its poet laureate. That Tolson was able to secure this position largely by virtue of his own renown and his connection with Lincoln is suggested by the fact that the poet's only relationship to a country on which he never set foot was through the university. As a Lincoln man, Tolson's intellectual inheritance thus included that Latin and Greek so "sacred to Lincoln men," as well as the African American culture preserved in that "oldest [of] Negro institutions," and a tradition of international relations dating back to Ashmun, which broadly includes slavery, colonization, intercontinental intellectual exchange, and transatlantic political alliance. Though referenced only obliquely, the entirety of *Libretto* is in fact framed by and presented through the historically situated person of Melvin Tolson. Carrying the classical education of Europe, ancestral roots from Africa, the citizenship of America, and an institutional-political relationship with Liberia, Tolson is the very incarnation of Liberia's fraught past, and the culturally polyphonic nature of the ode reflects on the level of discourse the convergence of these worlds.

Without ever overtly presenting the mediating individual, the *Libretto* catalogues the social and cultural effects of history on that individual. The history of Liberia is alive for Tolson, even though he would never physically visit that country. But the sustained invisibility of the poet, his presence that is more implied than represented, might suggest that the person is merely a symptom of antecedent forces - a mere bundle of effects from which coherence must always be inferred. Indeed, the few critics who have examined *Libretto* in detail mainly discuss the poem as operating on the rarified level of discourse, where its re-figuration of historical narratives and reorganization of cultural data transforms our social reality while altogether circumventing the experiencing persons of which societies are composed (Schultz, McCall). This is even true in those discussions which come closest to personality, like Timothy Dejong's insightful

exploration of affect and hope in the *Libretto*, which takes up the familiar thread of Tolson's political and discursive achievement and argues that political and discursive transcendence happens on the affective or intersubjective level. But in Dejong's analysis, the individual subjects who experience affect and relate intersubjectively are conspicuously absent. Considering the relative invisibility of Tolson in a poem that is nevertheless so reliant upon his personal particularity, such oversights can't be too severely censured; as Charles Taylor has observed of social imaginaries, it is those elements which are most fundamental to our thought that are most difficult to analyze.[341]

While it is somewhat understandable in discussions of an ostensibly impersonal poem like *Libretto*, that this critical neglect of personality should persist in conversations about *Harlem Gallery* - Tolson's most famous, and most autobiographical work - is rather more alarming. That this Afro-modernist epic is extremely personal isn't hard to see, for not only does it theorize personality in its repeated refiguring of the notion of tridimensionality and in its various author-inspired characters, but it even announces itself as an "auto-bio fragment" (*HG* 235, 332, 335, 342). Indeed, many critics do recognize the autobiographical strands of the poem; what is striking, rather, is that with almost reflexive regularity, readings of *Harlem Gallery* translate its personal terms into conceptual or impersonal categories. Craig Werner, for instance, remarks upon the obvious but complex analogue between the historical Tolson and several of the characters that populate *Harlem Gallery*, but these analogues are always in the service of the general and discursive, for through them Tolson presents certain aesthetic attitudes to look "toward a revision of aesthetic perspectives that have typically been seen as incompatible" by revealing such "false dichotomies as at best simplistic, and at worst destructive." Here Tolson's

---

[341] Taylor, Charles, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 10-15.

incorporation of his own life serves only "to demonstrate the potential power of an aesthetic synthesis."[342] More recently, Lena Hill has explored the analogue between Tolson and the Curator of the Gallery, asserting that Tolson's experience as an English professor carries over to the Curator's status as "ex-professor" in order to emphasize "the importance of instruction" for the poem. As both gatekeeper of knowledge and cultural representative, this biographically grounded figure's "circuitous exploration of his own character…becomes a vehicle for examining how those in positions of power might enlarge avenues of publication for black art."[343] For Hill, Tolson's characters become mere means for discussing social issues writ large; consequently, the museum itself ceases to be an archive, but is rather read as "a vibrant metaphor for an extended notion of publication."[344] Such moves are similar in spirit to the fixation on the discursive we saw earlier in critical treatments of *Libretto*, and as with that earlier poem, such moves are sensible approaches to a work that is self-consciously invested in questions of class, race, and culture. But the heavily autobiographical nature of *Harlem Gallery* reveals the necessarily incomplete nature of such heavily and primarily discursive interpretations.

On the surface this oversight might look like a case of missing that which hides in plain sight, a speculation which accords nicely with Rita Felski's assertion that literary criticism's hunt for the hidden often approaches the condition of paranoia.[345] But *Harlem Gallery* doesn't really *hide* its investment in personality; rather, the philosophical assumptions underlying analyses of the poem lead to the neglect of the personal. The particular mode of this neglect, which we have

---

[342] Werner, "The Afro-Modernist Aesthetic of Harlem Gallery," 453.

[343] Hill, *Visualizing Blackness,* 157

[344] Ibid.

[345] Best, Stephen, and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108 (1). (2009): 1–21; Felski, Rita. "After Suspicion." *Profession* (2009): 28-35.

seen proceeds by way of reduction to translate the personally particular into the general terms of discourse, betrays certain anti-subjective assumptions that *Harlem Gallery*'s robustly theorized and embodied concept of personality demonstrably refutes. But before turning directly *Harlem Gallery*, and in order to fully understand the [implicit critique] it levels against what we might call the discursive reduction, it is first necessary to fathom the philosophical assumptions that lead criticism to so instinctively depersonalize that poem. Conveniently, it is one of the ablest and most influential practitioners of this discursive method who also provides its most limpid genealogy. In *Marginal Forces/Cultural Centers*, his momentous monograph on Tolson, Pynchon, and the theory canon formation, Michael Berubé offers an insightful and revealing analysis of *Harlem Gallery* as "a poem about its own cultural position" that dramatizes the cultural politics of its own reception or neglect.[346] But unlike so many other critics who make similar moves, Berubé also discusses in some detail the theoretical framework which governs his inquiry. Reading *Harlem Gallery* both through and in terms of reception, begins as an earnest "interest in Tolson's life and career" ends by casting the latter as a collection of effects registered by criticism, and the former, following a Foucauldian legacy, as a "discursive formation."[347]Thus Tolson's career is reduced to his oeuvre, and even then only those choice bits that critics chose to regard; likewise, his life and personality are diminished to the discursive organizing principle Foucault calls "the author function."[348] Invoking not only Foucault, but his immediate forebear (Barthes, whose famous author-icide preceded the zombified "function") and his immediate successor (Bourdieu, whose agents roles and relationships merely translate discursive

---

[346] Berubé, *Marginal Forces*, 138.

[347] Ibid., 10, 56-7.

[348] Ibid., 57, see Foucault, Michel, "What is an Author?" in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D Faubion (New York, NY: New Press, 1998), 206-221.

functionality to the sociological "field"), Berubé presents the philosophical structure of impersonality that conditions not only his own work, but also the work of so many other academic readers of Tolson.[349] Given such a foundation, it isn't surprising that much of his ensuing analysis considers the *Gallery* as solely engaged with questions of reception, where both poem and poet are always on the margins trying to break into the canon. Hence every possible autobiographical analogue in the poem is construed as generally representative: "it is the academy [that] thus gets pictures and pictures itself" in *Harlem Gallery* the tension between Hideho Heights and the Curator, for instance, becomes a "struggle between competing conceptions of poetry as either written or oral," or as representing a Romantic versus a Modernist aesthetic.[350]

4. A Gallery of Portraits of Melvin Tolson

It is true that *Harlem Gallery* dramatizes its own literary production in a rather forthright manner. Of the many instances of such modernist self-reflexivity, none is as striking or as initially illuminating as this mature work's presentation of its own compositional infancy. More than halfway through *Harlem Gallery*, just after the rather mysterious death of Mister Starks, "piano modernist / of the Harlem Renaissance" and sometime writer of "imagistic verse," the Curator finds himself bequeathed with a manuscript of the composer's final work, *Harlem Vignettes* (294, 301). As the Curator reads through the draft, the following section of Tolson's poem presents a transcription of Starks' manuscript poem, which consists of several character sketches of *Harlem Gallery*'s principal personae, including the three main artists of the poem -

---

[349] The literary profession has lately seen a forceful but rather aimless reaction against such depersonalized approaches, which are nicely collected in Best and Marcus; see also Justice.

[350] Berubé, *Marginal Forces*, 67-71.

Hideho Heights, John Laggard, and Starks himself – as well as the Curator and Dr. Obi Nkomo, "alter ego of the Harlem Gallery" (*HG* 233). This illuminating poem-within-the poem is a poem-about-the poem, and in terms of more than just characterization; though Starks' manuscript does offer valuable diagetic information about the main players of *Harlem Gallery*, it also gestures beyond the content of Tolson's poem, pointing to the compositional history of the work itself. Those familiar with Tolson's oeuvre will immediately recognize in *Vignettes* a presentation of his first completed (1934), but only posthumously published poem *A Gallery of Harlem Portraits*, which gathered numerous vignettes of Harlemites that Tolson had either invented or known during his time New York in the early 1930s. Although Starks' poem presents characters particular to *Harlem Gallery* and not *Portraits*, toward the end of that earlier work one does find a portrait of one "Old Man Starks," and while the two Starks bear little relation to one another (one composer, the other a barber), the humorous anecdote explaining the later Starks' name is typical of the jocular folk narrative idiom *Portraits*. In the "Sigma" section of *Harlem Gallery*, when asked the name of her four year old son, Starks' "proud mother said 'Mister,'" and at the protest of the inquiring white lady, "since every Negro male in Dixie was / either a *boy* or an *uncle,*" the mother simply screams "it's *my* baby and I can name it / any damn thing I please" (294). Such clever and subversive exchanges not only characterize the overall presentation of *Portraits* but they also run throughout *Harlem Gallery*, most remarkably in the creative call and response sessions in the Zulu Club in the middle sections of the poem. *Harlem Gallery* thus preserves the form of *A Gallery of Harlem Portraits* in more than just its *mise en abyme*, for the riotous and witty interactions and anecdotes that permeate the late poem draw directly on the mood and narrative of the earlier.

But this self-referentiality alone seems more textual than autobiographical, pointing as it

does to the evolution of a single work and not necessarily of the poet himself; yet if we follow the textual tracks that *Harlem Gallery*'s representation of *Portraits* begins to disclose, we find that it leads to much more than just an editorial genealogy. For where *Harlem Gallery* tells the story of its own composition through *Vignettes (Portraits)*, the story of *Portraits'* composition is told through Tolson's own autobiography. After having peddled his manuscript for four years without any success, Tolson turns the occasion of *Portraits'* failure to find a publisher into a creative opportunity, and in 1938 writes a detailed account of its journey from reader to reader, publisher to publisher. But this "Odyssey of a Manuscript" begins well before even the poems composition in the early 1930s; indeed, we only learn of the "20,000 miles of traveling" and the "5,000 sheets of paper" that went into *Portrait* halfway through the account.[351] The opening sections of the essay are all about Tolson's life. How his "little walnut-hued mother" taught him "not to cry when hurt by the slings and darts of the white man's civilization" and regularly entertained "an old Bantu scholar, with tribal holes in his ears and an Oxford accent" and manifold "tales of black heroes and poets and artists," how "Iambic and trochaic feet pattered across [his] boyhood" in Iowa, and how as a young poet he felt like "an amanuensis writing down the stanzas of an invisible poet who whispered at [his] elbow" (*OM* 5-6). How the Christian moralizing of his early poetry was challenged by radicalism exclamations "the Local Socialist on the courthouse square" (which comments Tolson would internalize and adopt (*OM* 7). And how in 1932 he came to abandon "a world of twilight haunted by the ghosts of dead classicism," and left off "writing Anglo-Saxon sonnets as a graduate student in an Eastern University" to attempt the first "'Negro epic in America'" (*OM* 8-9).

That the "editorial odyssey" of *Portraits* - a poem unread by Mark Van Doren, Carl

---

[351] Tolson, Melvin B., "The Odyssey of a Manuscript" *New Letters* 48:1 (Fall 1981), 9. (Hereafter cited parenthetically and abbreviated as "Odyssey.")

Sanburg, and Edwin Marham, admired but unpromoted by Langston Hughes, rejected by Macmillan - occupies the same amount of space as Tolson's autobiographical sketches suggests a fundamental continuity between the self-reflective experiences of the poet and the life of the poem. The story of this work continues to involve and be imbedded in the story of Tolson's experience. When Langston Hughes reads *Portraits* in San Diego, Tolson's account presents this encounter through the lens of his first meeting with the "poet of Harlem's Lennox Avenue," pulling the narrative back in time to reflect on the Scottsboro trial, Hughes' controversial publication of "Goodbye, Jesus," and Tolson's own defense of that work. And while his friend presently reads through the manuscript, Tolson idly listens as "[d]own the hall, a Pullman porter's radio blared the *St. Louis Blues*," returning yet again to memory to recall how "at the other end of the continent" a priest had once explained to him that "the Negros had used *swing* music forty years ago in the churches on Beale Street." After Hughes had finished the poem and prepares to leave, Tolson again hears the blues:

> The Pullman porter was singing in the hallway as he went to the toilet:
> *Black Boy, sing an' clown an' dance,*
> *Strut yo' lowdown nigger stuff,*
> *White folks who' will tip you big*
> *If you flatters 'em enough!* (*OM* 13)

Though no one reading these lines in 1938 could have caught the reference, since its source remained unpublished, Tolson too had sung this song - the same lines are included in "Harlem," the poem whose original version inspired *Portraits* in the first place, and which Tolson revised to introduce the collection. Nor could anyone recall that uncirculated epic's portrait of Sidney Sippel, the "Pullman porter in Los Angeles," whose wife Stella, with a voice "like nobody else in Gawd's creation," one night joins in singing "de 'St. Louis Blues' …tears up de cabaret" and afterwards gets so "crazy to go onto de stage" that "she disappears…evaporates," leaving poor

Sippel looking high and low for her.[352] Is it Sippel Tolson hears outside his San Diego hotel room, singing the familiar blues which suggests to the discouraged poet his next course of action? If the St. Louis Blues speak of lost love to Tolson's character, conjured up or superimposed onto the Southern Californian scene, those inspired lines speak inspiration yet again to the poet himself, intimating to him a new strategy for finding a publisher. For immediately following these bluesy lines about the need for flattery, Tolson realizes that he "lacks salesmanship," and begins a thorough study of the tactics of cajolery: "I bought books and magazines on the financial aspect of writing. I read Dale Carnegie - tried to find out how to win editors and influence publishers" (*GHP* 14). Thus the epic he'd labored on for four years not only speaks through the world around him, issuing from the speaker of the radio and the lips of the porter, but is superimposed onto the landscape of the present, thereby speaking directly *to* Tolson. The work that sits on the bed, lately read by Langston Hughes, continues to resound through the poet's experience. Subsumed by an autobiographical narrative, this "Odyssey of a Manuscript" actually recounts the odyssey of Melvin B. Tolson's life. The work of *Portraits* is bounded neither by composition nor publication; continuing to work on Tolson both after its completion, "Odyssey" suggests that the epic is only one facet of the larger work that is Tolson himself.

While through Starks' poem *Harlem Gallery* gestures to Tolson's past work of writerly self-formation, through the figure of Hideho Heights it concretely embodies the present continuation of this endeavor, pointing to the poet not only through his own character, but through a cut-and-paste textual reference that only reinforces Hideho's autobiographical resonance. We first glimpse the curious figure of Hideho in the "Lambda" section of *Harlem*

---

[352] Tolson, Melvin B., *A Gallery of Harlem Portraits*, ed. Robert M Farnsworth (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1979), 98. (Hereafter cited parenthetically and abbreviated as *GHP*.)

Gallery, where this "vagabond bard of Lennox Avenue," fresh from "'a jam session / at the Daddy-O Club," meets the Curator's welcome with the contention that "In the beginning was the Word…not the brush!" (*HG* 258). Like Starks, Heights too produces something of a manuscript, his "pure inspiration" an ode to Satchmo (Louis Armstrong), which he recites right there at the entrance to the Gallery before both he and the Curator head to the Zulu Club for the real show. After being there announced "in rococo synchronization" by the M.C. Rufino Laughlin, Hideho Heights begins to tell, amidst exclamations, exhortations, and digressions from a boisterous audience, the tale of John Henry's fabulous days and ways. Hideho's performance is interrupted almost as soon as it begins, and the show quickly shifts from virtuoso oration to a dynamic back and forth, deploying the complex structure of call and response that Rita Dove observes "mirrors black street speech." In these moments Heights' voice joins with the crowd in a movement of polyphonic unity as

> The Zulu Club patrons whoop and stomp,
> clap thighs and backs and knees:
> the poet and the audience one,
> each gears itself to please. (*HG* 271)

And the momentum of this collective machine subsumes not only the clever speech of the vociferous Zulu Club Wits, but gathers even musical notes into its array as "the creative impulse of the Zulu Club / leaps from Hideho's lips to Frog Legs' fingers,/ like the electric fire from the clouds," as the Curator rhapsodizes:

> O spiritual, work-song, ragtime, blues, jazz -
> consorts of
> the march, quadrille, polka, and waltz!
> *Witness to a miracle*
> - I muse -
> *the birth of a blues…* (*HG* 273)

Through the whiskey-swigging figure of Heights we glimpse not just Tolson the poet, but Tolson

the teacher. On the first count, Hideho's tendency not only to push "the Word" to the condition of music, but incorporate several distinct voices (the Wits), genres (from the "work-song" to the waltz), and modes (the vocal to the instrumental) recalls Tolson's perennial deployment of musical schema in his poetry - from the "Ballad of Rattle Snakes" to the Italian tempo markings that head each section of "Dark Symphony" (e.g. *Allegro Moderato*), to the solfège divisions of *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia*. This formal and discursive democracy is of course related to Tolson's socio-political commitments; like his creation, Tolson too is "the people's poet."

But in Hideho we also see Tolson the teacher. For while both this generic confluence and the polyphonic call-and-response recollects Tolson's growing interest in blending speech and discursive registers, it resonates even more strikingly with his locally renowned pedagogical approaches. As David Gold observes, in his over twenty years at Wiley College, Tolson "promulgated an embodied, epistemic, activist rhetoric in which knowledge was crafted through agonistic, often confrontational dialogue."[353] The simultaneously performative and interactive classroom presence that Tolson cultivated through "the power of shock," rigorous questioning, and use of a "wide range of registers," which characterize *Harlem Gallery* in general, are especially reminiscent of Hideho's own performance in the Zulu Club.[354] And if through his teaching "Tolson turned his double consciousness into a powerful rhetorical tool, demonstrating the possibility of interrogating identity without losing one's identity or being narrowly defined by it," we find such a double consciousness autobiographically presented and poetically sounded in the figure of Heights.

After all, the most overtly personal aspect of Heights' character consists not in the dialogic

---

[353] Gold, "'Nothing Educates Us Like a Shock'," 228.

[354] Ibid., 236.

social performance, which so many have likened to African American oral traditions (Dove, Berubé), but in the "private gallery" that splits the "identity of the people's poet" (*HG* 333, 5).[355] Although "never before… had Hideho left the cellar door of his art ajar," one night the poet forgets to close it, and the Curator sees the "private poem in the modern vein" that subtends "the racial ballad in the public domain" (335). This gallery, where Hideho conducts his private life, stands where the poet himself privately dwells; it is in this personal space of Hideho's flat, near the couch on which he tossed the "dead drunk" poet, that the Curator "chanced to see, in the modern idiom, the poem called *E. & O.E.*" And in this interior we find none other than Melvin Tolson's exterior, for Hideho's fictional poem is Tolson's actual one. Unlike *Harlem Vignette*s, Tolson's *E.&O.E.* is an unconcealed and unaltered presentation of his own work, sharing not only the title but the very substance of historical poet's 1951 contribution to *Poetry* Magazine, his only publication to generate unsolicited official recognition, winning the magazine's Bess Hokim award. At the most personal level, this self-presentation casts the "split identity of the People's Poet" in a distinctly autobiographical light. Where the unruly, colloquial, and interactive public performance corresponds to Tolson's early predilection for vernacular idioms and conventional forms, the introspective and abstruse verse of *E.&O.E.* corresponds to his lately developed inclination toward modernist density. And although these two poetic modes correlate with the diachronic development of Tolson's aesthetic, that both tendencies coexist simultaneously in Hideho doesn't preclude this development as much as demonstrate the underlying continuity between folk-traditional and modernist idioms, which Michael North has observed of modernism in general, and Aldon Nielson of Tolson's work in particular.[356]

---

[355] This oral tradition is discussed in relation to Tolosn's work in: Berubé, *Marginal Forces*; Dove, "Telling it like it I-S IS."

While such self-presentation is striking, if not altogether uncommon for literature in the high modernist vein, even more remarkable is that the work of these authorial analogues is encountered, interpreted, and subsumed by yet another authorial figure. Though principally presenting Tolson's development of a robust but tense modernist aesthetic, we have also seen how Height's interactive and eclectic performance in the Zulu club obliquely gestures both to the poet's related investments in both a pedagogy of engagement and a poetic of generic and discursive variety. These educative and accumulative qualities, which are largely tacit in the ribald bard, are fully developed in the Curator, who functionally resonates with Tolson not only as cultural gatekeeper and archivist, but also as poetic producer of cultural assemblages. The Curator is both collector and mediator, precariously poised between the worlds of artistic production and the norms of economic and cultural value, between John Lugart, star painter of the gallery, and Guy Delaporte III, ravenous head of its regents. For among the personal functions the gallery plays for the Curator, the ostensible reason for its existence is at once archival and promotional: it collects and presents to the world African American art and culture. This double role is itself doubled, for it entails not only arbitrating between the interests of patrons and artists, but involves, in a broader sense, the mediation between the "Black Boy" and "The great White World."[357] More than any other figure, the Curator functions as both a character and the central narrative voice and organizing principle of the poem. In assembling both the Harlem Gallery exhibition and the poetic gallery the poem's verbal presentation, the Curator thus gathers from a mingled tradition as he musters "up from hands / now warm or cold:

---

[356] North, Michael, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3-30; Nielsen, "Deterritorialization of Modernism," 241.

[357] It is important to note that for Tolson these categories were more economic than racial, we see this both in the poem's opposition between Guy Delaporte III, "the bethel of the Sugar Hill Elite" (*HG* 254) and the octoroon Curator, as well as in Tolson's own express opinion that race amounts to socioeconomic construct.

a full rich Indies' cargo" (*HG* 209). This description of the Curator's poetic endeavor recalls the triangle of continental cultural influence presented in *Libretto*, where like the cargo of those trade routes, the substance of this poem remains protean and heteroclite; with content relative to its destination, it may consist of agricultural products from America, manufactured goods from Europe, or enslaved peoples from Africa. All of which suggests that the cultural matter gathered into both gallery and poem is rather more fluid than its fixed local might suggest.

Indeed, the content of turns out to be as mingled and various as the Curator's metaphors; the language of *Harlem Gallery* can't be parsed out any more easily than its cultural substance. Its content, like its metaphors, assert the complexity of the African American cultural inheritance (and the difficulty of personally understanding it) by confounding not just simplistic genealogies like "the myth of the Negro past" that Melville Herskovits refuted, but systems of meaning that demand neat sequentiality of violated and fractured cultural histories:

> Like the lice and maggots of the apples of Cain
> on a strawberry tree,
> the myth of the Afroamerican past
> extracts the parasite's fee. (*HG* 210)

This astounding mixture of metaphors and allusions confounds any search for discrete threads or discernibly directed logical relations. Every term of this tortuous analogy, which likens the impossible to the incomplete, undermines its logical coherence. Lice feed on hirsute organisms, not fruit; Adam, not Cain, ate the apple, which led to the corruption not of the fruit but the man; and the "apples" produced by this "strawberry tree" (*Arbutus unedo*, an evergreen native to the Mediterranean and parts of Western Europe) bears a fruit that is neither apple nor strawberry.[358] These things are "like" the ambiguous parasitic relationship between "the myth of the Afroamerican past" and some invisible other term, to which it could play either host of leech,

[358] see note in *HG* 371

depending on whether the extracted fee is vitality (paid by host) or independence (paid by leech). And yet, despite its confusion this conglomeration of terms is nevertheless alive; its referential import consists [not in the logical addition of its premises, but] in its tonal and conceptual coherence. One may well say that things are rotten in the States, especially for a people whose heteroclite *sui generis* culture is often considered to be just as much of a non-entity as its people have been.[359] The culture of this poem, and the notion of personality it entails, depends upon the same fluidity that we see in its language, as the Curator later explains:

Art
Is not barrel copper easily separated
From the matrix
It is not fresh tissues
-For microscope study-
One may *fix:* (*HG* 223)

What *Harlem Gallery* presents is not a discernable complex of constituent parts, but rather a living tradition that, while variously composed, is nevertheless irreducible.

Even the Curator cannot be fixed in his centrality, but like Hideho and Starks, he too is split and plays a double role, sharing his prominence not with some other aspect of version of himself, but with an entirely different character. Not only is "Doctor Obi Nkomo / the alter ego / of the Harlem Gallery," but he functions as the Curator's reflection, double, and compliment. On the opening night of the exhibition the "old Africanist" and the "ex-professor of Art" stand opposite one another, "counterpoise[d] beside / ebony doors of the Harlem Gallery, / Horthgarian hosts, / closemouthed and open-eyed" (*HG* 214, 242, 247). Throughout the poem, the exchanges between these two, which often center on vital questions of aesthetics, history, race, and politics, move like a dialectic. In *Harlem Vignettes*, Mister Starks reports how once

[359] e.g., cf. Gertrude Stein's comment that "the Negro suffers from nothingness," which Tolson took quite seriously with the history of black suffrage in the United States. See "Odyssey," 7.

While the Curator sipped his cream
And Doctor Nkomo swigged his homogenized milk,
…[He] tried to gin the secret of
The mutuality of minds
That moved independently of each other -
Like the eyeballs of a chameleon. (*HG* 312)

The ensuing debate between these two friends approaches artistic, social, and racial stratification through the metaphor of milk. Despite the Curators preference for a culturally elite "opacity of cream," which moves the milk-drinking populist Nkomo to heap up epithets "as a Bach fugue piles up rhythms," the two reach an apparent, though resigned, agreement: to "*taste* the milk of the skimmed / and *sip* the cream of the skimmers" and to "peddle / the homogenized milk of multicultural" (313-6). The two initial opposing attitudes that propel their debate arise from each man's personal history. Where the African-born Nkomo stands as aloof as possible from both Western culture and its elite proponents ("Aeons separate my native veld / and your peaks of philosophy," he declares earlier), the Curator is not only enmeshed in both spheres, but as an American octoroon, his cultural and personal identities are implicated in them (238, 350). Even despite the stakes of this nevertheless playful debate, in the end, "the Curator and Doctor Nkomo / sat staring into space, /united like the siphons of a Dosinia" having dialectically resolved not only their opposing positions, but also the polarities of identity.

But the fundamental unity of the Curator and Nkomo is not merely a culturally discursive one, for *Harlem Gallery* not only achieves a dialectical synthesis of their ideas and cultural positions, but it also fuses the characters themselves. While speaking with distinct counterpoise throughout much of *Harlem Gallery*, the dialectical resolution presented by Stark's manuscript is anticipated by the vocal collapse of "Omicron." Note the opening lines of that sections' first two stanzas:

"Life and Art," said Doctor Nkomo, "beget incestuously…"

….
Design trailed design as a scroll saw capered in his mind:
is *Homo Aethiopicus* doomed,
Like the stallions beard,
To wear the curb of the bridle? (*HG* 283)

From the first stanza to the next, the attributive specificity that marks Nkomo's oration on aesthetics quickly dissipates into a general narrative voice which could as easily belong to the Curator as to the Africanist. For it is clear enough who speaks the first lines, the quotation marks of which close only with the stanza itself. It is also clear from preceding sections' diegetic narration that the Curator offers the narrative frame that opens the second stanza. But after the colon, who speaks? The absence of quotation marks suggests that this question belongs to the Curator, who has been known to wax interior, while the reflective questioning mode itself seems continuous with the rhetorical tenor of the first stanza's concluding lines: "Without Velasquez and Cranach,/ What would Picasso be? /…/ Or Amedeo Modigliani without Sandro Botticelli?" Indeed, the elite traditionalism of Nkomo's questions here seem more characteristic of the Curator; and the still unquoted metaphorical proverbs are more akin to Nkomo's enigmatic orations than to the Curator's meandering descriptions (cf. Eta and Alpha).

Indeed, however different they appear, these characters not only share similar ideas, concerns, and tendencies with one another, but they both overtly point to yet a larger personality. If the dialogic, narrative, and even ontological aspects of the Curator and Nkomo function dialectically, it is toward a sublation that transcends not just the characters, but the fictional category of character itself, pointing ultimately not just to personality, but like both Starks and Hideho, to Tolson himself. Even in the opening sections of *Harlem Gallery*, the Curator's comments about Nkomo sounds suspiciously like self-description. When the Africanist makes his first appearance in "Eta," for instance, the Curator remarks upon how "*He absorbs alien*

ideas as Urdu / Arabic characters" (*HG* 239). This conceptually absorbent quality is of course shared by the Curator, whose arcane references not only frame this scene, but have also characterized the narrative up to this point. And while there is something particular about the Doctor's democratic referentiality, relying as heavily as it does upon Western sources (on the same page as the Curator's remarks, Nkomo invokes both the Greek and Judeo-Christian traditions), if we consider the vocal conflation achieved in the second half of the poem, we see that *Harlem Gallery* subsumes the voices and archives of both polymaths. It isn't too surprising that the voices of both characters should modulate into the poem's single voice when we consider that this larger voice has been speaking in a polyphonic manner for some time now. The tendencies of both Nkomo and the Curator are awfully similar to the sprawling, almost jarring, referentiality of *Libretto* we have already discussed. And looking back on that poem, we discover the voices of both the Curator and the Africanist issue from an organizing principle that exceeds *Harlem Gallery* as well as *Libretto.* For the entirety of that earlier poem seems to be written in the same eclectic referential style deployed by the Curator in *Harlem Gallery*, and the many proverbs presented in its "SOL" section read like cultural field reports upon which the Africanist models his own maxims. In *Libretto* are found the discursive and stylistic seeds that in *Harlem Gallery* blossom into full characters, and behind both poetics and character we suspect the person of Tolson, who had read 500 books in preparation for *Libretto*'s composition, and who, as Aldon Nielsen recalls, was "an inveterate collector of African proverbs and African talk. Among his papers are page after page upon which he has patiently copied out proverbs unearthed in his reading."[360]

Forming both the basis for Nkomo's character as well as the ostensible matter of his

---

[360] Schultz, *Afro-Modernist Epic,* 115; Nielsen, "Deterritorialization of Modernism," 247.

academic study, this concern for the African sage that is also demonstrated in *Libretto* traces its roots back to Tolson's earliest work. These figures, which the *Libretto* calls "*griots,*" are described in that poem's endnotes as "living encyclopedias" — "Giryama, Bantu, Amharic, Swahili, Yoruba, Vai, Thonga, Zulu, Zaba — these tribal scholars speak, with no basic change in idea and image, from line 173 to 214" (*HG* 194). In the same way that such tribal speak, which Tolson elsewhere calls "*talki-talki"* – "a concoction of many languages and idioms" – permeates not just Nkomo's speech but the idiom *Harlem Gallery* itself, the figure of the *griot* also pervades Tolson's entire oeuvre (*HG* 194). We see him, for instance, in *Rendevous with America*'s "The Bard of Addis Ababa," which portrays "a blooded Amharic scholar / with the lore of six thousand years…[whose] name is an emblem of justice" and who foretells the ruin of political tyrants like an Old Testament prophet. In the bard we discern the same multicultural mastery and literary fluency that characterize Nkomo: wearing "…a sackcloth *shamma* [Ethiopian robe] / From the looms of Tafwaiperes" and " A Chinese dagger in his girdle / [that] Ranks a pistol of English peers…He chants of men fleshed in epics, / Of freedoms that keep men free…" (*HG* 84). The bard can be heard from the epigrammatic style of "Song of myself" to the proverbs in *Libretto*. Indeed, in that earlier poem enterprise seems to channel the bardic voice and infiltrates the Whitmanesque self-proclamation in an act of appropriation that describes its own intellectual porousness, which is later inherited by both Nkomo and the Curator:

> I snatch
> From hooks
> The meat
> Of books.
> I seek
> Frontiers,
> Not worlds
> On biers. (*HG* 49)

And like the kernel of Nkomo's character, the fundamental concerns of the Curator also date

back to Tolson's artistic beginnings. The reflections on artistry presented in "The Poet," for instance, describes in a theoretical fashion the same qualities shared not all of these scavenging bardic figures. In the eponymous poem, the poet declares,

> A freebooter of lands and seas,
> He plunders the dialects of the marketplace,
> Thieves lexicons of Crown jewel discoveries,
> Pillages the symbols and meccas of the race:
> Of thefts the poet's magic leaves no trace. (*HG* 28)

Like the Ethiopian bard, this archetypal poet moves easily amongst discourses, social venues, and physical environments, pilfering from all of them in the name of universal liberatory artistic practice. The coherence we see in these poems, between the various voices and poetic credos presented across Tolson's oeuvre, coincides with the historical poet's developing intellectual interests and compositional strategies. As Aldon Nielsen has observed, Tolson was pillaging the African, European, and American archives since the very beginning, and perhaps even more surprisingly, he was theorizing a poetics of theft akin to T.S. Eliot's well before his express championing of the Eliotic style in the 1950s.[361] And this pillaging characterizes *all* of the Tolson analogues in *Harlem Gallery* – the Curator and Nkomo pillage from past traditions just as they are stolen from Tolson's past work, and Heights and Starks steal Tolson's work *directly*. In light of these resonances, it is impossible to think of any of these four figures as entirely *sui generis*, for they each appear to be developments of earlier tendencies, characters, voices, or ideas, all of which issue from an apparently coherent organizing principle.

5. Personal Criticism

Through tracing its personae, poetic tendencies, and *miss en abyme* presentations, we discover not only that the content and characters of *Harlem Gallery* are continuous with the rest

---

[361] Nielsen, "Deterritorialization of Modernism," 247, 249.

of Tolson's poetic oeuvre, but that the self-reflexivity of his entire corpus suggests a continuity between that poetic organizing principle, or "author function," and the extra-literary person of Melvin Tolson. For his characters are always reflecting on poetic practices, social concerns, and ethical matters that were profoundly important to Tolson the teacher, political activist, and civic leader. These converge and culminate in *Harlem Gallery's* recurrent interest in the cultural, social, and ethical responsibility of art, which Tolson displayed time and again in his classroom and in his editorial writing. But *Harlem Gallery* does more than merely suggest an analogous connection between Tolson as poet and Tolson as man, between the functional author and the autobiographical person; the poem actually denies this distinction by presenting the one as the other. It is precisely those elements (personae, mise en, poetic style) of *Harlem Gallery* that seem to suggest functional cohesion across the oeuvre which actually demonstrate a personal self-consciousness that is fundamentally incompatible with anti-subjectivist functionality. Tolson achieves this emphasis on personality, which we might call autobiographical intentionality, by emphatically directing all of the poem's matter toward self-interrogation.

We have already see how the poem clearly *presents* several pictures of Tolson - as teacher, as literary theorist, as conservative poet, as avant-garde artist, as black man in a white world. These analogues, however, are not merely presented, but they are also received, interpreted, evaluated, and digested. Indeed, *Harlem Gallery* culminates with Tolson presenting himself to himself in a scene of dynamic self-interrogation which precipitates the virtuosic finale of the poem. In recollecting his discovery of Hideho's "private poem in the modernist vein," the Curator's reading at first practices the same discursive reduction favored by so many critics, focusing on the literary-historical fact of its existence, and framing that in racial socio-cultural terms:

The Great White World
and the Black Bourgeoisie
have shoved the Negro artist into
the white and not-white dichotomy… (*HG* 336)

But this universalizing frame, which precedes his actual reading of Hideho's "private" poem, obscures more than it clarifies the Curator's complex engagement with a work that, as a Tolson analogue himself, presents a past reflection of his present self. For in following the Curator's introductory comments, we are encouraged to approach the poem more as a cultural and racial fact than as a particular artwork, inquiring into the sociological significance of *that sort* of man (i.e. cultural representative of " Afroamerican Freedom, Inc." (*HG* 338)) having written *this sort* of poem (i.e. Anglo-modernist). This emphasis on cultural politics distracts us from the fact that right before our eyes we see a veritable smorgasbord of self-reference. For here one Tolson analogue (the Curator) reads peers into the private chamber of another Tolson analogue (Hideho), and not only discovers but reads and interprets the literal past work of Melvin Tolson. To the Curator, Hideho's poem is "eyesight proof / that the Color Line, as well as the Party Line, / splits an artists identity," and presenting the first excerpt as Hideho's rationalization of neglecting his own contemporary culture, he proceeds to bemoan the poet's apparent inner betrayal.

It is true that with an entirely Anglo-European referential scope, *E.& O.E.* is the most whitewashed of Tolson's poems, as one glance at its published endnotes will testify. And in this sense the Curator's assessment of the fact of its existence is reasonable, for its uncharacteristic impersonality and its referential homogeneity present a break from the racial, cultural, and ethical concerns of *Rendezvous with America*. But we must also recognize that the Curator arrives at this conclusion by an inexcusable misreading of the poem. For the supposed rationalization that the Curator puts in the mouth of Hideho (already a problematic conflation of

author and speaker, especially for this Tolson's *least* personal work), the poem itself puts in the mouth of a character, and a notoriously unreliable character at that.[362] *E.& O.E.* attributes the lines to "the purse times' / Tartufean shill," who Tolson's notes explain "is hired by a gambling house to draw customers to the table and create "a fine spirit"; yet the biggest problem of a casino is to protect itself from a crooked shill" (*HG* 138,148). In his interpretation of *E.& O.E.* the Curator is not reading Hideho's poem, he is reading Hideho himself. And by the logic of analogy, in doing so he is reading Tolson. For while the tacit argument he advances against Hideho's antiquarianism has no *textual* basis, it does have an historical one, and the historical legitimacy of his argument holds across the authorial analogy. Just as the stark contrast between Hideho's Zulu Club performance and his modernist poem presume an exclusive cultural dichotomy, so the contrast between the personal and multicultural focus of Tolson's earliest work and the antique whiteness of his first foray into modernism reinforces this dichotomy. If the Curator is critical of Hideho's person, he is just as critical of Tolson's. Since the Curator *is* Tolson, what we have here is a complex instance of poetic self-indictment.

While this critical self-reflection is suggested by the autobiographical analogies upon which *Harlem Gallery* is built, the final sections of the poem realize the fundamental unity of all these characters in a crescendo of discursive and vocal convergence. This begins quietly, when in the midst of explicating Hideho's poem, the Curator unwittingly reincorporates into his own speech the ideas and themes of the poem that so disquiet him. We see this first when the third section of *E.& O.E.* , which reflects on the inexorable passage of time, though unquoted and undiscussed by the Curator, nevertheless determines his own meditation on temporality; "Time!

---

[362] For even if we assume that Hideho is the speaker of *E.&O.E.* (and considering the impersonal nature of that speaker, the assumption doesn't have much ground), because the poem explicitly attributes these lines to a speaker, they don't represent an authorial speaker any more than the Duke of Ferrara can represent Robert Browning in "My Last Duchess."

Time! That poet's *bête noire,*" he begins, and his thoughts turn from time to poetic meter (timing) before resuming his reading (*HG* 339). In the opening of "PSI," the penultimate division of *Harlem Gallery*, this appropriative tendency persists, as the Curator refigures both the orthographic and the thanatopic concerns of *E.& O.E.* 's second section, which begins:

Though
I dot my *i* in this
and rend the horns
of tribal ecbasis,
the Great White world's
uncrossed *t*
pockets the skeleton key
to doors beyond
black chrysalis. (*HG* 134-5)

Transmogrified by the mind of the Curator, these lifted lines are refashioned to describe the very poem from which they originate:

…let me gather the crumbs and cracklings
of this autobio-fragment,
before the curtain with the skull and bones descends.

Many a *t* in the ms.
I've left without a cross,
And many an *i* without a dot. (*HG* 342)

Here the Curator speaks not only *with* the language of E.& O.E. , but *through* its speaker. As an archivist, the Curator would be well aware that any errata encountered in a manuscript must be preserved, not corrected; belonging to Hideho, whatever uncrossed "t"s or undotted "i"s the manuscript presents are not the Curator's to cross or dot. By assuming responsibility for the errata of E.& O.E. , the Curator assumes the same creative agency that he demonstrates throughout *Harlem Gallery*, a role that is highlighted here by his shift to a collaborative role. For not only does he assume an editorial role with regard to Hideho's manuscript, but by inconspicuously sewing its language and concepts into his own poem, his relationship with

Hideho's own role shifts from object of study to poetic collaborator. Now only does the Curator take responsible possession of Hideho's manuscript, but by incorporating it into his own narrative he cedes his own creative autonomy to the people's poet. At this moment the two speak with one voice,and as E.& O.E. 's original vacuum of impersonality is filled with the idiosyncratic personalities of both Hideho and the Curator, it is also filled with Tolson himself. Indeed, it is only through the autobiographical analogy that the Curator's indictment of Hideho makes sense; for unlike the Curator, Tolson has access not only to text, but to intention. The Curator sees his own image in Hideho, just as Tolson confronts his past work in the making of this present poem. What Hideho has done Tolson has done, and the Curator is doing it presently, though with the depth of self-inclusion that resists and revises the initial high modernist inclination toward abstraction and impersonality.

Through the collapse of these autobiographically charged characters, seen both in "PSI" and earlier in "OMICRON", Tolson directs the entirety of *Harlem Gallery* to dramatizing his own poetic, personal, and cultural development. In strikingly overt terms, these scenes present Tolson's own reflection on his past work, and as these personal analogues coalesce in the final pages of the poem, the ecstatic series of apostrophes that close it signal the poem's synthetic transcendence of its constituent parts. On the one hand, *Harlem Gallery* sunders the apparent dichotomy of traditions and cultures by democratically drawing from both African and Western heritages [Matthew Hart on Tolson's "catholicity"]. But more remarkably, in dissolving the distinction between author and person by dramatizing the personality of authorship through critically narrating himself to himself, Tolson thereby unsettles the distinction between this addressed self and the reader. Immediately following the Curator's subtle blending of his own language with that of Hideho's manuscript, he resumes series of apostrophes that, with two

significant modulations, persists and steadily ascends to the poem's climax in the ensuing final:

Black Boy,
you stand before your heritage
naked and agape;
cheated like a mockingbird
pecking at a Zuexian grape,
pressed like an awl to do
duty as a screw-
driver, you
ask the American Dilemma in you… (*HG* 342)

The Curator's invocation of this "American Dilemma" - presumably the same "Afroamerican dilemma in the Arts" ("to be or not to be /a Negro") which Hideho's production of *E.& O.E.* demonstrates - follows directly from his interpretation of that poem. And because to the Curator, Hideho typifies the split identity of the African-American, the figurative addressee of these apostrophic stanza's is likely Hideho, whose full-sale adoption of the modernist idiom suggests his embodiment of that dilemma: black at the Zulu club, white on the page. It is because the Curator sees Hideho as a symptom of a larger cultural dynamic that the particularity of his address is so easily universalized; as a figure, "Black Boy" is Hideho Heights, but that figure also represents a general category, of which Hideho is a part. But the ambiguity of this apostrophic refrain is not limited to a slippage between the particular and the universal. For if Hideho stands before *E.& O.E.* as a symptom of "the Afroamerican dilemma in the Arts," the Curator, as an Afroamerican himself (and an art critic, no less), in reading Hideho's poem also to stands before this heritage. "Black Boy" in this sense, includes the Curator as much as Hideho. And as we discover a few pages later, the Curator embodies concretely the same dilemma that Hideho embodies poetically.

Halfway through "PSI," the term of address switches from "Black Boy" to "White Boy", where the Curator also explicitly aligns himself with the former:

White Boy,
as regards the ethnic origin
of Black Boy and me,
the *What* in Socrates' *"Tò tí?"* (*HG* 350)

There now appear to be three people and two categories. Black Boy, who is either Hideho or all Afroamericans, together with the Curator, who aligns himself with Black Boy, and White Boy, the new addressee who is likely synecdochal, as we have seen no particular white boys in *Harlem Gallery,* for "The Great White World." But then the Curator immediately abandons his impersonal discursive tack, translating "what" to "who" (much like Nkomo before him in "ETA") and rephrasing his question of "ethnic origin" as a matter of personal experience rather than anthropological concern:

Who is a Negro?
(I am White in deah ole Norfolk.)
Who is a White?
(I am a negro in little old New York.)
…
My skin is as white
As a Roman's toga when he sought an office on the sky;
my hair is as blond as xanthein;
my eyes are as blue
as at the hawk's-eye. (*HG* 350)

In declaring his skin color to be geographically and culturally relative, the Curator reveals that, like Tolson's friend Walter Francis White, he is of mixed African and European ancestry, with features emphasizing the latter. Thus the apostrophic ambiguity of the preceding stanzas persists here in exactly the same form, despite the complete reversal of color. For where "Black Boy" includes both Hideho and the Curator as inheritors of the Afroamerican split-identity dilemma, the very nature of this dualistic dilemma means that "White Boy" must include them both as well. In Hideho's case, his unflinching adoption of the high modernist idiom, with all its traditional Eurocentricity, demonstrates his own internal doubleness. Which doubleness the

Curator bemoans, before it leads him to reflect on his own analogous position, for he also stands in two places at once. As curator, he is the cultural preserver of his inherited Afroamerican tradition, but as cultural representative, he uses his passing ability to network and interface with "the Great White World."

The revelation that the Curator is an octoroon comes only by way of his own introspection, a self-interrogation that comes by seeing himself in another. In the Curator's general quest to fathom and present the Afroamerican cultural identity, *Harlem Gallery* presents a variety of different versions of Tolson, which the Curator encounters, interprets, and arranges. But at the emphatically *private* presentation of Hideho, he steps through the ajar door of personality and recognizes in this space of interiority that the object of his inquiry is himself. And it is only in bringing his own identity and experience to bear on Hideho's work that he discovers that apparently antipodal cultural spheres —black/white, high/low, public/private. — are as complicit generally as they are internally. Indeed, at this moment the entire opposition is denounced as specious: "My Negroness is a state of mind conjured by / by Stereotypus." Which is to say, dialectical transcendence of the many dichotomies presented by the poem is only achieved through an act of personal self-reflection; and from this space of personal interiority, synthesis moves outward:

> you [White Boy] are the wick that absorbs the oil in my lamp,
> in all kinds of weather;
> and we are teeth in the pitch wheel
> that work together. (*HG* 351)

Thus the Curator's jolt of self-recognition begins an outward-spiraling movement. Recognizing the coexistence within himself of two strands of culture and tradition enables him to discern a similar synergy at work not just at the societal level, but at the level of art. Indeed, it was art that suggested, in the very beginning of *Harlem Gallery,* what is only realized through personal

application; just like art, the cultural multiplicity of Afroamerican culture "[i]s not barrel copper easily separated / from the matrix." *Harlem Gallery* is of course the final testament to this inexorable involvement not just of aesthetic or cultural traditions, but of people. As will all its personae, all its strands of culture, history, and aesthetics collapse into a single entity; these things find their being in the person of Melvin Tolson.

But as it stands at the end of "CHI" this cooperation is unstable and dangerous. For as it radiates outward from the Curator's own experience toward larger social structures, the inner harmony between apparently opposed cultural identities threatens to collapse under the weight of objective individuality. The poems' turn toward the personal is momentarily forestalled by the demands of categorical definition, which insists upon rendering *who* as *what*. From his own fraught identification with Hideho Heights, we know that the aesthetic tension the Curator discovers within himself between modernist and folk-traditional and the related racial tension between black and white cultures is registered at the level of identity. But identity, in a solitary individual sense, proves incapable of ultimately reconciling these tensions, and at the end of CHI, the quest for a definite notion of black identity capsizes in a deluge of categorical abstractions:

> In the Strait of Octoroon,
> off black Scylla,
> after the typhoon Phobos, out of the Stereotypes Sea,
> had rived her hull and sailed to a T,
> the *Défineznegro* sank the rock
> and disappeared in the abyss
> (*Vanitas vanitatum!*)
> of white Charybdis. (*HG* 354)

The imperative "*définez negro*" begins a quest that ends in the destruction of that category. We might speculate that what precipitates the wreck of this endeavor in the strait of Octoroon, is nothing other than sailing to the "T" of Tolson, the theoretical inquiry failing in the face of a

concrete person. But if the imperative to define the Negro ultimately drowns the rock of Black scylla in the great Great White World [whirlpool], we are left wondering how both terms emerge together in the "Black Boy, White Boy" refrain of *Harlem Gallery*'s final section.

After all, it is rather surprising that the racial categories that went under with the wreck of the *Défineznegro* should resurface so insistently in *Harlem Gallery*'s finale, where the Curator addresses himself to first "White Boy, / Black Boy," then "Black Boy, / White Boy," and back and forth until the very last page of the poem. In the CHI section the interchangeability of these two terms centered on the Curator's personal bi-racial and bi-cultural identification, and while he experiences their simultaneous coexistence, the structure of the poem is still largely dualistic, "Black Boy" dominating the first half, and then being replaced by "White Boy" in the second. But in OMEGA, their interchangeability moves from the realm of the epiphanic realization to that quotidian reality, while the frequency of their oscillating shifts also suggests the relativity of such racial markers. Indeed, we mustn't forget that Tolson believed racial difference to be a function of economic difference, and therefore largely a construct of material inequality. And the apostrophic ambiguity that quietly subtends CHI is also brought to the forefront in OMEGA, where the Curator seems to address a composite figure that is simultaneously both particular and universal, high and low, black and white, himself and other. In the opening stanza, for instance, he declares:

> Now the difference between
> you and me
> is the little matter of
> a Harvard Ph.D. (*HG* 355)

To whom, we might wonder, does this doctoral degree belong? As an intellectual and ex-professor, it may as easily belong to the Curator as to Nkomo, or some anonymous synecdochal

person, black or white.[363] But given the way in which not only all *Harlem Gallery*'s characters, but also its invoked categories, have increasingly bled into one another, such a *particular* question rather misses the mark. Of course the composite figure addressed in these final pages is as much the Curator as it is Nkomo, Hideho, or Starks, for as our narrator discovers, like Walt Whitman, he contains multitudes. And just as both black and white threads of cultural and social identity converge in all of these characters, so they converge generally in the American landscape, hence the categorical relativity of this double invocation. In the multi-racial and multi-cultural landscape of American culture, as in the characters of *Harlem Gallery*, it is impossible to say just where "Black Boy" stops and "White Boy" begins.

Are we then awash in a sea of grey? Is Tolson's vision a "colorblind" one? Not quite, it would seem, for yet particularity *is* maintained, and the mechanism of its preservation is art. For just as *Harlem Gallery* dramatizes the interrelation of its characters and their cultures, its personae and references remain concrete and embodied. Unlike say, Eliot in *The Waste Land*, in Tolson's poem strands of culture are always tied to discrete characters. In this way art preserves personal and cultural particulars while also testifying that their underlying synthesis can only be approached through the personal. And strangely, the personal reaches its completion in the artwork. This swarming multiplicity of the singular is demonstrated not just by the Curator's character or his heteroclite exhibition, but by the entire production of *Harlem Gallery.* In this sense, it is the artwork itself that proves the sharpest view of personally grounded synthetic totality. Indeed, this conviction motivates the Curator's final reflections on art, which constitute a sort of apologia for the esoteric, not because the modernist mode is "here to stay" or carries special cultural capital, but rather because its participatory mode draws out and brings together

---

[363] We might recall that throughout *Harlem Gallery* Tolson has insistently invoked that most famous of African American Harvard Ph.D.s – W.E.B. DuBois.

the particularity of both cultures and persons. For while the final section of the poem calls out to the whole world, it aspires to the intersubjective through a still operative introspective mode. On the one hand, each page beings with Curator calling to a universal black-white audience, and on the other hand, each page ends with the Curator's return to his own highly individualized rumination on aesthetics theory. In addition to a number of new metaphors — "the open sesame to the unknown", "bitter crystalline alkaloid") — we also a return to the culture-as-milk metaphor, for instance (*HG* 355-6). Simultaneously addressing the world and the Curator's own inner conversation, OMEGA conflates two audiences, and the poem's participatory mode inheres in this bi-directionality; in speaking to itself, it speaks to the world. In these final sections, the Curator comes to recognize himself in art (Hideho's) and in this realization he moves *through* himself in a turn to other persons, creating an artwork that both registers his own personal recognition and affords the "Black Boy / White Boy" the same opportunity for self-reflection.

> What if a *chef-d'oeuvre* is esoteric?
> The cavernous By Room, with its unassignable variety
> of ego-dwarfing
> stalactites and stalagmites,
> makes my veins and arteries vibrate faster
> as I study its magnificence and intricacy. (*HG* 359)

Here we have an aesthetic vision similar to that articulated by Elaine Scarry discussion of beauty, where she borrows from Simone Weil the notion of "radical de-centering" to argue that the beautiful object brings one closer to social equality and justice by facilitating a sort of self-forgetfulness.[364] But here the "ego-dwarfing" splendor of the esoteric masterpiece leads to world-consciousness and democratic address by a radical de-centering that produces not self-forgetfulness but rather a more robust form of self-awareness and body-consciousness. If in the case of the Curator, this re-centered and expanded sense of self-consciousness is built upon a

[364] Scarry, Elaine, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 109-118

moment of sympathetic recognition, then it is fitting that self-consciousness (or to speak of modes of discourse, self-address) is the condition of intersubjective awareness (or, conversation). In this sense the artist isn't unlike the preacher, who, as Gregory the Great reminds orators, should be "first to find in Holy Scriptures the knowledge of themselves, and then to carry it to others, lest in reproving others they forget themselves."[365] And we recall that Tolson not only comes form a long line of preachers, but often employed the rhetorical tactics of such men of God in his political writings.

The mounting vocative posture of the this final section, which mingles the identities of its addressees while also merging the apostrophic and self-reflective modes, shuttlecocks between interior and exterior modes. On the outside, general address enlists the voices of others, from historical personages (French Cubist André Lhote, for instance) to the poem's own characters. Midway through OMEGA, Dr. Nkomo, quoted in hearty apostrophic fanfare, urges the alien patrons and viewers of the Curator's gallery, to distill and recreate from its paintings' representational distortions the matter of their art.

> "O fruits of the first Harlem Harvest,
> let the beholder who is neither kith nor kin
> recompose the unexpected tones in a dusky Everyman
> the painter's brush has dissociated against the milieu -
> then boned and fleshed and veined again" (*HG* 360)

Nkomo's address is directed toward this everyman as much as it is about him. This preaching declares that spectation consists in encountering that which is foreign to the experiencing person, and reconstituting it through an act of creative reassemblage. The Curator responds by applying this directive to himself, which moves him to an admission of failure:

> I confess without regret

---

[365] Gregory, the Great, from *Pastoral Rule* 3.24, quoted in Bechard, Dean Philip *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic* Teachings (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 41.

in this omega of my education:
I no longer have the force of a gilbert,
nor have I ever had the levitation
sustain a work of art.
I have only pilgrimed
to the cross street
(a godsend in God's acre)
where
curator and creator meet -
friend yolked to friend at the candle end. (*HG 360)*

And yet the Curator does sustain a work of art, for this education, which we might take as either his archival career or the events he has experienced and described throughout the narrative course of Tolson's poem, ends precisely in the production of an artwork in which critic and creator meet. For Harlem Gallery (the art exhibition, work of the curator) is *Harlem Gallery* (the poem, work of the creator). While these functions of creator and curator meet in the person of Melvin Tolson (professor, historian, poet, playwright), they remain distinct in *Harlem Gallery* because the "friend yoked to friend at the candle end" of the work of art names a mode of self-exploration as much as one of intersubjective exchange. In this sense the curator is also the critic, who "bolsters the topmost mast of Art" by presenting exhibitions that "open the sesame to the unknown / What and How and Why" by encouraging "exegesis [that] exacts patience" (359, 355). While we know that the Curator has amassed a collection, within the narrative of *Harlem Gallery*, his principle activities are dialogic and readerly - he is thus as much modeled after Tolson as he is a model for the reader. In this light *Harlem Gallery* as a whole functions as a testimony of personal experience which, directed toward a self-reflection that is both personally and socially cognizant, implicates its author as well as its reader.

The vision of art both theorized by and embodied in *Harlem Gallery* is thus simultaneously autobiographical and intersubjective; it its capacity to both testify and implicate, art completes a vision of the personal that resists categorical definition. Built upon a foundation of narrative self-

examination that invites readerly participation, the poem presents personality as coherent, reflective, communicative, and morally and politically? responsible. It is indeed this final point that unites the other aspects of personality, for coherence, reflection, and communication are all directed toward a morally motivated utopic vision. Through inspiring such self-reflection, interpersonal connection, and general social enlightenment, personal art like *Harlem Gallery* is both therapeutic and politically/ideologically productive. To the individual it is the a balmy river that, like Heraclitus', is always different because each bather discover in its current a course:

> Many mouths empty their waters
> into the Godavari of Art –
> […]
> and, in the selfheal of the river,
> pilgrims lave the bruises of the rain of woes. (*HG* 356)

To the critic this stream becomes "A Gobelin arras" to unweave in order "to make again /a new place for new things and new men," and thereby spreading the "freedom [that] s the oxygen / of the studio and gallery" (357, 359). This ultimately moral-utopic vision of *Harlem Gallery,* combined with the apostrophic mode of its final sections, recalls that dimension of meaning all too neglected by I.A. Richards in his formulation of a scientific methodology for literary studies. *Harlem Gallery* restores the four dimensions of meaning that governed literary interpretation before the modern era, for it is at once about a particular individual, an entire race, a future hope, and you, the reader. Its particular notion of personality rests upon this last, tropological sense, for it is the morality of the tropological dimension that enables the poem not just to describe or express, but to address and engage.

It is here that the truly remarkable aspect of *Harlem Gallery*'s personality come into view. The reflexivity of Tolson's poem outdoes the metafictional self-consciousness of the modernist Künstlerroman not only by foregrounding its writerly awareness ("I know I'm writing this

poem") and drawing into this awareness all past acts of writing together with their personal significance, but by also implicating the audience in its morally urgent cultural reflections. To consider this sort of authorship through the Foucaultian lens, we must say that the "author function" is designated not by the intellect of the critic, but by that of the poet, which takes us out of the realm of imposed intellectual or discursive categories and back into that archaic terrain of cognizant self-expression and communication. Arising as it does from a robust autobiographical sensibility, the personal notion of authorship enacted by *Harlem Gallery* isn't limited to autobiography. Rather, *Harlem Gallery* takes autobiography as the necessary path not just to express personality but to engage with persons. The self-interrogation worked out in the final sections of the poem, together with the implicative and intersubjective mode of its climax, complete the translation of personality from the discursive to the ethically active.

This topologically robust poetic mode makes a rather heavy demand on academic criticism, requiring not only a theoretical reassessment of the predominant paradigm of impersonal discursive subjectivity, but also a refigured set of practices to access, foreground, and understand the personal dimension of literary experience. Fortunately the need for such a shift is already felt amongst literary critics. Lisa Ruddick, for instance, has recently called attention to the detrimental effect of the anti-subjectivist turn on the discipline in particular and its newest recruits in particular. The tendency of academic criticism over the past several decades to not just exclude but openly revile such categories as personal identity, selfhood, and interpersonal intimacy has produced, she asserts, a generation of graduate students who "suffer from malaise a malaise without a name" that is characterized by "feelings of confusion, inhabitation, and loss."[366] Yet even before Ruddick's intervention, there have been efforts from within the field of

literary studies to expand the horizon of its critical practices in the name of personality. In closing we might briefly nod to two such instances, the first theoretical, the second demonstrative. Not long ago Andrew Miller made the case for what he calls "implicative criticism," a mode of reading and writing eschews the impulse toward drawing conclusions and advancing definitive interpretations, favoring instead a sort of "display of thought" that seeks to "stimulate modes of thinking and trains of thought" in a way that "singles out the reader" and generates thought that is less descriptive and more cooperative with a work.[367] On the practical end, Rachel Buurma and Laura Heffernan display something like this sort of literary thinking in their exploration of reference and autobiographical reality in the late work of Roland Barthes and Shelia Heti's novel *How Should a Person Be?* Both writers, they argue, renounce metalanguage and thereby "refuse to signal an outside" of their autobiographically inspired characters' lives, effectively dissolving "the hard division between life and literature."[368] But in order for such endeavors to fully grasp the capacity of literary works to sunder the divisions between production, reception, and the rest of life, literary criticism must first reconsider and coherently theorize its understanding of human personality. Melvin Tolson himself provides an early and exceptional model for this, conducting as he did the entirety of his poetic, political, and critical career within a university, both in its classrooms and in endeavors more tangential, like debate.

---

[366] Ruddick, Lisa, "When Nothing Is Cool," in *The Future of Scholarly Writing – Critical Interventions,* ed. Angelika Bammer and Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres (Palgrave Macmillan 2015).

[367] Miller, Andrew H., "Implicative Criticism, or The Display of Thinking." *New Literary History: A Journal Of Theory And Interpretation* 44, no. 3 (2013): 348, 354.

[368] Buurma, Rachel Sagner, and Laura Heffernan. "Notation after the 'Reality Effect': Remaking Reference with Roland Barthes and Sheila Heti." *Representations* 125, (Winter 2014): 90.

CODA

The Persistence of Personality and the Assistance of the Institution

The title of this dissertation inverts that of an essay Roland Barthes published in 1971; rather than moving "from Work to Text," I have maintained that we literary critics might take a cue from the late work of Eliot, Moore, Tolson, and even Richards, and move from text to work. In many ways, the argument Barthes makes in that short essay is of a piece with his more famous manifesto of 1969, "The Death of the Author," but there is one peculiar feature of later essay. About halfway through his argument about the superiority of the text over the work, Barthes begins explaining how the "Text is plural," and breaking from the structure wherein he compares the text's positive and liberating qualities to the work's negative and constrictive ones, he dedicates this fourth point entirely to the Text. "The plurality of the Text," he explains,

> depends, as a matter of fact, not on the ambiguity of its contents, but on what we might call the stereographic plurality of the signifiers which weave it (etymologically, the text is a fabric): the reader of the Text might be compared to an idle subject (who has relaxed his image-repertoire): this fairly empty subject (this has happened to the author of these lines, and it is for this reason that he has come to an intense awareness of the Text) along a hillside at the bottom of which flows a wadi (I use the word to attest to a certain alienation); what he perceives is multiple, irreducible, issuing from heterogeneous, detached substances and levels: lights, colors, vegetation, heat, air, tenuous explosions of sound, tiny cries of birds, children's voices from the other side of the valley…[369]

The list goes on, and the list alone is remarkable. But even more surprising is the fact that Barthes not only builds this rather beautiful argument upon the foundation of his own particular

[369] Barthes, Roland, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1977), 159.

aesthetic experience, but also conveys that experience with a certain intention. It is phenomenal experience that provides the ground for this theory, the intelligibility of which depends on Barthes's intentional use of language. Thus even in 1971 it is clear that Barthes's resistance to author-centric meaning is not set in opposition to personality as such, but rather the distortion of personality that sees *only* the author as important.[370] And as Barthes's late work suggests, this preference for the reader-position of experience over the author-position is likely a function of his job – he worked as theorist, critic, philosopher, but not really as a writer.

All of this changed when Barthes began "Wanting-to-Write," wanting to embrace "a renunciation of metalanguage."[371] With this shift in position, we witness a shift not unlike that of the late I.A. Richards. In the beginning of *Preparation of the Novel* – the fruit of this desire to write – Barthes explains that he belongs "to a generation that has suffered too much from the censorship of the subject, whether following the positivist route (the objectivity required by literary history, the triumph of philology) or the Marxist… Better the illusion of subjectivity than the impostures of objectivity."[372] Objectivity comes to appear as a false position precisely because Barthes comes to occupy the position that he had theretofore denied subjectivity (i.e. the position of the author). After the historical and hermeneutic turns of phenomenology, this epiphany appears neither surprising nor terribly interesting. To contemporary fiction writers like Zadie Smith and David Foster Wallace, it would seem almost intuitive, albeit somewhat

[370] That Barthes here is an ostensibly empty subject can hardly be taken as indicative of the nature of the subject itself, but more likely presents a receptive state or position the subject can experience or occupy. Indeed, the highly personal concerns of Barthes's late work (*Camera Lucinda*, *Mourning Diary*), which reflects on and is born out of the loss of his mother, testifies to the strength of his personal investments.

[371] Barthes, Roland, *The Preparation of the Novel: Lecture Courses and Seminars At the Collège De France, 1978-1979 and 1979-1980*, trans. Kate Briggs, ed. Nathalie Léger (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 8-9.

[372] Ibid., 3.

mystically so. There are, however, two more striking realities that Barthes's late conversion to writing suggests.

The first we might call the persistence of personality. In the short essay on personality by Hans Urs von Balthasar (discussed in the opening pages of this dissertation), the theologian suggests that intellectual history testifies to a sort of dialectic between impersonality and personality, where at the very apex of philosophical impersonality, its opposite always remerges and reasserts itself with sublated strength. Hence for von Balthasar, the relative degeneration of this term "person" from the Enlightenment forward never fully evacuated it of theological import. For even as the dignity endowed the human person achieved the "independence" of "subjective-self consciousness" with Descartes, that "independence then absolutized itself very soon (Spinoza, Hegel) so that the individuals had to give themselves up to [the] Absolute." Paradoxically, he notes, "after a personless idealism met its end in Hegel, the popular atheistic materialism of a Feuerbach had to rediscover the elementary fact that there simply cannot be a single person, existing within himself, but that existence as a person comes about only in the relationship between I and Thou."[373] What von Balthasar maintains of the history of philosophy on a grand scale, my own treatment of Richard, Eliot, Moore, and Tolson demonstrates on the level of the individual career. That the same dynamic works itself out in the career of Barthes, several decades after these modernist figures, seems to suggest that personality lurks behind any vehement theory of impersonality, regardless of its particular historical situation.

The second reality is somewhat related to the first. I have suggested in the preceding pages that the depersonalization represented in Richards's method and recapitulated in Barthes's early thought is a function of the university itself. And yet, as Rachel Buurma and Laura

[373] von Balthasar, Hans Urs, "On the Concept of Person," *Communio* 13, Spring (1986), 23-4.

Heffernan demonstrate, Barthes's late turn toward subjectivity is not so much set up against the university as it is intentionally embedded in it. This is not to say that Barthes found these two occupations naturally symbiotic – he didn't. In fact, as Buurma and Heffernan point out, when he first underwent "his conversion experience from critic to writer and decide[d] to make writing his life – to emerge into writing instead of regarding it from the outside – Barthes first imagine[d] that he [would] need to resign from the Collège."[374] But he did not, and *The Preparation of the Novel* came into existence through the institutional forms of lecture courses and seminars, as its subtitle indicates. Thus not only did Barthes's about-face take place within the very institution that fostered in him the attitudes from which he had lately turned, but to some degree it was enabled by that same institution. In varying degrees, this same dynamic of immanent resistance characterizes the development of the figures discussed in this dissertation. The most obvious instances are Richards and Tolson, both of whom spent their entire careers in universities, and both of whose intellectual development tended toward the personal. The particular avenues for their movements, however, belie the marginal orientation such development needed to take within the university. For Richards, that path was beyond the pale of the field he so heavily influenced, in administrative projects like the *Red Book* and in general education courses; for Tolson it was in an institutional iteration that was itself wholly marginal – the Historically Black College – and in activities that were largely tangential to scholarship – debate societies and thespian clubs. This marginality accords with the positions of Moore and Eliot, both of whom maintained official aloofness to universities while nevertheless lecturing in their auditoriums and participating in their conversations through reviews and acquaintances.

[374] Buurma, Rachel Sagner, and Laura Heffernan. "Notation after the 'Reality Effect': Remaking Reference with Roland Barthes and Sheila Heti." *Representations* 125, (Winter 2014): 87.

Taken together with the insight gleaned from von Balthasar, the different institutional situations of these four figures reveal deep the complicity of the impersonal with the personal; in good dialectical fashion, the most robust manifestations of personality arise from impersonal structures like the university, and are realized by the use of impersonal tools like the endnote.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Albright, Daniel. *Personality and Impersonality: Lawrence, Woolf, and Mann.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

Alighieri, Dante, and Robert S. Haller. *Literary Criticism of Dante Alighieri.* Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1973.

Anderson, R. D. *European Universities From the Enlightenment to 1914*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition. Charles R Walgreen Foundation Lectures*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

Arnold, Matthew, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" in *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, edited by Stefan Collini, 26-52. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Attridge, Derek, "Literary Experience and the Value of Criticism" in *The Values of Literary Studies: Critical Institutions, Scholarly Agendas,* edited by Rónán McDonald, 249-262. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Auerbach, Erich. *Scenes From the Drama of European Literature.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Augustine, and Henry Chadwick. *Confessions*. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Bacon, Francis.. *The New Organon*, edited by Lisa Jardine, and Michael Silverthorne. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Baldick, Chris, *The Social Mission of English Criticism, 1848-1932.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983.

Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*, translated by Stephen Heath. New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1977.

———. *The Preparation of the Novel: Lecture Courses and Seminars At the Collège De France, 1978-1979 and 1979-1980*, translated by Kate Briggs, edited and compiled by Nathalie Léger. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011.

Bazin, Victoria. *Marianne Moore and the Cultures of Modernity*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010.

Bechard, Dean Philip *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings.* Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2002.

Bérubé, Michael. *Marginal Forces/Cultural Centers : Tolson, Pynchon, and the Politics of the Canon.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992.

Best, Stephen, and Sharon Marcus. "Surface Reading: An Introduction". *Representations* 108 No.1. (Fall 2009): 1–21.

Borges, Jorge Luis. *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other* Writings, edited by Donald A Yates and James East Irby. New York, NY: New Directions, 2007.

Briggs, Asa, "History and the Social Sciences" in *Universities in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries (1800-1945). A History of the University in Europe,* edited by Walter Rüegg, 459-89. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Brooke, Christopher, Victor Morgan, Damian Riehl Leader, and Peter Searby. *A History of the University of Cambridge. Vol.4*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Brooker, Jewel Spears. "Eliot and Bergson: 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' and the Intractability of Dualism." *Partial Answers: Journal Of Literature And The History Of Ideas 13*, no. 1 (January 2015): 1-17.

Brooker, Jewel Spears, and Joseph Bentley. *Reading The Waste Land: Modernism and the Limits of Interpretation.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990.

Brooks, Cleanth, Jr. "*The Waste Land*: An Analysis." *Southern Literature* 3, (1937): 106-136.

Bryn Mawr College Calendar: Register of Alumnæ and Former Students 1908. Part 1. Vol.1. Bryn Mawr, Pa.: Bryn Mawr College, 1908.

Bryn Mawr College Program, Academic Year 1904-5. Philadelphia. John C. Winston Co. 1904.

"The Bryn Mawr College Geology Collections", *Bryn Mawr College*. Accessed 29 April, 2016. http://www.brynmawr.edu/collections/geology.html

Buurma, Rachel Sagner, and Laura Heffernan. "Notation after the 'Reality Effect': Remaking Reference with Roland Barthes and Sheila Heti." *Representations* 125, (Winter 2014): 80-102.

Bush, Ronald. *T.S. Eliot, A Study in Character and Style*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Cameron, Sharon. *Impersonality: Seven Essays*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Cherniss, Harold F.. *The Biographical Fashion in Literary Criticism. University of California Publications in Classical Philology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1943.

Childs, Donald J.. *The Birth of New Criticism : Conflict and Conciliation in the Early Work of William Empson, I.A. Richards, Laura Riding, and Robert Graves.* Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013.

Childs, Donald J.. *From Philosophy to Poetry: T.S. Eliot's Study of Knowledge and Experience*. New York, NY: Palgrave, 2001.

Costello, Bonnie. *Marianne Moore, Imaginary Possessions.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981.

Cox, Oliver C.. *Caste, Class & Race: A Study In Social Dynamics*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1948.

Cremin, Lawrence A.. *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism In American Education, 1876-1957*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1964.

Cull, Ryan E.. "'Complexities Which Will Remain Complexities': The Environmentalist Epistemology of Marianne Moore's 'An Octopus'." *Paideuma: Studies In American And British Modernist Poetry* 33, no. 2-3 (2004 Fall-Winter 2004): 3-27.

Culler, Jonathan. "Changes in the Study of the Lyric." In *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, edited by Chaviva Hošek and Patricia Parker, 38-54. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985.

Danto, Arthur C. *Jean-Paul Sartre.* Modern Masters. New York, NY: Viking Press, 1975.

"datum, n." *OED Online.* June 2016. Oxford University Press. Accessed May 21, 2016. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/47434

David, Elizabeth H. "Moore's 'The Hero'." *Explicator* 49, no. 3 (Spring 1991): 173-175.

“Decorative Arts”, *Bryn Mawr College*. Accessed 29 April, 2016. http://www.brynmawr.edu/collections/decorative.html

Dejong, Timothy. "Affect and Diaspora: Unfashionable Hope in Melvin B. Tolson's Libretto for the Republic of Liberia." *Research In African Literatures* 45, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 110-129.

De Man, Paul. *The Resistance to Theory. Theory and History of Literature.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

Dove, Rita. "Telling It Like It I-S IS: Narrative Techniques in Melvin Tolson's Harlem Gallery." *New England Review And Bread Loaf Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (Autumn 1985): 109-117.

Du Bois, W. E. B. *The World and Africa; an Inquiry into the Part Which Africa Has Played in World History.* New York, NY: The Viking Press, 1947.

Eboch, Douglas and Ken Aguado. "Tales from the trenches: Robert Eisele pitches 'The Great Debaters,'" *Hollywood Journal*, last modified September 5, 2014. http://hollywoodjournal.com/industry-impressions/tales-from-the-trenches-robert-eisele-pitches-the-great-debaters/20140905/

Eliot, T. S. *Complete Poems and Plays.* New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, 1969.

———. *On Poetry and Poets.* New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957.

———. *To Criticize the Critic: And Other Writings*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965.

———. *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies In the Relation of Criticism to Poetry In England.* London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1964.

———. *The Letters of T.S. Eliot. Volume 1, 1898*-1922, edited by John Haffenden, Hugh Haughton, and Valerie Eliot. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2011.

———. *The Waste Land: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, edited by Michael North. New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001.

———. *The Annotated Waste Land with Eliot's Contemporary Prose*, edited by Lawrence S. Rainey. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2005.

———. *The Poems of T.S. Eliot,* edited by Christopher Ricks, and Jim McCue. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015.

———. *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot. The Critical Edition*, edited by Ronald Schuchard, Jewel Spears Brooker, Anthony Cuda, Frances Dickey, Jennifer Formichelli, and Jason Harding. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.

———. *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, edited by Valerie Eliot. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971.

Ellmann, Maud. *The Poetics of Impersonality : T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987.

Fabio, Sarah Webster. "Who Speaks Negro?" *Negro Digest* 16.2. (1966): 54-8.

Farnsworth, Robert M.. *Melvin B. Tolson, 1898-1966 : Plain Talk and Poetic Prophecy.* Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984.

Felski, Rita *Uses of Literature.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2008.

———. "'Context Stinks!'" *New Literary History* 42, no. 4 (2011): 573-591.

———. "After Suspicion." *Profession* (2009): 28-35.

Flasch, Joy. *Melvin B. Tolson*. Twayne's United States Authors Series, 215. New York, Twayne Publishers. 1972.

Foucault, Michel. "What is an Author?" in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, edited by James D Faubion, 206-221. New York, NY: New Press, 1998.

Freed, Lewis, *T. S. Eliot: Aesthetics and History*. La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1962.

Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* 30th anniversary ed. New York, NY: Continuum, 2000.

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method.* The Bloomsbury Revelations Series, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

Gardner, Helen, *The Composition of Four Quartets*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978.

General Education in a Free Society: Report of the Harvard Committee. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1945.

Gold, David. "'Nothing Educates Us Like a Shock': The Integrated Rhetoric of Melvin B. Tolson." *College Composition And Communication* 55, no. 2 (December 2003): 226-253.

Gordon, Lyndall. *Eliot's Early Years.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Graff, Gerald. *Professing Literature: An Institutional History.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Grafton, Anthony. *The Footnote: A Curious History.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Gray, Piers. *T.S. Eliot's Intellectual and Poetic Development, 1909-1922*. Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982.

Gregory, Brad S.. *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society.* Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012.

Gregory, Elizabeth. "'Still Leafing': Celebrity, Confession, Marianne Moore's 'The Camperdown Elm' and the Scandal of Age." *Journal Of Modern Literature* 35, no. 3 (Spring 2012): 51-76.

———. "Stamps, Money, Pop Culture, and Marianne Moore." *Discourse: Journal For Theoretical Studies In Media And Culture* 17, no. 1 (Fall 1994): 123-146.

———. *Quotation and Modern American Poetry: Imaginary Gardens with Real Toads*. Houston, TX: Rice University Press, 1996.

Habib, Rafey. *The Early T.S. Eliot and Western Philosophy*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Hadot, Pierre. *Philosophy As a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises From Socrates to Foucault*, translated by Arnold I. Davidson. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.

Hall, Donald. *Their Ancient Glittering Eyes: Remembering Poets and More Poets: Robert Frost, Dylan Thomas, T.S. Eliot, Archibald Macleish, Yvor Winters, Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound.* New York, NY: Ticknor & Fields, 1992.

Hart, Matthew. *Nations of Nothing But Poetry: Modernism, Transnationalism, and Synthetic Vernacular Writing*. Oxford, England: Oxford UP, 2010.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Aesthetics : Lectures on Fine Art*. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time.* Harper Perennial Modern Thought ed., translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008.

———. "Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics" in *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to the Task of Thinking (1964*), edited by David F. Krell, 271-305. New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008.

———. “Letter on Humanism” in *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to the Task of Thinking (1964*), edited by David F. Krell, 213-266. New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008.

Heuving, Jeanne. *Omissions Are Not Accidents: Gender In the Art of Marianne Moore*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992.

Hill, Lena M. *Visualizing Blackness and the Creation of the African American Literary Tradition. Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Hirsch, E.D.. "Derrida's Axioms" in *London Review of Books*. Vol. 5 No. 13 (1983): 17-18.

Holley, Margaret. *The Poetry of Marianne Moore: A Study In Voice and Value*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Honigsblum, Bonnie. "Marianne Moore's Revisions of 'Poetry'." *Marianne Moore: Woman and Poet*, edited by Patricia Willis, 185-222. Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine, 1990.

Horowitz, Helen Lefkowitz *The Power and Passion of M. Carey Thomas*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.

"hover, v.1". OED Online. March 2016. Oxford University Press. Accessed May 25, 2016. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/88986

Hughes, Langston. "Here to Yonder." *Chicago Defender* (Chicago, IL), Aug. 15 1945.

Husserl, Edmund. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology; an Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, translated by David Carr. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970.

"information, n." *OED Online*. March 2016. Oxford University Press. Accessed May 21, 2016. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/95568?redirectedFrom=information

Jain, Manju. *T.S. Eliot and American Philosophy: The Harvard Years*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981.

Jarrett, Hobart. “Adventures in Interracial Debates” in *Crisis*, August, 1935. 240.

Kaiser, Jo Ellen Green. "Disciplining The Waste Land: Or, How to Lead Critics into Temptation," *Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly And Critical Journal 44*, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 88-99.

Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of* Morals, edited by Allen W. Wood and J. B. Schneewind. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2002.

———. *Critique of Judgement,* trans. Nicholas Walker. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Kappel, Andrew J.. “The Verba Artendia of Richard Baxter in the Poems of Marianne Moore,” *Christianity and Literature* 41. (Summer 1992): 421-44

———. "Complete with Omissions: The Text of Marianne Moore's Complete Poems." In *Representing Modernist Texts: Editing as Interpretation*, edited by George Bornstein, 125-156. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991.

Kenner, Hugh. *The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot.* New York, NY: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959.

———. *A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers.* [1st ed.] New York, NY: Knopf, 1974

Kierkegaard, Søren, *The Present Age and Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1962)

Kindley, Evan. "Picking and Choosing: Marianne Moore among the Agonists." *ELH* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 685-713.

Knoper, Randall. "Walt Whitman and New Biographical Criticism." *College Literature* 30, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 161-168.

Kohlstedt, Sally Gregory. “Curiosities and Cabinets: Natural History Museums and Education on the Antebellum Campus”. *Isis* 79, no. 3 (1988): 405–26.

Land-Grant College Act, U.S. Code 7 (2016), chapter 13, § 304 https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/7/304

Lang, Eugene M.. "Distinctively American: The Liberal Arts College" in *Distinctively American: The Residential Liberal Arts* College, edited by Steven Koblik and Stephen Richards Graubard, 133-150. New Brunswick: Transaction, 2000.

Latour, Bruno. "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern." *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (Winter 2004): 225-248.

Leavell, Linda. *Holding On Upside Down: The Life and Work of Marianne Moore*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013.

Leavis, Frank Raymond. *New Bearings In English Poetry: A Study of the Contemporary Situation.* London: Chatto & Windus, 1932.

Levenson, Michael H.. *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine 1908-1922.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Levina, Jūratė. "Speaking the Unnamable: A Phenomenology of Sense in T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets," *Journal Of Modern Literature* 36, no. 3 (Spring 2013): 194-211.

Levine, Caroline. *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015.

Lewis, Pericles. *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism*. Cambridge ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Liddell, Henry George and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon, revised and augmented throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie*. Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1940.

Love, Heather. “Close Reading and Thin Description” *Public Culture* Volume 25, no. 3 71 (2013): 401-434.

Lubac, Henri de. *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, *Vol. 1*, translated by Mark Sebanc. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1998.

———. *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, *Vol.* 2, translated by E.M. Macierowski. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2000.

Lukas, F.L.. “Review of *The Waste Land*.” *Newstatesman* 22 (London), Nov. 3, 1923: 116-8.

Lukes, Steven. *Individualism. Key Concepts in the Social Sciences*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1973.

McCall, Dan. "The Quicksilver Sparrow of M. B. Tolson." *American Quarterly* 18, (1966): 538-542.

McDonald, Rónán, “After Suspicion” Surface, Method, Value” in *The Values of Literary Studies: Critical Institutions, Scholarly Agendas,* edited by Rónán McDonald, 235-248. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

McGuinness, Brian. *Young Ludwig: Wittgenstein's Life, 1889-1921.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005.

MacIntyre, Alasdair C.. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

Marion, Jean-Luc. *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012.

Maritain, Jacques. *Education At the Crossroads*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1943.

Maritain, Jacques. *The Person and the Common Good*, translated by John J. Fitzgerald. New York, NY: C. Scribner's Sons, 1947.

Meigs, Cornelia. *What Makes a College?: A History of Bryn Mawr.* New York, NY: Macmillan, 1956.

Menand, Louis. *Discovering Modernism: T.S. Eliot and His Context*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

———. *The Metaphysical Club*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001.

Middleton, Peter. "The Academic Development of The Wasteland." in *Demarcating the Disciplines: Philosophy, Literature, Art*, edited by Samuel Weber, 153-180. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

Miller, Andrew H., "Implicative Criticism, or The Display of Thinking." *New Literary History: A Journal Of Theory And Interpretation* 44, no. 3 (2013): 345-360.

Miller, James E.. *T.S. Eliot: The Making of an American Poet, 1888-1922.* University Park, PA.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005.

———. *T. S. Eliot's Personal Waste Land: Exorcism of the Demons.* University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977.

Miller, Cristanne. "Distrusting: Marianne Moore on Feeling and War in the 1940s." *American Literature: A Journal Of Literary History, Criticism, And Bibliography* 80, no. 2 (June 2008): 353-379.

———. "Marianne Moore's Black Maternal Hero: A Study in Categorization." *American Literary History* 1, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 786-815.

"MM's Course Record, 1905-1909." *Marianne Moore Newsletter* 5, no. 1 (1981): 13-14.

Molesworth, Charles. *Marianne Moore: A Literary Life*. New York, NY: Atheneum, 1990.

Moore, Marianne. *The Selected Letters of Marianne Moore*, edited by Bonnie Costello, Celeste Goodridge, and Cristanne Miller. New York, NY: Knopf, 1997.

———. *Nevertheless.* New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1944.

———. *O to Be a Dragon.* New York, NY: Viking Press, 1959.

———. *Becoming Marianne Moore: The Early Poems, 1907-1924*, edited by Robin G Schulze. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

———. *A-Quiver with Significance: Marianne Moore, 1932-1936*, edited by Heather Cass White. Victoria, BC: ELS Editions, 2008.

———. *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, edited by Patricia C Willis. New York, NY: Viking, 1986.

———. "Reading List " *Marianne Moore Newsletter* 5, no.1 (1981): 15-18.

Moretti, Franco. "Conjectures on World Literature." *New Left Review* 1. Jan-Feb (2000): 54-68.

Muller, Steven. "German Influences on the Development of American Higher Education" in *A Spirit of Reason: Festschrift for Steven Muller*, ed. Jackson Janes, 12-19. Washington, DC: American Institute for Contemporary German Studies. 2004.

Newman, John Henry. *Historical Sketches, Vol.1.* London: B.M. Pickering, 1872.

———. *The Idea of a University*, edited by Frank M Turner. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1996.

Nielsen, Aldon L. "Melvin B. Tolson and the Deterritorialization of Modernism." *African American Review* 26, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 241-255.

"The Nobel Prize in Literature 1950." *The Nobel Prize in Literature 1950*. Accessed May 27, 2016. http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1950/index.html

North, Michael. *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Olsen, Stein Haugom. "Biography in Literary Criticism," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*, edited by Garry L. Hagberg and Walter Jost, 436-452. Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Palmer, D. J.. *The Rise of English Studies: An Account of the Study of English Language and Literature From Its Origins to the Making of the Oxford English School.* London: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Pauly, Philip J.. "The Appearance of Academic Biology in Late Nineteenth-century America," *Journal of the History of Biology* 17, no. 3 (1984): 369-397.

"person, n.". *OED Online*. June 2016. Oxford University Press. Accessed July 15, 2016. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/141476?rskey=zN8bRd&result=1&isAdvanced=false

Peter, John. "A New Interpretation of The Waste Land," *Essays In Criticism: A Quarterly Journal Of Literary Criticism* 19, (1969): 140-175.

Peterson, Jeffrey D. "Notes on the Poem(s) 'Poetry': The Ingenuity of Moore's Poetic 'Place'." *Marianne Moore: Woman and Poet,* edited by Patricial Willis, 223-41. Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine, 1990.

Polanyi, Michael. *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1964.

Porter, Roy. "The Scientific Revolution and Universities" in *Universities In Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800.* Edited by Hilde de Ridder-Symoens, 531-562. Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

"pseudopodium, n.". *OED Online*. March 2016. Oxford University Press. Accessed March 31, 2016. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/153784?redirectedFrom=pseudopodia

Rancière, Jacques, *Mute Speech: Literature, Critical Theory, and Politics*, translated by James Swenson. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011.

Rainey, Lawrence S.. *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1998.

Readings, Bill. *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Redding, Patrick. "'One Must Make a Distinction, However': Marianne Moore and Democratic Taste." *Twentieth Century Literature* 58, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 296-332.

Reddy, Srikanth. "'To Explain Grace Requires a Curious Hand': Marianne Moore's Interdisciplinary Digressions." *American Literature: A Journal Of Literary History, Criticism, And Bibliography* 77, no. 3 (September 2005): 451-481

Reizenstein, Ben. "Perspicuous Opacity: Marianne Moore and Truth in a Fallen World." *Cambridge Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2007): 317-337.

Reuben, Julie A.. *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality.* Chicago, IL: the University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Richards, I.A., Ogden, C. K., and James Edward Hathorn Wood. *The Foundations of Aesthetics*. London,: G. Allen and Unwin limited, 1922.

———. *Principles of Literary Criticism.* New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, 1948.

———. *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949.

Rives, Rochelle. *Modernist Impersonalities: Affect, Authority, and the Subject*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Rives, Rochelle. "'Things That Lie on the Surface': Modernism, Impersonality, and Emotional Inexpressibility." *Disclosure: A Journal Of Social Theory* 16, (2007): 59-87.

Roberts, Jon H., and James Turner. *The Sacred and the Secular University*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Roebuck, Julian B., and Komanduri Srinivasa Murty. *Historically Black Colleges and Universities : Their Place in American Higher Education.* Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993.

Röhrs, Hermann, and Gerhard Hess. *Tradition and Reform of the University Under an International Perspective: An Interdisciplinary Approach.* Frankfurt am Main: Verlag P. Lang, 1987.

Rowland, Henry A., "The Physical Laboratory in Modern Education," *Science* 7, no. 177 (June 25, 1886): 573-575.

Ruddick, Lisa. "When Nothing Is Cool," in *The Future of Scholarly Writing – Critical Interventions*, edited by Angelika Bammer and Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres, 71-83. Palgrave Macmillan 2015.

Rüegg, Walter. *Universities in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries (1800-1945). A History of the University in Europe.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Russell, Mariann B. "Evolution of Style in the Poetry of Melvin B. Tolson," in *Black American Poets between Worlds, 1940-1960*, edited by R. Baxter Miller, 1-18. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986.

Russo, John Paul. *I.A. Richards: His Life and Work.* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.

Scarry, Elaine. *On Beauty and Being Just*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Schroeder, Patricia R.. "Point and Counterpoint in Harlem Gallery." *College Language Association Journal* 27, no. 2 (December 1983): 152-168.

Schulman, Grace. *Marianne Moore: The Poetry of Engagement*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986.

———. introduction to *The Poems of Marianne Moore.* New York, NY: Viking, 2003.

Schulze, Robin Gail. "'The Frigate Pelican's Progress: Marianne Moore's Multiple Versions and Modernist Practice." In *Gendered Modernisms: American Women Poets and Their Readers*, edited by Margaret Dickie and Thomas Travisano, 117-139. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.

Schultz, Kathy Lou. *The Afro-Modernist Epic and Literary History: Tolson, Hughes, Baraka*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Schütze, Martin. *Academic Illusions In the Field of Letters and the Arts: A Survey a Criticism, a New Approach, and a Comprehensive Plan for Reorganizing the Study of Letters and Arts.* Hamden, CN.: Archon Books, 1962.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, and Adam Frank. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

Sedgwick, W. T, and Edmund B Wilson. *General Biology.* New York, NY: H. Holt and Co., 1886.

Shapiro, Karl, introdtion to *Harlem Gallery: Book I, The Curator,* by Melvin Tolson. New York, NY: Twayne, 1965.

Singer, Susan R.. *America's Lab Report: Investigations In High School Science*. Edited by Margaret L Hilton and Heidi A Schweingruber. Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2005.

Skaff, William. *The Philosophy of T.S. Eliot: From Skepticism to a Surrealist Poetic, 1909-1927*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986.

Slatin, John M.. *The Savage's Romance: The Poetry of Marianne Moore*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986.

Sloterdijk, Peter. *You Must Change Your Life: On* Anthropotechnics, translated by Wieland Hoban. Malden, MA: Polity, 2013.

Smith, Zadie. "Rereading Barthes and Nabokov" in *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays*, 42-57. New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2009.

Spingarn, Joel Elias. "The New Criticism" in *Creative Criticism*, 3-44. New York,: H. Holt and Company, 1917.

Stapleton, Laurence. *Marianne Moore, the Poet's Advance*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978.

Steinman, Lisa Malinowski. *Made In America: Science, Technology, and American Modernist Poets*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1987.

Tate, Allen. Introduction to *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia*, by Melvin B. Tolson. New York, NY: Twayne Publishers, 1953.

Taylor, Charles. *Modern Social Imaginaries.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004.

———. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity.* Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Tillyard, E. M. W., and C. S. Lewis. *The Personal Heresy: A Controversy*. London: Oxford University Press, 1939.

Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America, vol. 2*. translated by Henry Reeve, edited by Francis Bowen. Cambridge MA: Sever and Francis, 1862.

Tolson, Melvin B.. *Caviar and Cabbage*, edited by Robert M. Farnsworth. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982.

———. “The Odyssey of a Manuscript” *New Letters* 48:1 (Fall 1981). 5-17

———. *Harlem Gallery, and Other Poems of Melvin B. Tolson*, edited by Raymond Nelson. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999.

———. *A Gallery of Harlem Portraits*, edited by Robert M Farnsworth. Columbia MO: University of Missouri Press, 1979.

———. *The Harlem Group of Negro Writers*. Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies, edited by Edward J. Mullen. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 2001.

Trilling, Lionel. *Beyond Culture: Essays On Literature and Learning.* New York, NY: Viking Press, 1965.

Vendler, Helen. "I.A. Richards at Harvard," *Boston Review*. (Boston, MA). April 1981. Accessed May 16, 2016. http://new.bostonreview.net/BR06.2/vendler.html#7.

Veysey, Laurence R.. *The Emergence of the American University.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1965.

Von Balthasar, Hans Urs. “On the Concept of Person” *Communio* 13, Spring (1986): 18-26.

Wallace, David Foster. *This Is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered On a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life.* New York, NY: Little, Brown, 2009.

———. “Octet” in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, 131-160. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1999.

———. “Greatly Exaggerated” in *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments*, 139-145. New York, NY: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Co./Hachette Book Group, 2009.

Ward, Kingdon. “Glacial Phenomena on the Yun-Nan-Tibet Frontier,” *Geological Journal* vol. 48 no. 55 (July, 1916): 55-65.

Warner, Michael. "Professionalization and the Rewards of Literature: 1875-1900." *Criticism: A Quarterly For Literature And The Arts* 27, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 1-28.

Wellek, René, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950*, *vol. 5*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1955.

Werner, Craig. "Blues for T. S. Eliot and Langston Hughes: The Afro-Modernist Aesthetic of Harlem Gallery." *Black American Literature Forum* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 453-472.

Widiss, Benjamin Leigh. *Obscure Invitations: The Persistence of the Author In Twentieth-Century American Literature.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011.

Williams, Thomas D. and Jan Olof Bengtsson, "Personalism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/personalism/>.

Williamson, George. *A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot: A Poem-By-Poem Analysis*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966.

Willis, Patricia C.. "The Road to Paradise: First Notes on Marianne Moore's 'An Octopus'." *Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly And Critical Journal* 30, no. 2-3 (Summer-Fall 1984): 242-272.

Wilson, Edmund, Jr.. "The Poetry of Drouth," *The Dial* vol. 73.6. (December 1922): 611-16.

Wimsatt, W. K. Jr., and M. C. Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy." *Sewanee Review* 54, (1946): 468-488.

Wollheim, Richard. *On Art and the Mind.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974.

Wood, Michael. "William Empson", *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, *vol. 7*, edited by A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey, 219-234. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Yannaras, Christos. *Person and Eros.* Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007.

Yates, Frances Amelia. *The Art of Memory*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1966.

Zizioulas, Jean, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church In the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop During the First Three Centuries.* Brookline,MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001.