



Modernisms tragic end : T.S. Eliots long labor with the negative  
by James Bower Maxwell

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English  
Montana State University

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Abstract:

This thesis situates T.S. Eliot as a transitional figure between modernism and postmodernism with particular attention paid to his poetry. The discussion focuses on the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, specifically his critique of dialectical thinking and his distinctions between affirmation and negation, to arrive at this conclusion. The argument establishes that a defining feature of most modernist art is an attachment to a dialectic of the self which is found in the philosophy of Henri Bergson. Utilizing Nietzsche's devaluation of such dialectical approaches to life, the discussion proceeds to examine the various epistemological systems which support the dialectic as well as the specific means through which a "will to negation", the mechanism of the dialectic, dominates human understanding of the world. Subsequently, the argument establishes the ideology necessary for an approach to life based on a "will to affirmation" and attempts to situate the progression of Eliot's poetry as tending toward this will. Chapter two thus focuses on "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and casts it as a critique of the modernist self-dialectic with particular attention to the Nietzschean concepts of resentment, bad conscience, and passivity which represent various manifestations of a "will to negation." Chapter three continues with a discussion of *The Waste Land* as carrying on a similar critique, specifically in terms of Nietzsche's theory of the "higher man." Finally, chapter four addresses *Four Quartets* and argues that they represent an effort to approach the world based on a "will to affirmation." Through the progression of these poems, this thesis suggests that Eliot's constant efforts to animate his reactions to the world with a "will to affirmation" is what constitutes him as a transitional figure between modernism and post-modernism in terms of art, just as Nietzsche was transitional in terms of philosophy for similar reasons.

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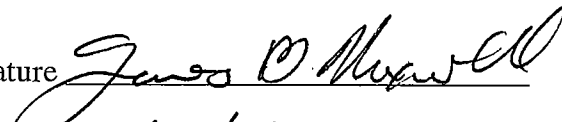
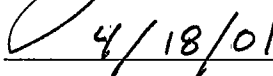
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis situates T.S. Eliot as a transitional figure between modernism and postmodernism with particular attention paid to his poetry. The discussion focuses on the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, specifically his critique of dialectical thinking and his distinctions between affirmation and negation, to arrive at this conclusion. The argument establishes that a defining feature of most modernist art is an attachment to a dialectic of the self which is found in the philosophy of Henri Bergson. Utilizing Nietzsche's devaluation of such dialectical approaches to life, the discussion proceeds to examine the various epistemological systems which support the dialectic as well as the specific means through which a "will to negation", the mechanism of the dialectic, dominates human understanding of the world. Subsequently, the argument establishes the ideology necessary for an approach to life based on a "will to affirmation" and attempts to situate the progression of Eliot's poetry as tending toward this will. Chapter two thus focuses on "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and casts it as a critique of the modernist self-dialectic with particular attention to the Nietzschean concepts of resentment, bad conscience, and passivity which represent various manifestations of a "will to negation." Chapter three continues with a discussion of *The Waste Land* as carrying on a similar critique, specifically in terms of Nietzsche's theory of the "higher man." Finally, chapter four addresses *Four Quartets* and argues that they represent an effort to approach the world based on a "will to affirmation." Through the progression of these poems, this thesis suggests that Eliot's constant efforts to animate his reactions to the world with a "will to affirmation" is what constitutes him as a transitional figure between modernism and post-modernism in terms of art, just as Nietzsche was transitional in terms of philosophy for similar reasons.

## A DIALECTICAL TALE

T.S. Eliot, like so many of his contemporaries, viewed the changing social landscape of the modernist period with disdain. He saw chaos, threatening to destroy even the most unimpeachable cultural values. From this perspective, everything which should be valued by an enlightened society seemed to be crumbling under the tremendous weight of a pervasive bourgeois mentality. Increasing urbanity, spreading industrialization, and the concomitant decline of ethical and cultural renewal seemed to be destroying the human race. In other words, everywhere Eliot looked, he saw values destroyed and the great nihilistic void beginning to yawn, threatening to swallow all of humanity.

What makes his world view anomalous within modernism lies not so much in his various critiques of the situation here described - all modernists were masters of such critiques - but the way he made an effort to go beyond the fundamentally dialectical logic haunting endless criticisms of the new (and not so new) epistemologies cultivated during the period. Whereas Ezra Pound, for instance, could not extricate his poetic sensibility from an often feverish need to dismantle and reappropriate traditional cognitive structures governing art, history, and science, Eliot refused to be pigeon-holed so easily. The development of his poetry thus contains an effort to move beyond modernism itself, an effort to turn both with and against his contemporaries.

In his modernist moments, Eliot was the elitist's elitist, arguing vehemently for an



intensified attention to history and cultural tradition as a possible salvation from the encroaching chaos. Additionally, much of his writing appears to adhere to the belief in a stable, essential self capable of "knowing them all already", a self capable of dialectical omniscience. There are aspects of his poetry and criticism, then, that are quite typically modernist, areas that whole-heartedly celebrate a dialectical return to a fully-integrated Romantic selfhood.

A substantial part of his work, however, can be seen as an effort to move beyond these perhaps helpful but ultimately limiting conceptions of existence. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," for example, is typically modernist in many ways - it critiques the modern world as considerably detrimental to human development, wholly objectifies women, and appears to advocate a positive understanding of a selfhood achieved in the culmination of a dialectical process of reappropriation - but it also moves beyond these concepts as it describes the paralysis and passivity of a particularly dialectical self. *The Waste Land*, often critically examined as an extension of the critique of modern civilization, actually continues this turning away from typically modernist tendencies. The questing theme so often attributed to the poem may, in fact, be not so much a quest for eventual salvation from bourgeois civilization but rather a quest to turn toward a conception of life which is capable of tolerating an essential chaos within existence. Finally, *Four Quartets* represents a certain realization of this very quest. Put another way, tracing the development of certain themes (themes drawing on a Nietzschean perspective) in these poems, should indicate that Eliot was not the avatar of high modernism he is often made out to be, but rather the individual who most directly, most actively, turned away

from modernism and toward post-modernism.

By setting out on such a quest, the discussion which follows here attempts to establish Eliot as one transitional figure between the two artistic/philosophical movements. In this light, too much importance should not be attached to a clear cut division between them as much as on the ways in which post-modern modes of thought forced modernism to move beyond itself. In order to investigate this movement, it will be necessary to first attend to the philosophy of Henri Bergson (a key influence on Eliot) and, subsequently, the critique leveled at his dialectical philosophy by Friedrich Nietzsche<sup>1</sup>. Despite the fact that Nietzsche was a contemporary of the modernist project, his philosophy, like Eliot's, went largely unimagined during the height of its reign. Thus, by investigating important similarities between Bergson and Eliot, and, more importantly, the convergence of Nietzschean thought in Eliot's later poetry, it should become clear that T.S. Eliot was much more post-modern than thoroughly modern.

# I

*In reality, no one of them begins or ends, but all extend into each other.*

-Bergson

Ihab Hassan suggests that "postmodernism may be a response, direct or oblique, to the Unimaginable that Modernism glimpsed only at its most prophetic moments"(39). For

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1

While Bergson's philosophy was not a specific Nietzschean target, his dialectical approach certainly was.

instance, the assertion that an absolute, transcendental entity does not exist above and beyond our fragmentary human existence, often present though not fully thought through (consider the lingering attachment of most modernists to the notion of an essential selfhood) in key modernist productions, becomes a fundamental aspect of post-modern epistemologies. There can therefore be no question that post-modernism was always present, lurking though largely unimagined, within modernism, and, consequently, modernism still lurks within the post. Every effort to establish the "turning point" between them is thus haunted, even fettered, by oft-blurred distinctions. We have even reached the point where no one is quite sure how to label particular writers hitherto imagined as the standard bearers of "high modernism" - Eliot, Joyce, Stein, Williams, and Stevens, just to name a few - and, depending on certain critical proclivities, each of these names has been variously deployed to indicate the "turning point" between the movements. Hassan, for instance, tentatively locates the pivotal moment in *Finnegans Wake*, but still pays heed to Stein and others who rode the proverbial fence. However slippery our distinctions become, it remains vital that we investigate at what point those on the fence turned their backs to modernism and set their sites on the post and what constituted this "turn." Before doing so, however, we must attend to the philosopher/critic who now appears to have almost written the modernist play-book: Henri Bergson, who offered a thoroughly metaphysical "critique" of the intellect which opened the door for subsequent modernist attacks (reactions) against supposed scientific objectivity, realistic symbolic representation, and other traditional epistemologies. Furthermore, he cemented important, utilitarian distinctions between interiority and

exteriority and the most vital differences between knowing *of* something and knowing *within* something.

The fundamental object of Bergsonian "critique" was the intellect, the realm which only knows *of*. Although he recognizes the perhaps unavoidable necessity of this cognitive power - defined primarily as "relative" knowledge versus "absolute" knowledge - his goal is to establish "the original and . . . very indistinct" intuition as the *a priori* condition beyond and behind all intellectual pursuits. He thus criticizes the intrusion of the intellect as the immediate degradation of the intuitive moment, or, in other words "a representation taken from a certain point of view, a translation made with certain symbols, [which] will always remain imperfect in comparison with the object of which a view has been taken or which the symbols seek to express"(Bergson, *An Intro* 23). Herein lies the modernist critique of supposed realistic art, art which aims to accurately, objectively, and perfectly reproduce - via symbolic exchange - the object observed.

Manifestations of such a critique within the movement cover an extremely wide range of responses: some are less conciliatory regarding the necessity of the intellect while others favor highlighting distinct literary issues over incursions into philosophy. In short, there were as many distinct devaluations of traditional epistemologies and aesthetics as there were modernist artists. Pound, for instance, even argued for a particular marriage of the scientific project to the practice of literary criticism: "the proper METHOD for studying poetry and good letters is the method of contemporary biologists, that is careful first-hand examination of the matter, and continual COMPARISON of one 'slide' or specimen with another"(Pound 17). He assuredly had Bergsonian support for such a

concept for “we do not obtain an intuition from reality - that is, an intellectual sympathy with the most intimate part of it - unless we have won its confidence by a long fellowship with its superficial manifestations”(An Intro 61). Relating to the intellectually differentiated “bits and pieces” of the world thus became a means of elevating humankind to a deeper and more profound knowledge of life attainable only through a highly personal experience of intuition.

Bergson’s problem with proponents of “realism”- primarily empiricists and rationalists - is not so much that they move immediately (necessarily) from the intuitive moment to intellectual analysis, but rather their belief that they can then re-present the “essence” of things observed via intuition (for Bergson, only intuition gives a sense, however incommunicable, of essence) in any symbol whatsoever. This is where his concepts of relative versus absolute knowledge become particularly important. Relative knowledge is intellectual knowledge, “understanding,” achieved by attending only to exterior signs. When we understand, for example, that the sky is blue, we have gained this understanding only through attention to outward appearance which, as a direct consequence of its exteriority, can only be expressed via symbolic exchange. In contrast, absolute knowledge, understanding of the essence of things, can only be achieved through “coincidence with the person [read also thing, idea, object] himself”(Bergson, *An Intro* 22) and can only be *inadequately* expressed in the symbolic realm.

Due largely to the nature of the human condition - we are, no doubt, intellectual animals - the analytical translation of the intuitive moment is unavoidable. Trapped as we are in our senses, we are fundamentally incapable of doing anything else. Thus and once

again, Bergson's complaint does not focus so much on this necessity as much as the effort of so-called realists (in their various guises) to reconstruct or re-present the absolute reality bestowed through intuition by making use of translated symbols: "the very idea of reconstituting a thing by operations practiced on symbolic elements alone implies such an absurdity that it would never occur to anyone if they recollected that they were not dealing with fragments of the thing, but only, as it were, with fragments of its symbol"(Bergson *An Intro* 33). In other words, the moment when intuition (immediate and inexpressible) passes into the intellect is the moment of the symbol and all subsequent articulations of the thing intuited are further removed not only from the immediate symbol, but also, and most especially, from the thing itself - from its essence. The intellect thus traffics in fragments of symbols and never in essential qualities; to suggest, therefore, that an accurate or complete representation of the thing in question could be constructed from these symbolic fragments is indeed laughable: "from intuition one can pass to analysis, but not from analysis to intuition"(42).

The impossibility of such a movement is expressed especially well in the poetry of Stevens. While much of his interest revolved around the mythical, even religious, aspects of modern life - perhaps especially the ways lost myths might live again in poetry - his "Thirteen Ways of Looking at A Blackbird" focuses explicitly on point of view - specifically on the issue of any presupposed objective claim to re-present a blackbird. Involving the blackbird in extremely diverse and largely suggestive "impressions" entirely undermines any single way of observing the creature (perhaps most directly the biological view) and calls into question any project suggesting that it can accurately portray the bird

by utilizing "fragments of its symbol." Even largely utopian dreams of something beyond a coincidence with the blackbird, or, at the very least extremely concentrated attention to the bird, are called to testify to their internal fallacies: "O thin men of Haddam, / Why do you imagine golden birds? / Do you not see how the blackbird / Walks around the feet / Of the women about you?" (Stevens 93)

All of this begs the question of what is actually given in Bergsonian intuition; we must still ask what essence really is. Bergson uses the term "duration" to characterize, as accurately as is possible within the self-imposed limitations of his philosophy, this essence of things. "Inner duration is the continuous life of a memory which prolongs the past into the present, the present either containing within it in a *distinct* form the ceaselessly growing image of the past, or, more probably, showing by its continual change of quality the *heavier and still heavier load* we drag behind us as we grow older"(Bergson, *An Intro* 40, my emphasis). Duration is, most importantly, the interpenetration of changing states within the individual psyche, which itself both changes and endures in such cohabitation; it is "the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states"(Bergson, *Time and* 100). Essential duration does not therefore indicate some vast unchanging self moving unaltered throughout a lifetime or even many lifetimes, but rather a self which continually grows and develops through constant efforts toward dialectical reintegration of self and Other.

Bergson utilizes the image of notes within a musical tune in order to fully articulate his sense of essential duration (an image which contributed greatly to the emphasis from

Pound and many others regarding the musicality of a poem or even a painting):

It is enough that in recalling these states, it [the ego] does not set them alongside its actual state as one point alongside another, but forms both the past and the present states into an organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune melting, so to speak, into one another . . . We can thus conceive of succession without distinction, and think of it as mutual penetration, an interconnexion and organization of elements, each one of which represents the whole, and cannot be distinguished or isolated from it except by abstract thought. (*Time and* 100-101)

This statement nearly encapsulates the entire Bergsonian project: the intellect, via necessity and largely utilitarian concerns, corrupts, falsifies, and brings difference to duration (the organic whole - perhaps yet unachieved - comprised of self and other). Only intuition, "coincidence with the thing itself", can provide a complete understanding of this fullness and interpenetration of selves. Finally, the intellect, because it "apprehends the word externally as a collection of things in space, . . . deals with the world by means of discrete units capable of being counted or measured, . . . [and] treats the world as though it were fundamentally static and immobile" (*Time and* 102), cannot achieve anything but an abstract and incomplete representation of duration, and only the ego, via an incredible labor of imagination can arrive at any full semblance of essential duration, only intuition can "undifferentiate" existence.

As Bergson repeatedly points out, this is no easy task. In fact, most individuals are wholly incapable of such a movement because "the mind *has to do violence to itself*, has to *reverse* the direction of the operation by which it habitually thinks" (Bergson, *An Intro* 51, my emphasis). This difficulty establishes one of Bergson's greatest contributions to the modernist project - it directly addresses the role of the artist (as cultural philosopher)



in moving the masses to the all important realization of intuition: "Here the single aim of the philosopher should be to promote a certain effort, which in most men is usually fettered by habits of mind more useful to life"(*An Intro* 27).

Artists were thus charged with the task of preparing the masses for intuition, preparing them to overcome the differentiating intellect. Hence the admonishment made by many modernists regarding efforts to isolate various aspects of their work rather than take the work as a whole - only by such coexistence with the entire work (the work not separated into discrete intellectual units) could the intuition be suggested and hence the reader prepared. This relates primarily to but one level (however fundamental) of duration: the concept of multiplicity and interpenetration. Discrete parts, taken alone as entities separated in space, cannot even approximate the interpenetration suggested, even essential, in duration. Here, then, is evidence of a particularly important aspect of Pound's *Cantos*. What appears in them as juxtaposition of discrete historical and personal events is actually an articulation of the interpenetration and organic homogeneity of these events - their (re)collection within the dialectic of intuition. Within the *Cantos*, it is not so much that various historical events are capable of placement together to reveal similarity, but rather that such events always and already interpenetrate and form an "organic whole" in pure duration.

As Bergson is quick to point out, "no image can replace the intuition of duration, but many diverse images, borrowed from very different orders of things, may, by the convergence of their action, direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to be seized"(*An Intro* 27-28). In the *Cantos*, as in so many modernist

“creations,” it is the *convergence* of the action, the interpenetration of states, which is of vital importance, and only by approaching such works with an eye on convergence and not juxtaposition (witness many of Picasso’s paintings, certain aspects of *The Waste Land* or Williams’s *Patterson*) will the individual mind, the ego itself, be prepared an for intuition of the wholeness of which it is part and parcel.

Preparation here is the key point: “it [the mind, ego, etc] will have been shown nothing: It will simply have been placed in the attitude it must take up in order to make the desired effort and so come by itself to the intuition”(Bergson, *An Intro* 28). Intuition - as with all forms of dialectical reappropriation - is always unique and individual - artists could no more produce an accurate picture (operating as artists must in the symbolic) of their intuition of duration than they could provide another with a similar intuition. What artists *can* (must) do, however, is twofold: they can suggest feelings, suggest intuitions and they can prepare a person’s mind for intuition itself. Suggestion is in fact all artists can do with their personal intuition; they cannot express it in any way - cannot make it impersonal - but they can prepare the reader for such an intuition in themselves: “thus art aims at impressing feelings on us rather than expressing them; it suggests them to us and willingly dispenses with the imitation of nature when it finds some more efficacious means”(Bergson, *Time and* 16). In the construction of images, then, often drawn from diverse images or specific focus on a single image capable of suggesting intuitive sympathy, artists insinuate what the audience must achieve on its own. While I have focused primarily on longer works, Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro” also operates on this level of suggestive imagery. The stark image of faces in the crowd suggests the

intuitive moment of Pound in his specific experience of the underground station. While this intuition itself is entirely personal, its suggestion is impersonal, and the reader is thus led (however subtly and indirectly) to their own intuitive moment, perhaps but not necessarily, relating to the experience of crowds.

Although it does not appear as explicitly in "Metro" as in many of Pound's longer works, the rhythm and musicality of poetry does have a special role to play in this process, one of which Pound was perhaps the most vocal proponent. It could even be said that the musical aspects of poetry (this musicality can be translated to visual art with but a small effort of the imagination) is the essential quality, one which the images themselves must adhere to because "if musical sounds affect us more powerfully than the sounds of nature, the reason is that nature confines itself to expressing feelings whereas music suggests them to us" (*Time and* 15). This has to do with the hypnotic quality of art, as only through a particular numbing of our intellectual faculties can our minds be prepared for intuition:

the object of art is to put to sleep the *active or rather resistant powers* of our personality, and thus to bring us into a state of perfect responsiveness in which we realize the idea that is suggested to us and sympathize with the feeling that is expressed . . . [Images provide the suggestive impetus and,] in seeing these images pass before our eyes we in our turn experience the feeling which was so to speak their emotional equivalent, but we should never realize these images so strongly without the regular movements of the rhythm by which our soul is *lulled* into self-forgetfulness, and, as in a dream, thinks and sees with the poet. (*Time and* 14-15, my emphasis)

A reader must let intellectual faculties rest, must let the mind flow with the music of the poem if the suggestion is to be effective. By thus focusing on rhythmic constructions, by forcing the mind to attend to the musicality of a poetic phrase, modernist artists (such as Pound) lulled the reader and prepared them for their own intuition.

Bergsonian duration is also to be found in the myriad ways modernists understood tradition as an organic entity. There can be no doubt that Eliot articulated the most direct and often quoted analysis of such a tradition, although each modernist certainly engaged in a similar relationship. Despite the significant disparities between Bergson and Eliot (consider Eliot's assertion that "the existing order is complete" in contrast to Bergson's firm stance that "there can be no pre-established harmony") their similarities are much more striking and important to the modernist project. Eliot's "historical sense" for instance could be aptly compared to Bergson's definition of intuition. For one thing, this historical sense "cannot be inherited . . . you must obtain it by great labour" (Eliot, *The Sacred* 28). On a still deeper level, it

involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and temporal *together* is what makes a writer traditional. (28, my emphasis)

Without pausing too long to consider Eliot's location of the well spring of poetry within Europe, the passage above specifies a particular manifestation of the intuition of essential duration in the poetic mind and highlights the novel understanding of time itself suggested by this intuition of duration.

This idea of duration is directly linked to Bergson's greatest contribution to the modernist project - the dialectic of the self - which could be summarized as follows. The intellect leads us astray not only from the interpenetration of others within ourselves, but

also from "our own personality in its flowing through time - our self which endures"(Bergson, *An Intro* 24). We are therefore amputated from our interiority and become trapped in exterior symbolic exchange. It thus becomes essential that we explore the methodologies proper to escaping this web of exteriority, and these methodologies are what Bergson will call the "proper metaphysics." This metaphysics involves precisely a return of the self to the self, a backwards turn from traditional epistemologies and their marriage to relative knowledge, a return to interiority, which will once again be forced into exteriority and return again, thus initiating the endless cycle of Bergson's self-dialectic, the quest to perceive organic homogeneity.

The movement into exterior symbolic exchange is already well established: "intuition, once attained, must find a mode of expression and of application which conforms to the habits of our thought, and one which furnishes us, in the shape of well-defined concepts, with the solid points of support which we so greatly need"(Bergson, *An Intro* 53). Both original and repetitive intuition must bow to this representational necessity. The return to the self thus involves a process where

the mind has to do violence to itself, has to reverse the direction of the operation by which it habitually thinks, has perpetually to revise, or rather to recast, all its categories . . . In this way it will attain to fluid concepts, capable of following reality in all its sinuosities and of adopting the very movement of the inward life of things. . . *To philosophize, therefore, is to invert the habitual direction of the work of thought.* (Bergson, *An Intro* 51-52).

Metaphysics thus becomes a reversal of ancient, even natural, tendencies, the goal of which is to dispense - in an apparently endless process - with the products of the sciences, an effort to rescue the mobility, the organic homogeneity of the real, from a certain

immobility and difference supposedly imposed by scientific constructs. But Bergson also suggests ways that science and metaphysics might come together in their own dialectic. Science needs intuition just as metaphysics must ultimately make use of symbols, at least in order to prepare others for intuitive revelation. Here is how Bergson describes this often contentious marriage: "while it would make of metaphysics a positive science - that is, a progressive and indefinitely perfectible one - it would at the same time lead the positive sciences, properly so called, to become conscious of their true scope, often far greater than they imagine" (*An Intro* 54).

This dialectical synthesis of science and intuitive metaphysics is precisely the same dialectic of the self implied by Bergson's philosophy. It must begin with an intuition of mobility, fluidity, interpenetration, and essential wholeness (in short, with duration), which unavoidably proceeds to the exterior, to identification of fixed points in space or a differentiation of duration. From here it returns to intuition through great labors of the mind; one must again make "an effort to substitute the being-made for the ready-made" (Bergson, *An Intro* 52). Only in so doing will the self return to itself, but in a different form, for just as duration continues so too does it continue to grow and take on new elements in an endless cycle. Only in this way will we know "exactly what unity, what multiplicity, and what reality superior both to abstract unity and multiplicity the multiple unity of the self actually is. Now philosophy [read also the self] will know this only when it *recovers possession of the simple intuition of the self by the self*" (37, my emphasis). Such is also the proper way for one to know an other and truly see it as part of oneself within duration. Hence, Bergson's dialectic goes far beyond a simply harmonious

relationship between science and philosophy. However far he extends his analysis of duration to include that which changes, that which has no pre-established harmony, he is never fully able to extricate his metaphysics from a firm belief in a stable self, a self capable not only of overcoming an integral part of its humanity (the intellect) but of journeying to the farthest reaches of this intellect in order to return to itself, and with itself others, in intuition. It is this stable self which is the operator and operated within the dialectical cycle. This, then, is where we must turn to Nietzsche.

## II

*It is a miserable story: man seeks a principle through which he can despise men - he invents a world so as to be able to slander and bespatter this world: in reality, he reaches every time for nothingness and constructs nothingness as "God," as "truth," and in any case as judge and condemner of this state of being.*

-Nietzsche

There are significant similarities between these thinkers: each addressed issues of time, the multiplicity of the self, and an often irrational faith in scientific realism, but what separates them is the extent to which they carried their critique, the sense in which they turned toward philosophy. The differences between these respective turns (also the difference, the turn, from modernism to post-modernism) rests heavily on what Nietzsche calls the "labour of the negative" which haunts all dialectical ways of considering the role of humans in the world. As Gilles Deleuze repeatedly and emphatically points out, "there is no difficulty in identifying Nietzsche's enemy: it is the dialectic"(183). By this he means

all forms of dialectical thinking, all manner of thought which rests entirely on opposition, on heavy-handed and misguided critique, on, once again, "the labour of the negative."

Nietzsche's critique of the dialectic is extremely complex and roughly includes every subtle aspect of his thought - everything within his philosophy, in fact, turns on this enemy, this wicked inversion of the will to power. Deleuze was perhaps the first to point this out, and his exploration *Nietzsche and Philosophy* is very much an effort to rescue Nietzsche from all those who have either consciously or unconsciously misinterpreted his message. In other words, it is an attempt to rescue one post-modern thinker from modernism's dialectical nihilism, an attempt to imagine the predominantly unimagined excess of Nietzschean thought within and beyond modernism.

As Deleuze makes clear, "Nietzsche's philosophy has a great polemical range; it forms an absolute anti-dialectics and sets out to expose all the mystifications that find a final refuge in the dialectic"(195), and he goes to great lengths to investigate these mystifications as well as the will(s) behind them. For both he and Nietzsche, then, the primary issue with the dialectic is that it does not know how to affirm; it is only capable of negation and springs from an entirely reactive mentality. Thus, the key concepts bearing intense analysis in Deleuze are what constitutes the negative, what wills the negative, and (within this willing) what are the relations between reactive forces and active forces, the latter of which constitute for Nietzsche the only way to overcome (complete) nihilism, the only way to affirmation of difference and not its negation, the Dionysian way.

Active forces are those which dominate; they "will obedience." In contrast, reactive forces obey; they are the forces of the slave and the dialectic. Within and between



these forces is the will to power which brings the concepts of affirmation and negation into play within the forces themselves: "active and reactive designate the original qualities of force but affirmative and negative designate the primordial qualities of the will to power"(Deleuze 54). Thus, the will to power is not only the will to dominate or obey, but also the plastic relationship between affirmation and negation within these wills, generating these wills, making willing itself, action and reaction themselves, possible. Each of the forces may both affirm and negate, largely depending on the specific willing behind them<sup>2</sup>. Thus, reactive forces are usually characterized as both those which do not know how to affirm - those which labor under the negative - and those which do not know how to actively negate - those which say yes to the burdens of domination, whether human or divine. In contrast, active forces both affirm and actively negate; they are the forces which know (actively) how to say *both* yes *and* no. It is in this way that all forces are double - even affirmation and negation are themselves double.

The doubleness of these terms is certainly rather subtle, and will therefore require further investigation, but not before turning toward Nietzsche's "eternal return" which is itself double, the doubleness of the dice throw. This is perhaps one of the most widely misinterpreted of all Nietzschean concepts (especially by the modernists): many suggest that it is nothing more than the eternal recurrence of the same, the endless and despairing cycle of time which forces one to infinitely repeat the same moments; others (dialecticians) posit that the eternal return is precisely the Bergsonian concept of the self eventually

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Because the will to nothingness is the will animating reactive forces, they often (especially among the human species) lack affirmation.

returning to the self. Deleuze, however, takes great pain to point out that the eternal return is infinitely more complex. The analogy of the dice throw is perhaps the clearest articulation of what (re)occurs eternally:

Affirming becoming and affirming the being of becoming are the two moments of a game which are compounded with a third term, the player, the artist, or the child . . . The being of becoming, the eternal return is the second moment of the game, but also the third term, identical to the two moments and valid for the whole. For the eternal return is the distinct return of the outward movement, the distinct contemplation of the action, but also the return of the outward movement itself and the return of action; at once movement and cycle of time . . . The game thus has two moments which are those of a dicethrow - the dice that is thrown and the dice that falls back . . . The dicethrow affirms becoming and it affirms the being of becoming.(Deleuze 24-25)

Several difficult terms clearly complicate the issue of the game (especially becoming and being) but they should cause no great difficulty if we keep in mind that, according to Nietzsche, there is nothing but becoming, a world perpetually in the making. This is precisely what is affirmed in the game (the only Being affirmed by those who play the game well); those who do not play the game well, those who hope to cheat both chance and necessity, do so because they only affirm being, they fail to affirm becoming and especially the liberating difference within becoming. Those who play the game well, those who affirm life, also affirm the doubleness of the throw: "the dice which are thrown once are the affirmation of chance [of essential difference], the combination which they form on falling is the affirmation of necessity"(Deleuze 26). Thus, the affirmation of the dice throw is the affirmation of *both* chance *and* necessity, both being *and* becoming; it is the affirmation of the difference in chance, the difference between chance and necessity, the inexpungeable difference in the self.

Nietzsche's central problem is with those who refuse to play the game well: "to abolish chance by holding it in the grip of causality and finality, to count on the repetition of throws rather than affirming chance, to anticipate a result instead of affirming necessity - these are all the operations of a bad player. They have their root in reason, but what is the root of reason? The spirit of revenge, nothing but the spirit of revenge"(Deleuze 27). Scientific thinkers count on such causality and finality; it is they who believe in the eternal return of the same; it is they who count on a finite number of throws finally producing the final answer to human existence; it is they who seek revenge on nature. Traditional metaphysics also counts on this, and Bergson's dialectic is no exception. Caught as it is in the belief that a finite number of intuitive moments, followed by intellectual degradation, and followed once again by intuitive recollection, will ultimately return the self and its others to the self, it is trapped in a corrupted and corrupting game.

Affirmation of chance (not only necessity - witness Bergson's affirmation of intellectual necessity), affirmation of difference, not only the same or making the same, then, is clearly the fundamental aspect of Nietzsche's thought, but it cannot be fully understood without attending to the important differences between active and reactive forces and the latter's inversion of the will to power. The dialectic operates entirely in the reactive, turning fully on opposition and contradiction, completely within the "spirit of revenge." This drive for revenge is a component of a larger "will to nothingness" governing the dialectic, a need to denigrate, to blame, to negate differences. In other words, the will to nothingness is "the attempt to deny differences [which] is a part of the more general enterprise of denying life, depressing existence and promising it a death . . .

where the universe sinks into the undifferentiated”(Deleuze 45). For Nietzsche, difference is essential to becoming, which is all life really is, and the various attempts of the dialecticians to deny or sublimate this difference are tantamount to a denial of life itself. Involved in this denigration of life are the interrelated concepts of resentment, bad conscience, and passivity.

Ressentiment, like all reactive forces, operates through opposition (dialectical opposition and contradiction). Its power rests fundamentally on the difference between others and ourselves and places the blame for our differentiated condition on others. Whether this other is defined as God, scientific realism, or difference itself matters little for “it is not content to denounce crimes and criminals, it wants sinners, people who are responsible . . . He [the man of resentment] wants others to be evil, he needs others to be evil in order to be able to consider himself good”(Deleuze 119). Ressentiment is therefore an initial step towards a reactive nihilism; it is the beginning of a process whereby the justification of the organic wholeness of the self begins. It is the mentality of the slave which needs a master to blame; it is the method which separates the active forces from what they can do and inverts their affirmative power as the negative dominance of the slave, as the reason for human suffering. Put another way, resentment is precisely the spirit of revenge made manifest in incomplete critiques of existence in this human world.

To adequately understand resentment, bad conscience, and the movement from the former to the latter, one must attend to Nietzschean conceptions of Judaic and Christian priests:

It will be recalled that the man of *ressentiment*, who is by nature full of

pain, is looking for a cause for his suffering. He accuses, he accuses everything that is active in life. The priest appears in an initial form here: he presides over the accusation, he organizes it. "Look at these men who call themselves good, I tell you: these are the evil ones." . . . But *ressentiment* is an explosive substance: it makes active forces become reactive. *Ressentiment* must then adapt itself to these new conditions; it must change direction. The reactive man must now find the cause of his suffering *in himself*. Bad conscience suggest to him that he must look for this cause "in himself" . . . And the priest appears a second time in order to preside over this change of direction.(Deleuze 131)

The first appearance of the priest organizes the spirit of revenge into the method of the dialectic. It provides slaves with a target for their hatred and thus an other to overcome and incorporate. If the other is responsible for suffering, then turning the other against itself, becoming the other, will lead to overcoming suffering. But this method has its own revenge on the man of *ressentiment*, the revenge of the dialectic of the self. The irony rests on the fact that the slave does not become the master (the utopia of the dialectic between self and other) but rather that the master becomes the slave via the internalization of responsibility. In other words, the active man, having been blamed and finally accepting blame for his activity, becomes the guilty, reactive man. As Deleuze makes clear, *ressentiment* must "spread the contagion" of revenge; the return of the self to the self becomes the return of revenge; negation becomes the human project par excellence and must ultimately be turned against the self. In the now diseased machinations of the dialectic, the dialectic which sought to make masters of slaves, guilt becomes the spirit of revenge directed against the self - self-negation becomes the means of salvation, overcoming the self through the self becomes humanity's path to enlightenment.

This difficult relationship between *ressentiment* and bad conscience becomes more

clear if considered in the context of Bergson's dialectical system which originally sought revenge on the intellect; it alone was given responsibility for divorcing the self from its essence and the essential qualities of existence; it alone was deemed responsible for differentiation. The intellect is thus separated from what it can do on its own, and Bergson suggests that only a dialectical synthesis of the intellect and the intuitive moment can achieve an accurate rendering of essential reality: a reality without difference. However, if intellectual degradation is inevitable within the human mind, then responsibility for the degradation of intuition must ultimately rest with the self. It may have been the fault of God for providing men with such impressive intellectual faculties, but, given free will, for example, these men could choose to disallow or at least *circumvent* such degradation (such is the boon of reactive thinking). This being so, responsibility must therefore rest with the self - it is humanity's fault for not only degrading the intuitive moment, but also further separating it from its power by celebrating intellectual achievements over and against "coincidence with the thing itself." In response to this guilt, Bergson's system becomes an advocate of the self-dialectic, an advocate of guilt and revenge by the self on the self.

The logical conclusion of this inversionary and self-destroying process lies in the final term of the reactive trinity: passivity. In a philosophy which not only advocates affirmation, but above all activity, there can be no greater enemy than the passive acceptance of the dialectical excrement. Ressentiment and bad conscience, largely via their reactive dialectics, hope to destroy all values and ultimately collapse the difference in becoming into opposition and resolution. Their interconnected appearances ultimately

excrete a human animal who has "known them all already," one who has not only wreaked revenge on God, but also succeeded in assimilating God within the self; they reveal an individual who has become a slavish leader among others of the same type (the herd). But by thus negating all values and collapsing difference into opposition and resolution, by destroying all extant values, this human animal leaves behind nothing but the void of nihilism calling out for new values. Positing such new values, however, would reintroduce the now supposedly absent difference between masters and slaves; it would require one who is capable of affirming this difference and actively creating new values. This is why Deleuze makes special note of the final cry of the negative and reactive dialectic: "It is better to fade away passively!"(149).

This accurately describes the difficulty that any dialectical system will encounter with something which exceeds its machinations. For the dialectician, nothing can be beyond its movement; the self must be capable of knowing them all already or the dialectic itself becomes nothing more than a meaningless, utopian conception (which is, in fact, Nietzsche's view of the situation). The need for new values, or, better, a new sense of valuation itself, the wills which evaluate, is the excessive desire beyond the dialectic, caught as it is in the spirit of revenge and the labor of the negative. This is exactly why the ultimate end of a nihilistic way of considering existence (a reactive dialectics) is a wholly passive death because, for the reactive man "it is better to have no values at all than higher values, it is better to have no will at all, better to have a nothingness of will than a will to nothingness. It is better to fade away passively . . . the reactive life left alone with itself, no longer even having the will to disappear, dreaming of a passive

extinction”(Deleuze 150). In other words, the dialectic (ultimate throne of the reactive man) destroys all value and willing in the movement of opposition/resolution and cannot tolerate the excessive need for new values; it cannot make the final turn toward affirmation and transvaluation. This inability (an unsolvable contradiction within the dialectic which originally propagated the fiction of a dialectical individual being the ultimate creator) leads reactive people not necessarily to despair, but rather to complete absorption in the self and hence an entirely passive extinction, “Buddhism’s . . . realized end” according to Deleuze.

But the world need not end in this way. While nihilism may indeed be the “motor of history” (at least human history for those on “the dark side of the Earth”), humanity need not, in fact should not, simply fade away passively in the face of rapidly and continually extinguishing values. What is desperately needed is a new sense of the world, a truly radical philosophy of life, a thoroughly “inhuman” conception of existence. Nietzsche locates such a philosophy in the power of affirmation which represents the only method for overcoming nihilism, the only possibility of living joyfully with(in) the eternal return.

Affirmation is the key to Nietzschean philosophy, the only way to circumvent the “triumph” of reactive forces. Only affirmation can overcome (reverse) the labor of the negative; only true affirmation can celebrate and play with difference; only affirmation is capable of creating new values. This is the reason for Nietzsche’s intense disdain for the dialectic: “The . . . dialectic is indeed a reflection on difference, but it inverts its image. For the affirmation of difference as such it substitutes the negation of that which differs;



for the affirmation of self it substitutes the negation of the other, and for the affirmation of affirmation it substitutes the famous negation of the negation”(Deleuze 196). Affirmation for Nietzsche means more than the simple acceptance of humanity’s burden in the world (the yes of the ass which cannot say no); it is rather the affirmation of perpetual becoming which is all there truly is. This affirmation must therefore include the affirmation of difference *especially* which is the motor of becoming - if all difference is overcome, then there would be no existence, no game.

This is not to say that negation, even reactive forces, have no place in affirmation or activity, but these forces must be turned to the service of affirming life and becoming. True critiques, critiques which question not only values themselves but also and more importantly the value of values or the will(s) behind them (the will to negation or the will to affirmation), in fact belong to becoming and the affirmation of becoming as much as affirmation of the game itself. This is how Deleuze characterizes the becoming active of reactive forces which will directly relate to the concept of transvaluation: “negation *sacrifices* all reactive forces, becoming ‘relentless destruction of everything that was degenerating and parasitical’ passing into the service of an *excess* of life: only here is it completed”(175). Critique thus has a special place in the affirmation of becoming, but only if such critique is carried to its absolute limit, carried even beyond the human, for humanity knows very well how to negate, how to abolish differences, but does not really know how to turn negation into a service for affirmation. Philosophy and art must therefore prepare the way for such an overcoming of the human condition and its often irrational faith in Being.

Turning reactive forces against themselves, forcing them to stand as witness against the very will to nothingness wherein they previously found their support, is what Nietzsche means by transvaluation - the transmutation of values: "Instead of the labour of opposition or the suffering of the negative we have the war like play of difference, affirmation and the joy of destruction. The no stripped of its power, transformed into the opposite quality, turned affirmative and creative, such is transmutation"(Deleuze 191). When reactive forces become forces in the service of affirmation, when "critique" truly becomes *critique*, the full power of affirmation and difference become clear; the game can then be played well and the eternal return takes on its full significance. It is in this way that Nietzsche's philosophy moves humanity beyond and completes nihilism - the neurotic destruction of values without forcing them to testify against the will behind them and the ultimate goal of passively fading away - and into the game; it is in this way that he turns labor into play which must ultimately find its genesis in "the lightness of that which affirms against the weight of the negative; the games of the will to power against the labour of the dialectic; the affirmation of affirmation against that famous negation of the negative"(Deleuze 197).

It is this understanding of affirmation and transmutation which makes Nietzsche very much a post-modern thinker, an individual who, like the Christ described by Deleuze, "was too far ahead of his time . . . so far ahead of his time that [he] . . . had to be deformed, his whole story falsified, moved backward, made to serve preceding stages, turned to the benefit of negative or reactive nihilism"(155). The description of his philosophy here, intended to cast him in this light, represents only a baseline for further

investigation. The nuances of his extremely difficult concepts (I have but barely scratched the surface here) will therefore be explored more deeply, but with the supporting context of another individual who was also “so far ahead of his time”: T.S. Eliot.

### J. ALFRED PRUFROCK: MODERNISM'S MAN OF RESENTMENT

Most criticism surrounding "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" describes the protagonist as someone who "lives with his light entombed in the dark hell of his own fear of rejection" (Ledbetter 45). Specifically, it is said to tell the tale of a man wholly paralyzed by his sense of inadequacy and bewilderment in the face of the rapidly changing modern age, the story of one whose light cannot shine in the paralyzing context of modernity and the concomitant decline of cultural values on which he could have once hung his hopes for action. Put another way, Prufrock's song is often cast as a lament for the individual in a world that on all sides seeks to destroy individuality and cultural creativity - the modernist world par excellence. In short, many view it as the voice in the modernist wilderness crying out for human contact and a relationship with culture which have seemingly been ground beneath the wheel of progress.

However accurate such descriptions are, "Prufrock" seems also to be operating at a more personal level of critique, a critique of the modernist self-emancipation project itself which found support in Bergson's self-dialectic. Prufrock is, in fact, one result of this dialectic; an individual who, if we read the poem not as a critique of the modern world and its effects on the individual but as a critique of the individual "liberation" posited by most of the modernists themselves, reveals the ultimate failure of the modern emancipation project.

This emancipatory goal has been a key feature of philosophical, artistic, and

political movements since the Enlightenment, and certain turns in this direction were present long before (witness Plato's "Allegory of the Cave"). It largely proceeded as an effort to lift the burdens of social constraints, religious dogmas, and certain epistemological systems from the human ability to achieve perfection. The drive for scientific achievement was just such an effort, intended to raise humanity above the natural world, whereas Romantics sought the essentially opposite goal of returning humanity to nature and hence itself. Whatever the specific focus, "new" epistemological movements long sought a method for *returning* human powers *to* humanity, and Bergson's dialectical approach - like the modernists who utilized it - occupies a similar position in philosophy.

A recent biography of Eliot, *An Imperfect Life* by Lyndall Gordon, describes this drive for emancipation: "throughout his life and throughout his work, Eliot was testing the sublime plot of spiritual biography, the plot laid down in Exodus: an exit from civilisation followed by a long trial in a waste place, followed by entry into the promised land"(Gordon 4). Several aspects of this highly religious description indicate important themes running throughout human history in general, culminating for many modernists in Bergson's dialectic of the self (the salvation offered by the dialectic, the religion of the negative): a "pure" state of existence wherein humanity was cognizant of an organic unity and was thus capable of fully articulating and employing the powers of the human community followed by a descent into differentiating and problematic systems for classifying and ordering the world and followed finally by a return to that fabled state of integrated self-hood in paradise.

The opening lines of "Prufrock" elaborate this process of self-(re)integration and

speak to its always fictional nature. Much has been said regarding the function of "you", and criticism offers solutions as diverse as Prufrock speaking to a woman, to the reader, or to himself. It is this last description of "you" which seems most appropriate in the context of a Bergsonian dialectic and the subsequent critique of this negative and wholly reactive process contained in the remaining sections. In this light, "you" refers explicitly to Prufrock himself and establishes a fundamental division within the self intended to highlight the fictional nature of his dialectical reintegration - in other words, it reintroduces essential difference to the Prufrockian ego. Having wandered in the "waste place" of intellectual differentiation, having already "made his visit", he has supposedly found the method to "transcend [intellectual] concepts in order to reach intuition"(Bergson, *An Intro* 30), and has reached the point where his now (re)integrated self can return to the doomed world of those who have not yet "divorced themselves from the demands of action." Now that he has achieved the long sought synthesis of the self, perhaps he could truly be "Lazarus, come from the dead" to testify to the "miracle" of the dialectic. The invitation at the beginning of "Prufrock" is thus an invitation from Prufrock himself to himself in his now (re)integrated and supposedly liberated persona, an invitation to return to the modern waste land and offer salvation to others.

In many ways, this self-reintegration (dialectical salvation) achieved by Prufrock was a predominant quest of modernist artists, and Eliot certainly found it at times appealing. "Tradition and the Individual Talent", for example, suggests that an intimate relationship with the cultural tradition will provide the necessary tools while his later conversion to Anglo-Catholicism locates such tools in religious experiences on par with

Christ or Thomas of Canterbury. Despite the diverse range indicated by these conversionary extremes, it is important to keep in mind that, as his thought developed, Eliot *did not* find the tools offered by his contemporaries all that helpful for the purposes of human liberation. That is, despite his expressed admiration for certain poets and philosophers who supported the dialectical position, his struggle with the very concepts they offered throughout his poetic career indicates that very little of the modernist ethos would eventually be of much use, except perhaps as an impetus for further consideration and permutation.

One such concept was Bergson's firm belief that individuals could be liberated through a personal intuition of duration, that an escape from the modern world specifically and difference itself generally happens when "it [the individual] *recovers possession* of the simple intuition of the self by the self" (Bergson, *An Intro* 37). Eliot arguably found this belief - that dialectical reappropriation, the eventual recovery of an undifferentiated, self-contained ego capable of transcendent recollection of the self and others - could not provide an "escape" from existence in the world, and "Prufrock" is precisely an exploration of this dilemma, an effort to show that "the ideology of the unified, coherent self [regardless of the name under which this ideology is propagated] is part of the problem, not part of the solution" (McNamara 358). In other words, Eliot's poetry questions the very notion of escape, the possibility of complete reintegration in some existence beyond this life, the possibility of overcoming the *essential* difference within the self. The divided protagonist (again, the division is highlighted by the use of "you") of the poem further indicates the problem, the illusion, of a reintegrated self either in or beyond

this world.

The opening epigraph operates in an interesting way within the context of this critique of modernism's retreat to a dialectical ideology of coherent selfhood. As George Williamson points out in *A Reader's Guide to T.S. Eliot*, "the epigraph is never to be ignored in Eliot; for while it is not an essential part of the poem, it conveys hints of the significance or even genesis of the poem"(57-58). The epigraph's source is, of course, canto xxvii of Dante's *Inferno* wherein Guido da Montefeltro reluctantly decides to reveal his sin to the pilgrim, confident in the belief that his secret will never be revealed to the world, and this does appear to have special significance with regard to the genesis of "Prufrock". Specifically, it indicates Eliot's own reticence about revealing an ideological critique of many of his contemporaries (individuals who played a very large role in his fame and financial stability) and their largely solipsistic means of liberation from the modern condition. The revelation of "Prufrock," one which starkly shows the horrible fate awaiting dialectical reintegration of the self (not at all unlike the fate of Guido in Hell) cherished for so long in the world, is thus one Eliot is perhaps justifiably reluctant to offer. In one particularly prescient moment, however, he, like Guido, knows that the full force of his critique will not reach those who perhaps most need to hear it. He likely realized that the poem would read as a Bergsonian critique of the human condition - the unavoidable intellectual degradation (the essential appearance of difference) which seems to only "fix you in a formulated phrase" - as the differentiating force which ultimately paralyzes Prufrock and divides him from action in the world; indeed, this remains a prevalent reading, and, Eliot thus presented his Prufrockian critique without any immediate fear of



infamy.

This critique centers on dialectical re-collection and will thus re-turn us to Nietzsche. The critique's momentum must therefore be considered in the context of the difficult Nietzschean concepts used to articulate the various ways the dialectic becomes a force operating only via the spirit of revenge, the will to nothingness, and the labor of the negative. The dialectical return of the self to the self bases its triumph on precisely these forces, and Prufrock's paralysis results directly from this dialectical process and is not a consequence of worldly encumbrances as previously supposed.

Re-turning to Bergson, we find that such paralysis is not only a consequence of dialectical thinking, but also a positive means (for him) to dialectical liberation and freedom from the impositions of the world: "intuition . . . can be accomplished only by making an effort to detach oneself from the demands of action" (*An Intro* 60). For Bergson, the world demands action; it needs people to use their intellectual abilities to differentiate and bring order to the world; it needs the intellect for its survival. Only an extremely intense effort to detach oneself from these demands will result in absolute knowledge of the self by the self; only intellectual passivity can lead to salvation. In Bergson's self-dialectic, then, passivity serves as both the motor of its development and, perhaps unwittingly on his part, the ultimate product of its movement.

The fog-cat metaphor provides a provocative representation of this demand for passivity and its ultimate consequences:

The yellow fog that rubs its back on the window-panes,

The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,

Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,  
 Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,  
 Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,  
 Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,  
 And seeing that it was a soft October night,  
 Curled once about the house, and fell asleep. (*Collected* 3)

This all encompassing fog is, like Prufrock himself, an entity which has “known them all already.” In Bergson’s terminology, it is symbolic of one who has “won its [intuition’s] confidence by a long fellowship with its superficial manifestations” (*An Intro* 61). It has made direct contact with those windows on intuition, has lingered over the collections of symbols as they gather in pools of ideology and thought, has let all the intellectual trappings fall onto its back, and, in accepting this burden, has reached a point where it can finally rest easy with its supposedly absolute knowledge in the autumn of the world.

Within this symbolism, it is important to note that the cat’s “fellowship” with the world is an entirely passive one. Like fog itself, it has no need of active conversation with existence, no need to play the game of life; it is content to merely settle slowly over all human knowledge and ideologies, letting these worldly ideations become part of itself; in other words, “*reaction ceases to be acted in order to become something felt*” (Deleuze 111). This is precisely Bergson’s method for achieving absolute intuitive knowledge of the world around us and thus ourselves. He advocates a certain sensible passivity wherein duration is felt, wherein the individual self merely lets the fog of its imagination slowly settle on everything the world offers to its perceptions.

There is a great deal more to the concept of resentment than mere passivity, and turning to the subtle nuances of this idea will further shed light on Eliot's critique of modern subjectivity. Of vital importance to this exploration is the distinction Nietzsche offers between the conscious and the unconscious:

We must . . . see the formation of the conscious system as the result of a process of evolution: at the boundary between the outside and the inside, between the internal world and the external world, we could say that a 'skin has been formed which has been made so supple by the excitations it constantly receives, that it has acquired properties making it uniquely suited to receive new excitations', retaining only a direct and changeable image of objects completely distinct from the lasting or even changeless trace in the unconscious system.(Deleuze 112)

The conscious is the skin receiving excitations from the external world whereas the unconscious corresponds to the memory, the traces of the excitations - and their concomitant attachment to a specific experience of loss - which are retained in the mind. The supple nature of the conscious skin is such that every experience (even those which cause anguish) becomes, in itself, a reason for living, a sense that to live is to play the game in every moment without introducing "rules" which would turn the game into one dominated by a fictionalizing slave mentality. In contrast, when mnemonic traces are foregrounded in the game, when the memory of pain caused dictates how an individual relates to the world, life becomes nothing but a trial; each experience is housed in an abusive world to be overcome.

Despite these vitally important differences, both the conscious and the unconscious traffic with reactive forces - both represent specific reactions to the external world. This relates directly to the difficult differentiation between an active (noble) reaction and a

purely passive (base) one, and there are certain parallels between this conceptualization and Bergson's notion of the intuitive moment, but one should never forget that *both* reaction to mnemonic traces *and* to conscious excitations are just that, reactions.

However, "the second kind of reactive forces [reaction to conscious excitations] show us in what form and under what conditions reaction can be acted: when reactive forces take conscious excitation as their object, then the corresponding reaction is itself acted"(Deleuze 113). Reaction to conscious excitation thus represents a certain "nobility" of reactive forces. Because such reactions do not fundamentally rely on some memory of past wrongs ("I have measured out my life with coffee spoons"(4)) or constantly emphasize the pain of *a priori* differentiation ("It is impossible to say just what I mean!"(6)) in their approach to the world, they are the most noble. "Base" reactions, in contrast, are constantly embroiled in the "blame game" and the effort to overcome rather than actively address the issue of difference, the effort to repudiate *this* life which is *essentially* differential.

The proper conditions for ennobling reactive forces in this way requires a particularly active force: the faculty of forgetting,

A specific active force must be given the job of supporting consciousness and renewing its freshness, fluidity and mobile, agile chemistry at every moment. This active super-conscious faculty is the faculty of forgetting. Psychology's mistake was to treat forgetting as a negative determination, not to discover its active and positive character.(Deleuze 113)

In Nietzsche's "new" sense of forgetting, the faculty of repression, the cognitive ability to resist the constant attack of mnemonic traces, is a wholly functional active force and a

thoroughly positive quality of the mind. This ability to keep the boundary between the conscious skin and the unconscious memory intact is precisely what allows a reaction to external forces to be correspondingly acted. Only through such repression, only by allowing the mind to utilize its ability to resist the integration of mnemonic traces with conscious excitations (the dialectical goal par excellence), can the spirit of revenge, that powerful driving force behind this dialectic, be avoided.

This is because the spirit of revenge needs the invasion of mnemonic traces in the conscious apparatus; it bases its power on humanity's ability to recall each and every wrong perpetrated against the individual; it relies on the fact that every experience necessarily involves some pain, some feeling of being wronged by life, and, consequently, some feeling that *a priori* difference (the ultimate reason pain is ascribed to experience) can be overcome. Freud's Oedipal Complex is a perfect example of this sort of revenge in action. It relies solely on the need for an individual to wreak revenge on the father for separating him from the mother's loving embrace (instigation of the difference between self and (m)other), and, by extension, it relies on the individual's ability to constantly recall this original, fatherly differentiation in each and every reaction it has toward the world. In other words, all activities of the individual following this original differentiation are an effort to overcome the pain of experience by overcoming differentiation itself - the labor of the dialectic.

When there is no such breach between conscious and unconscious systems, the activities of the individual toward the world do not necessarily take on this need for revenge against the pain of differentiation and are thus more noble. Only continual

maintenance of the border between the conscious and the unconscious - only when the active force of repression is *not* separated from what it can do - ennobles reactive forces. Rarely, however, is such nobility to be found in the world. In fact, it is quite natural for humanity to lay blame on others for their pain, and this behavior needs to repress repression in order to maintain its power and spread the contagion of reaction. Thus, it is the more base reactive forces (those forces more comfortable within the spirit of revenge and negation than difference itself) which "triumph because, by separating active force from what it can do, they betray it to the will of nothingness"(Deleuze 64). This separation, this betrayal, occurs largely by way of a fictional reversal; it relies on the ability of reactive forces (ressentiment, bad conscience, passivity) to invert the positive qualities of active forces.

In terms of conscious and unconscious systems, the active force of repression is separated from what it can do through an inversion of the mechanism of repression. Rather than allow this active force to exercise its powers, rather than utilizing active repression as a means for affirming (or, at the very least tolerating versus negating) difference in *every* relationship an individual has with the world, the reactive man represses repression itself; he chokes down the cognitive faculty of forgetting and thus separates repression from its powers to ennoble the reactions of consciousness. He represses repression in favor of a memory of pain (especially a source of pain) which subsequently carries him into the spirit of revenge and, eventually, the will to nothingness. Such is the fictional inversion of repression supported in reactive individuals, repression itself is repressed. This is why Deleuze - via Nietzsche - characterizes the man of

ressentiment, the wholly reactive man, as someone who “cannot ‘have done’ with anything”(114), as the man who has a prodigious memory of all he has suffered and makes use of this memory not only in his reactions to the world but also in order to spread the dominance of reactive forces. “We can thus finally see in what way reactive forces prevail over active forces: when the trace takes the place of the excitation in the reactive apparatus [recall that even conscious excitation is reactive], reaction itself takes the place of action, reaction prevails over action”(Deleuze 114). The greatest victory of reactive forces, then, rests on integration of memory and consciousness (the constant negation of repression), rests, in other words, on the victorious cry of the dialectic.

Prufrock’s paralysis results from this same triumph of reactive forces which helps to indicate the direction of Eliot’s critique against the modernist self-dialectic. As previously described, the first order of business for the dialectic is to establish the existence of an other, an other who brings differentiation to the self-sufficient ego and thus causes pain for the individual; the dialectic needs this pain of differentiation and especially a source for this pain; it therefore needs someone like Prufrock who cannot “have done with anything”, someone to consistently blame others.

First and foremost, Prufrock is this man who cannot forget. His despair is all the more intense because he has “known them all”; he has seen every wrong, every source of pain and differentiation. Because he cannot repress the mnemonic traces of this knowledge, even the most “tedious argument” must have some underlying “insidious intent.” In fact, the very world itself, existence itself, is wholly insidious, even the love of which he supposedly sings. Prufrock’s inability to forget and his perception of life and

experience as wholly insidious (even in its most tedious moments) is indicated in the following passage:

And indeed there will be time  
 To wonder, 'Do I dare?' and, 'Do I dare?'  
 Time to turn back and descend the stair  
 With a bald spot in the middle of my hair -  
 (They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin!')  
 My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,  
 My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin -  
 (They will say: 'But how his arms and legs are thin!')(4)

Prufrock cannot even allow himself to age naturally without investing the mnemonic traces with all the power in his reactions. Quite simply, he is incapable of approaching the decline of his youth and accepting the differentiation this implies from his earlier self. It is much too painful for him to be losing his hair, but he could deal more productively and actively - more nobly - with this natural decline if he were not so quick to allow unconscious memory free reign over his reactions to situations. The parenthetical thought invests these mnemonic traces with too much power, power enough to prevent him from turning back to descend the stairs. He is too concerned with how others will perceive his situation, too concerned that they will have something insidious to say about his descent into old age. In other words, Prufrock is a man who cannot repress the trace admonishments regarding proper and youthful appearance in the world. The very memory that others will examine him, perhaps based largely on "formulated phrases", is enough to



reveal the answer to his constant question about action: absolutely not!

This holds important consequences for the eternal return. Reactive individuals such as Prufrock fundamentally misinterpret this concept and therefore find it extremely unbearable. Because such individuals possess a neurotic faith in Being, they see the eternal return as the eternal return of the same rather than the return of *a priori* difference; they interpret it as the eternal return of the same criticism, the same pain, the same futility. If their Being returns, so too must all the reactive forces on which this Being rests, and this not only makes the thought of eternal return unbearable to reactive creatures, but also to those who hope to resist reaction in a quest for nobility, those whose faith lies in becoming over Being.

The parenthetical remark about his fashionable dress serves the same function in terms of Prufrock's inability to act, his inability to 'have done' with social criticism, his inability to accurately comprehend the eternal return, but there is an even more direct passage highlighting this situation:

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

The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,

And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,

When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,

Then how should I begin

To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?(5)

Prufrock's description of his activities in the world as the discarded, blackened stumps of cigarettes is quite telling both in terms of his inability to forget and his fundamental

misunderstanding of the eternal return. It seems that nothing in his life was of any use or any importance, much less the source of any kind of joy (why, then, would he ever hope for it to return again?). It is as if all the trials of his life, trials ultimately leading to his being pinned and wriggling on the wall (whether this be the scientific wall of the intellect or the ethical wall of religion matters little), could give absolutely no solace. Such a description makes it clear that he is most certainly a man of resentment, "a being full of pain: the sclerosis or hardening of his consciousness, the rapidity with which every excitation sets and freezes within him, the weight of the traces that invade him are so many cruel sufferings"(Deleuze 116). This is exactly the reason that every experience (keeping in mind his misinterpretation of the eternal return) is either preceded or followed by "would it have been worth it after all"(6).

Like any "good" man of resentment, Prufrock is not content merely to catalogue his sufferings; it is not enough for him to say "I suffer, I feel nothing but pain." He must find someone to blame for humanity's endless pain. In this particular passage, he locates the source of this pain (in a moment not unlike Bergson's devaluation of the intellect and those who traffic with it) in "the eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase." Prufrock has felt the observant sting of all these eyes - the gaze of science, of God, of psychology - and is unable to extricate any meaningful action from the trace memories of pain he attributes to them. He "knows," for example, that his love song will always be a hollow one, that "in the room, women come and go talking of Michelangelo"(4), but they will only talk of him with disdain. Because Prufrock cannot actively repress, because he is unable to "have done with anything," because he represses repression itself and reverses the function of

active forces (turns them against themselves) he will never act.

The extension or end of resentment is bad conscience which also requires a certain reversion, a particular reversal of positive and affirming active forces.

Ressentiment reverses the operation of repression; it fictionalizes repression and in so doing separates it from its capabilities. But reactive people are rarely content with this reversal purely on the level of the individual, their goal is to spread the infection; they want everyone to feel pain and seek revenge for this pain on others. Nietzsche himself posits an important consequence of this disease-spreading faculty of the reactive individual:

When would men of resentment achieve the ultimate, subtlest, sublimest triumph of revenge? Undoubtedly if they succeeded in poisoning the consciences of the fortunate with their own misery, with all misery, so that one day the fortunate began to be ashamed of their own good fortune and perhaps said to one another: 'it is disgraceful to be fortunate: *there is too much misery.*' (Nietzsche, *The Genealogy* 124)

The reactive man absolutely does not want to be alone with his pain; he must be sure that others feel it; he must be sure that the activity of others is turned against them. This is yet another strategy deployed by reactive forces in an effort to separate active forces from what they can do. Reactive forces extend their triumph in this way by turning active forces themselves against those in whom they are most positively manifest. And this is also something which happens within the reactive man because "separated from what it can do, active force does not evaporate. Turning back against itself *it produces pain*" (Deleuze 128). This is truly a case where the reactive man chokes on the active forces he has repressed, a situation where active forces themselves have a certain revenge.

Additionally, when activity becomes the target of this revenge, not only will reactive men be stung by their repressed active forces, but the same process will spread to others.

On an individual level, when active forces are in this way "interiorized," when they become producers of pain and rise up within the reactive man "*a new sense is invented for pain, an internal sense, an inward sense*: pain is made the consequence of a sin, a fault" (Deleuze 129). The occurrence of this internalization of pain should be clear if we consider that specific "priests" have a role to play in this process. As far as the man of resentment is concerned, everything is the fault of someone(thing) else; he is not to blame for his inadequacies, his feeling of pain in differentiation. Perhaps science is to blame for ordering the world according to categories, for highlighting the differences between one thing and another. Perhaps God is to blame for creating a world in which no two things are ever alike, a world which constantly breaks down into different people, different animals, different activities. According to Nietzsche, the Judaic priest (more like an internal monitor than an external person) organizes the blame game described above. He is the entity which consistently hardens the memory of an inflicted pain, the entity which propagates the disease on the skin of consciousness. He organizes the herd (others who share Prufrock's perspective) under the banner of revenge against those who act, those who dominate.

In the context of resentment, then, this priest is very much like a gatekeeper between the faculties of consciousness and unconscious memory, constantly opening the way for mnemonic traces, constantly feeding base reactive forces with the nourishment of

painful memories<sup>3</sup>. This priest is the force which hardens the conscious skin by allowing mnemonic traces to invade Prufrock's reactions to the world; he organizes Prufrock's pain by constantly interrupting Prufrock's ability to digest conscious excitations in order to react his reactions; he makes sure that Prufrock remembers pain and, most importantly, remembers that others are to blame. But the organization of resentment (the spirit of revenge) can only go so far:

It is in bad conscience that resentment comes into its own and reaches the summit of its contagious power: by changing direction. It cries "It is my fault, it is my fault" until the whole world takes up this dreary refrain, until everything active in life develops this same feeling of guilt. (Deleuze 132)

The development of this interiorized sense of guilt (as opposed to blaming an external force for the pain of existence) is organized by another internal monitor, what Nietzsche will call the Christian priest. This priest is the one who returns the blame game to the individual, the one who still organizes the memories of "so many cruel sufferings" but places the blame squarely on the shoulders of the individual who suffers. Such is the concept of sin, the belief that we suffer because we are fundamentally bad, the feeling that the world is not free from suffering because we are not free from sin and its temptations. In addition to this sense of an inward fault, bad conscience also results from the fact that the creature of resentment, having wreaked his revenge on those responsible for the pain of differentiation, now occupies their position. Having diverted their power from its capabilities, it would seem that reactive individuals should be in a position to exercise a

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In this context, those paralyzing parenthetical remarks could be considered as the organizing and disease-spreading voice of the Judaic Priest.

new power to provide the rest of humanity with the tools necessary for attaining a similar position. But because they fear the consequences of imposing forms on others (the very thing for which they blamed these others) they seldom if ever act on this new power and, as such, do not offer the message they should, hence the overwhelming feeling of guilt which accompanies one who has "known them all already." Thus, Prufrock, like any individual who has experienced this new sense of pain, has "seen the eternal Footman hold [his] coat, and snicker, / And in short [he] was afraid"(6).

There exists, however, a particular method for circumventing this movement of guilt, this interiorization of blame, which involves another active force, which, if *not* separated from what it can do, is capable of raising reaction once again to a certain level of nobility. The specific active force involved in this training, in this preparation of, for example, the reaction to conscious excitation for being acted, is seemingly in a paradoxical relationship with the active force of repression; it is the faculty of memory, but a *very* special kind of memory.

This active memory is not the memory of traces in the unconscious system; above all, it is not the memory of pain caused and a perpetrator of pain nor the memory of sin, for this type of memory only recalls past moments; it only invests unconscious traces with the authority for reacting to life. In contrast, and active memory is a memory of the future:

It is the faculty of promising, commitment to the future, memory of the future itself. Remembering the promise that has been made is not recalling that it was made at a particular past moment, but that one must hold to it at a future moment. . . . Only such a man is active; he acts his reactions, everything in him is active or acted.(Deleuze 134)

Within the dialectic of the self, there is no such promising; the only future in this vicious circle is the utopian dream of overcoming difference; it does not look to the future except as holding a possible salvation, as finally producing the desired throw of the dice<sup>4</sup>. This dialectic, if we recall that its motor is passivity, "a divorce from the demands of action," really promises only the herd, a gathering of the undifferentiated, anaesthetized, and passively completed selves, only the return of Being; it promises *no* future action, and this is perhaps one of its greatest temptations (one which Prufrock is quick to embrace).

Active promising is, in contrast, a promise regarding the openendedness of the future; it is quite simply a promise to act, but act in such a way that difference is affirmed. This promise must begin by thinking becoming over Being, for only becoming allows for such an open promise whereas Being makes no promise except that one rediscover her "true" self through dialectical reappropriation ( a passive promise or a promise of passivity). Once existence is evaluated from the perspective of becoming, one must then accept a level of responsibility, not in the sense of guilt but in the sense that she actively feel responsible for reactive forces, accept the fact that human beings behave reactively, but strive to raise this reactive nature to its highest nobility through always resisting or circumventing the triumph of reactive forces. Once responsibility is taken on *in this sense* the individual is in a position to promise, she is able to promise not only continual

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In terms of the Judaic priest, this final throw would be the destruction of dogmatic rulers and their subsequent replacement by the power of the herd, while for the Christian priest, it would be the resolution of a sinful life in the arms of God. Whatever they count on, their goal (like that of the dialectic) is to devalue this world in favor of one not yet attained.

resistance to the triumph of reaction, but also a continual effort to act in the world rather than let it slowly fall upon its “virginal” and self-sufficient ego.

Mere acceptance of responsibility without the promise is the dialectical path and one which could never lead to action. As Bergson noted, the fall into intellectual differentiation cannot be avoided but can be overcome with only the proper exertion. It is in this way that the dialectic promises only more of the same; its only promise of salvation is based on reaction, continual falls into differentiation and subsequent reappropriation; it only promises more reaction to pain.

This dialectical error really lies in a particular reversal of the active faculty of promising. It promises at best an end to the vicious circle, a final state where one has “known them all already.” At worst, it promises only the eternal return of the same, the eternal recurrence of differentiation and reappropriation. In other words, the dialectic promises that for all eternity, humanity will never be capable of repaying the debt of reaction. It is in this way that bad conscience achieves its lasting form: “it is no longer a matter of a suffering through which debt is paid, but of a suffering through which one is shackled to it, through which one becomes a debtor forever”(Deleuze 141). Within the dialectic as a whole and Bergson’s self-dialectic specifically, we can see how this perpetual debt becomes its driving force.

In such a situation, one in which humanity is forever responsible but unable to promise, unable to joyfully look to the eternal return, the true colors of bad conscience become clear. Rather than suffering finally being a means of affirming life, a training mechanism which but asks us to be active, to actively confront the world rather than



relying solely on our burdensome memory of wrongs suffered and pain inflicted, bad conscience, once resentment's disease has spread, embroils humanity in a perpetual blame game which could only find relief in passive nihilism. This is Prufrock's very predicament, but it remains to be seen how bad conscience is manifest in his psyche.

The poem's turning point in terms of this perpetual debt is the section where Prufrock imagines himself as a "pair of ragged claws." The imagery of the sleepy evening, the "restful" moment at the end of his dialectic, indicates that his long labors with the differentiated and differentiating world have finally come to an end, an end where he knows them all already, a moment where an *active* promise must be made. But, above all, Prufrock is unable to actively make this promise, and the continual repetition of such interrogatives as "would it be worth it" and "do I dare" highlight this fact. They are the questions of a reactive man, one who constantly "chokes on the eternal return" and not the questions of one who *both* remembers the future *and* "forgets" the past, one who can promise action.

The catalogue of men who have made such a promise, often described by critics as a certain "mock-heroics," help to highlight not only his inability to promise but also, and perhaps most importantly, his relationship with modernism's bad conscience. This bad conscience certainly involves an inability to actively promise, but it also involves a deepening of the debt, a firm belief that debt is ultimately unpayable. It would seem that for someone who has undergone the labors of the dialect there should be something to offer the world, perhaps a prophecy which may help to alleviate the pain of existence or at least indicate where humanity has "gone wrong"; the religion of the negative must be able

to offer something resembling salvation. However, because he chokes on the eternal return of the same, because he cannot imagine what he could possibly offer in terms of solace, he blames himself. As someone who has foresuffered all, he should be able to help others, but he ultimately cannot:

But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,  
 Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in  
     upon a platter,

I am no prophet - and here's no great matter;

...

Would it have been worth while,

...

To say: 'I am Lazarus, come from the dead,

Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all'(6)

But because he fears, among other things, misinterpretation, because he cannot articulate to others what he has supposedly discovered about the inherent nature of dialectical reappropriation, he will not tell us all. This is one way Prufrock becomes forever shackled to his debt. It is now his fault that humanity suffers because he can offer no means of liberation from this pain of existence. In this way, Prufrock's mock-heroics further elucidates Eliot's critique of dialectical liberation. Unlike John the Baptist or even Lazarus, Prufrock promises nothing but more of the same, more falls into a differentiated world of misinterpretation and unrealistic expectations. Because he cannot speak or say exactly what he means, people will suffer, and unlike the men to whom he compares

himself, he does not even try. After all, what's the point if the end is a state of utter alienation because one has already known them all?

It has often been commented that Prufrock's problem parallels that of Hamlet, but that he differs from Hamlet precisely because he does not force the moment to its crisis. This important difference further highlights Eliot's critique of modern subjectivity. The man at the end of the dialectic can really do no more than "swell a progress, start a scene or two, / Advise the prince; no doubt an easy [all too easy] tool"(7). In other words, at the dialectic's end, there can be nothing other than an "attendant lord," nothing but a passive individual waiting to finally die, and Prufrock is to blame precisely because he can do nothing more than attend, nothing more than passively accept his fate and watch others do the same. Unlike Hamlet, he does not actively and affirmatively promise, and, what is more, he does not even *attempt* to live up to the primordial promise of action and nobility.

This inability of dialectical individuals to act or actively promise must quite clearly end with passive nihilism, and this is why Prufrock wishes to be nothing more than a "pair of ragged claws." If blaming others for pain and finally taking their place in the dialectical process results in nothing but perpetual guilt - more suffering - than is there really any point to existence? For Prufrock the answer is a resounding no, but in yet another prescient moment, his song ends with an admonishment regarding this individual will to nothingness:

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each,

I do not think that they will sing to me.

...

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea

By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown

Till human voices wake us, and we drown.(7)

Mermaids will sing only to active people, only to those who can *actively* promise and ultimately remain responsible to this promise. The sea imagery also invokes a parallel between his wish for passive nothingness and the results of such an existence. Having lingered with himself in such a sea, he realizes that he will ultimately be called back to life, that pain will ultimately invade even the darkest corners of his silent seas and force him to repeat again the process of dialectical reintegration. This is a reminder to Prufrock about the true character of the eternal return, a lesson that only difference, only becoming returns and any sense of Being which would have the individual resting easy with his absolute knowledge is shattered by this return.

### ELIOT'S LONG TRIAL WITH THE "WASTE PLACE"

Lest we rush to believe Prufrock's situation anomalous, we must always bear in mind that humanity in general finds difference intolerable, especially a differential origin for Being or a fall from this Being into differentiation. Always and everywhere we find such difference abhorrent, frightening, and fundamentally painful. We want Being, a stable sense of self-unity, a belief that the fall into differential existence might be overcome in some final, unifying state or at least a belief that existence has unfairly separated us from this state. We humans share a Prufrockian dream to "know them all already", to make everything a part of our personal intellectual system - to overcome difference. Witnessing Prufrock's steady decline into complete paralysis, however, should serve as a warning regarding the flawed nature of such dreams. What Eliot offers in "Prufrock" is therefore not so much a critique of human existence, this fall into difference and the potential renewal offered by dialectical reappropriation, but rather a critique of this reappropriating tendency itself, a critique of this illusory unity.

Such illusions are a constant target of Eliot and Nietzsche, both of whom strove for a truly new sense of existence, a sense based not on Being, some lost state of absolute unity, but rather on becoming, always becoming. And like Eliot, Nietzsche focused on the movement of time to articulate this new (profoundly new and truly modern) sense of existence in *absolute* contradistinction to the belief in some original or not yet attained unity of Being: "if the universe had an equilibrium position, if becoming had an end or final

state, it would already have been attained. But the present moment, as the passing moment, proves that it is not attained and therefore that an equilibrium of forces is not possible”(Deleuze 47). This logical conclusion is precisely what is forgotten (necessarily forgotten?) by dialecticians - see Bergson’s belief that self-unity can be achieved via intuitive moments or Prufrock’s belief that he has “known them all already.” This same logic is, however, a major force behind *Four Quartets*, but, like Nietzsche, Eliot had to struggle with the very notion of becoming itself before he could articulate his new sense for life; it is this struggle, a struggle with the only becoming known to humanity (becoming-reactive), which is taken up in *The Waste Land*.

It would be misleading to suggest that Prufrock is paralyzed because he only “becomes” a reactive creature and was simply unable to locate and utilize a becoming-active because humanity itself, that great “skin disease of the earth,” is essentially incapable of a becoming-active, the only becoming we know is a becoming-reactive of forces. This becoming wells up from the belief that a unified existence (Being) is unfairly denied to individuals and that existence itself, because it is *essentially* differential, is to blame for their paralysis or pain. “Difference can and must be overcome!” thus becomes the constant cry of dialectical creatures. It is in this way that the program of the human species is flawed from the start. Because we cannot affirm the *a priori* difference of existence, because (for us) that which differs inflicts pain and alienation, and because we begin with the illusion of unity as our well-spring and goal, we cannot know any becoming but becoming-reactive; this is what leads Nietzsche to his position that “even the best men

must be overcome.”

Nietzsche expresses what he means by “the best men” in his theory of the higher man, and the various symbols he deploys to articulate this theory parallel in provocative ways the difficult symbolism of *The Waste Land*. This theory rests on several important and interrelated principles: humanity is essentially reactive; this reactive nature of the human is fundamentally linked to a neurotic desire to overcome difference; this desire leads human beings (even the best) to eventually “choke” on the eternal return, a concept whose name belies its complexity.

The reason that humanity (as a wholly reactive species) chokes on the eternal return is deceptively simple. The eternal return is primarily unbearable because

It is not being that returns but rather the returning itself that constitutes being insofar as it is affirmed of becoming and of that which passes. It is not some one thing that returns but rather returning itself is the one thing which is affirmed of diversity or multiplicity. In other words, identity in the eternal return does not describe the nature of that which returns but, on the contrary, the fact of returning for that which differs. (Deleuze 48)

Clearly, dialecticians - all reactive beings in fact - would have that which is the same return again and for all time. But, despite our repeated attempts at identity (attempts which return in their own way) only difference profoundly returns, only becoming and the difference in becoming returns, and because humanity cannot affirm this unbearable but fundamentally inextinguishable difference it becomes trapped forever in a becoming-reactive; it continually strives to annihilate this difference in favor of unifying or utilitarian purposes.

This is why any investigation of humanity in general and humanity’s “species

activity” specifically must begin with the genealogist’s art of interpreting and evaluating reactive forces, forces which seek to negate the eternal return of *a priori* difference. The role of the genealogist is to constantly explore the relation between forces, but, more profoundly, to elucidate the constant betrayal to reactive forces which is the human condition par excellence: “the problem of interpretation is to interpret the state of reactive forces in each case - that is the degree of development that they have reached in relation to negation and the will to nothingness”(Deleuze 67). Negation and the will to nothingness are the mechanisms which both drive and lend support to reactive forces; they, in fact, make the reactive life desirable and “spread the contagion.” Most importantly, negation and the will to nothingness are all the human type can know: “nihilism, the will to nothingness, is not only a will to power, a quality of the will to power, but the *ratio cognoscendi* of the will to power in general”(Deleuze 172). The problem of acting in the world, the difficulty in overcoming reaction, is thus not a problem which can be solved within the human. This is precisely the reason why a genealogist must explore the subtle nuances of reactive forces themselves - some reactive forces are, simply, better than others, and it is the higher (wo)men, those humans who have pushed reactive forces to the utmost which, at least, may manifest the best that reactive forces can offer.

Deleuze articulates the different manifestations, the different “activities” of reactive forces in this way:

Reactive forces are not the same and they change nuance depending on the extent to which they develop their affinity for the will to nothingness. One reactive force both obeys and resists, another separates active force from what it can do; a third contaminates active force, carries it along to the



limit of becoming-reactive, into the will to nothingness; a fourth type of reactive force was originally active but became reactive and separated from its power, it was then dragged into the abyss and turned against itself - these are the different nuances, affects and types that the genealogist must interpret, that no one else knows how to interpret.(67)

There are thus both "good" and "bad" reactive forces, both noble and base means of trafficking with them. The responsibility of higher (wo)men is to constantly measure the degree to which these forces are either noble or base, the suitability for acting reactive forces. But it is vitally important to remember that because even they are "human, all too human" they cannot escape the movement of reactive forces, even they are reactive and constantly exhibit both the drive to negate difference and the will to nothingness, even they choke on the eternal return.

The most noble of reactive forces is of the first type identified by Deleuze. Reactive forces which both obey active forces, which "create forms by exploiting circumstances", and resist, struggle with, these same active forces are of the highest type because they do not strive to separate active forces from their abilities nor do they passively accept their lot. They are also the more noble type insofar as they are involved in the more productive relationship of responsibility-debt versus responsibility-guilt - they accept responsibility for being reactive but do not implicate themselves in the "blame game." This is the only type wherein reactive forces can be re-acted; the other types represent a steady decline into "baser" types. Higher (wo)men constantly engage in a struggle to raise humanity's reactive nature to the first, most noble type but, like all human creatures, continually fall prey to the temptations of the others.

This is why one point constantly emphasized by Nietzsche is, once again, the illusory nature of the persona of the higher (wo)man: "the higher man is the image in which the reactive man represents himself as 'higher', and, better still deifies himself" (Deleuze 164). This culmination of the human condition is thus but another fiction to support the reactive life, the life which lacks affirmation, the life which betrays Dionysus. It is the end of the reactive dialectic and the logical conclusion of this reactive machine, but still does not carry humanity into the realm of affirmation. Because even higher (wo)men lack this power of affirmation, because, in fact, humanity in general lacks this power, the reactive life will always be triumphant<sup>5</sup>. The myriad manifestations of this triumph remain to be seen, and for this we need to turn to several symbols of the higher man in the context of Eliot's "grouse against life."

*The Waste Land* is indeed such a grouse, but a grouse against the reactive life and the various, appealing ways in which this life is supported by even "higher" (wo)men. Thus it continues in many ways the critique inaugurated by "Prufrock" but expands its scope beyond a wholly individual psyche - rather than the song of one man, it offers a song of humanity in general. More specifically, *The Waste Land* explores the nuances of reactive forces rather than explicitly focusing, as "Prufrock" does, on more base manifestations of these forces.

Even the best humanity has to offer strives to overcome and negate difference,

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Despite the fact that humanity lacks the power of affirmation *in principle*, human beings are capable of both "preparing the way" for this affirmation and affirming this life *conditionally*.

even the best (wo)men fall prey to reactive temptations. One such person is represented by the sorcerer who “is bad conscience, the ‘counterfeiter’, the ‘penitent of the spirit’, the ‘demon of melancholy’ who fabricates his suffering in order to excite pity, in order to spread the contagion”(Deleuze 164). The sorcerer is that higher (wo)man who traffics in reactive forces of the baser type, that individual who separates active force from what it can do and thereby contaminates it, betrays it to the will to nothingness and the spirit of revenge. It is the individual who lives like a god, but a god whose active forces have been betrayed to the reactive life. This individual who best represents this particular higher (wo)man in *The Waste Land* is Belladonna, the “lady of situations.”

In the beginning, She is described as having achieved a “higher” state of human existence:

The chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,  
 Glowed on the marble, where the glass  
 Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines  
 From which a golden Cupidon peeped out

(Another hid his eyes behind his wing)(*Collected* 56)

Clearly, then, we are confronted with a woman living in opulence, a woman to whom the reactive life has seemingly been quite good. However, her description clearly highlights the illusory nature of her position as above reactionary slaves. The doubled Cupidon, for example, helps to establish what her position in the world really is, a situation where she must turn at least one blind eye to life in order to support her fabricated position beyond

its machinations. She, like “the last pope”, another symbol of the higher man, and Madame Sosostriis, lost “the eye which saw active, affirmative gods”(Deleuze 165). Other components of her description further emphasize her fictional elevation, her fabricated position as higher (wo)man:

In vials of ivory and coloured glass  
 Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,  
 Unguent, powdered, or liquid - troubled, confused  
 And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air  
 That freshened from the window, these ascended  
 In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,  
 Flung their smoke into the laqueria,  
 Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.(56)

All the ways in which she supports her illusion of existing beyond humanity, of overcoming and transcending a painful existence are here described. Most striking is that the imagery conveys the sense of an anesthetized individual, surrounded by the incense and intoxicating fumes of an opium den. The evocation of Plato’s allegory of the cave helps to further emphasize the fiction, and like the man who is violently murdered upon returning to the cave, the man to whom this lady speaks offers her nothing of what she seeks from him; he instead problematizes her symbolic serenity.

“A Game of Chess” also exhibits Belladonna’s all too reactive relationship to forces. Her admonishment of the man from whom she seeks pity: “Do / You know

nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember / Nothing?"(57) indicates that she, like Prufrock is someone who cannot "have done with anything"; she cannot allow active repression to do its work in others much less in herself, and she cannot even compete with or resist such repression. For her, its all much too difficult; it requires too much action, and one of her greatest hopes seems to be that the man fall prey to this same sickness. This is, in fact, the most often used strategy of higher (wo)men for spreading the contagion of reaction: to manufacture pain is to illustrate that existence itself is painful, always painful; to excite pity from "the herd" is but the first step in separating active forces from their work and forcing the slaves to remember that existence=difference=pain; to force these slaves to recognize the pain in "higher" others will lead the slaves to recognize their own pain and repeat the dialectical cycle inaugurated by higher (wo)men.

Her need for pity is perhaps the most important representation of her relationship to reaction. Because she cannot actively take responsibility for her reactive forces, because such responsibility becomes, for her, an unpayable responsibility, she constantly seeks pity for her bad conscience from the other conversant:

'My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.

'Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.

'What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?

'I never know what you are thinking. Think.'(57)

Her alienation is here so profound as to almost totally paralyze her, and she seems to know that it is her fault, but the momentum of the conversation also suggests that she not

only manufacturers her pain, not only seeks pity from the man, but also wants him to accept the blame for her situation, wants to "spread the contagion." She wants him to remember and feel guilty like herself; she wants his pity and guilt expressed to her in a great confessional; she wants to separate active forces from what they can do and "have [them] dragged into the abyss and turned against [themselves]." What she receives, however, from this man who seems to remember little, who appears to react only to conscious excitations rather than unconscious trace memories, only serves to further highlight her extreme alienation from the world (so often the fate of higher (wo)men), her setting of herself falsely beyond life, seeking the pity of slaves. Her inability to understand another human being (one who seems more capable of acting reactions than she), her incapacity to empathize with her conversant, is partly the predicament of the higher (wo)man in general and partly the result of the trap of pity into which she falls when her illusory existence is revealed for what it is. In other words, she cannot tolerate the difference between herself and others; she cannot accept that one would feel no pity for her; she betrays Dionysian difference to her drive for an Apollonian confirmation of her Being; she betrays herself and hopes to betray the rest of humanity to the movement of a reactive dialectic.

The concluding episode of this section is representative of "the two kings" within the symbolism of the higher man. This is perhaps the theory's most positive symbol because it directly addresses the more active relationship toward reactive forces (that of obedience and resistance). These kings are "customs, the morality of customs and the two

ends of this morality, the two extremities of culture. They represent species activity grasped in the pre-historic determination of customs but also in the post-historic product where customs are suppressed”(Deleuze 165). This double nature of the kings is essential to the theory of the higher man because it represents the constant struggle necessary between reactive forces if they are to become noble, the constant effort to take reactive culture seriously - obey its laws and customs - and the constant effort to resist and perhaps even leave such obeisance behind. This very struggle is played out in the tavern conversation.

The unidentified voice best represents the first of the two kings, the one which determines and emphasizes the role of cultural training and obedience to custom. It constantly wants to remind Lil of her customary responsibilities as Albert's wife, the burden(s) she must bear. When a husband, for example, provides his wife with money for a specific purpose, it is her responsibility to obey. Moreover, it is her customary responsibility to prepare for her husband, to make herself ready to meet his needs, and to bear his children: “Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart. / He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave / you / To get yourself some teeth”(58). Lil struggles explicitly against these demands even while she fundamentally obeys them, and her somewhat sardonic position that Albert can go ahead and get “a good time” from others solidifies her resistant yet obedient stance.

Lil thus not only exhibits the struggle, the constant resistance which strengthens active forces, but also the need for obedience, the impossibility of escaping custom and

law. In her, the interrelationship between these reactive forces is played out:

You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique.

(And her only thirty-one.)

I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,

It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.

(She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.)

The chemist said it would be all right, but I've never been

the same.(58)

Clearly, Lil is a woman who has given such a large portion of herself over to customary demands that not only is she old beyond her years, but she barely escaped death in her obedience; the cultural burden(s) nearly killed her. The voice to whom she responds would likely want this very thing to have happened: a complete loss of the individual under the cultural burden. This voice thus sheds light on another difficult Nietzschean symbol: the ass which cannot say no.

The ass is the temptation of affirmation held out to higher (wo)men, it seems to symbolize a method for finally bringing the affirmative into play in such a negative existence, but

We can guess the meaning of the ass' affirmation, of the yes which does not know how to say no: *this kind of affirming is nothing but bearing* [recall the reference to child-bearing in Lil's section], *taking upon oneself*, acquiescing in the real as it is, taking reality as it is upon oneself. The idea of the real in itself is an ass' idea. The ass feels the weight of the burdens that it has been loaded with, that it has taken up, as the positivity of the real . . . But the real and its acceptance remain what they are, false positivity and false affirmation.(Deleuze 181-82)



Passive acceptance of cultural burdens, the weight of a illusory and constructed real, is all the affirmation the ass can offer, the only affirmation of the “first king” to whom Lil speaks in the pub, the fictional affirmation against which she struggles. It is the real of reaction against which she struggles but cannot escape, the real which constantly asks her to take on a still heavier burden (a burden which might finally kill her, or so the “first king” hopes).

But Lil neither perishes, succumbs entirely to culture, nor leaves culture forever behind; the only thing which continues (the only thing that returns) is the struggle itself - the game, and it is the interesting dinner invitation which establishes this: “Well, that Sunday, Albert was home, they had a hot gammon, / And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot”(59). The fact that the invitation is extended to an individual whose sole goal seems to be to spread the contagion, to add to and emphasize the need for taking on burdens, is important in the sense that who else needs to “get the beauty of it hot”? Who else should bear witness to the struggle itself rather than lend support to a supposed victor? It is the will behind the “ass” of culture and tradition which must bear witness, that must see that neither Albert’s demands nor Lil’s resistance wins out but continues, often hot and contentious, but beautiful and invigorating for this very reason.

The fact that Albert and Lil remain together and continue the game is vitally important to the theory of the higher man. Lil is quite capable of resisting the burden of customary demands, but she is still *fundamentally* incapable of a radical critique of these same demands; she still cannot affirm existence. She resists but cannot overcome cultural

demands, the movement of "species activity," all the sanctioned manifestations of the great "skin disease of the earth." Because she cannot *radically* negate cultural burdens, that is, because she does not yet know how to turn a negation of reactive culture into an affirmation of life itself, she yet lacks the "inhuman" powers which would make life truly playful. Her relationship to reactive forces, however, remains noble because she is able say no to the ass's yea, she is able to *both* obey *and* resist even though she cannot, by dint of her humanity, yet carry such resistance to its utmost.

However disconcerting this appears (the eternal return here truly seems indigestible; it seems to mean only the return of the reactive life) this is the fundamental, human problem traced in *The Waste Land*. Once again, it is not Lil only who lacks the power of affirmation and activity; it is humanity in general. This precisely the reason Madame Sosostris does "not find the Hanged Man." in the fortune she tells. Her section is often described as pivotal in the poem; it seems she unites more than even Tiresias. But despite her awesome powers, she, like the human species, remains profoundly and unavoidably blind. There can therefore be no question about the sickness of Sosostris; it is the dialectical sickness, the disease of a reactive life which finds difference intolerable and leads her to choke on the eternal return. This sickness not only causes her to constantly "regurgitate" the eternal return of reactive forces, but has made her vitally blind despite (perhaps even because of) the fact that she is "known to be the wisest woman in Europe"(54). Her section is in fact full of such blindness: it lacks an eye for Dionysus; it contains a merchant who also lacks such an eye; and it remains forever blind to the nature

of the burden carried by this merchant.

Her inability to "find The Hanged Man" is perhaps her greatest blindness, the blindness of every clairvoyante (every person who would believe themselves beyond the slave's reach), the blindness of humanity. His absence within her fortune (and the fact that this absence is specifically mentioned) indicates the absence of Dionysus, the supreme manifestation of active, affirmative gods, the only gods capable of reversing the grinding of the reactive wheel from not only the poem itself but also from human existence in general. It is a strategic absence in the sense that the Hanged Man would reveal this reactive existence in all its negative glory; his presence would effectively destroy the life she supports in one blow. In terms of such a life, her blindness in this case is truly and profoundly necessary.

Another necessary blindness is her inability to see the nature of the burden carried by the one-eyed merchant, this man who also lost an eye through his long service to the reactive life. If this burden were revealed for what it is - the empty fictions which support the reactive live (i.e. the firm belief in liberation via dialectical reappropriation or the empty "blame game" of resentment and bad conscience) - then the species activity of humanity, the constant struggle for human emancipation, would lose all meaning.

According to this somewhat limited position, such illusions should never ("I am forbidden to see") be questioned, *can* never be questioned by humanity. They may be resisted, they may even be overcome, but they will never be revealed *as* fictions by the human species because it lacks the only eye capable of such radical critique. This is exactly why Prufrock

cannot even "frame" his "overwhelming question."

What Madame Sosostriis does see are the many entities which passively accept this blindness and lend increasing support to a reactive existence; she sees the myriad manifestation of higher (wo)men in the poem. She sees Belladonna that great seeker of men's pity; she sees the Fisher King, so tied to customs and tradition that he forever struggles to rid himself of his necessary double; and she sees humanity itself "walking around in a ring," the ring of the reactive life. Most importantly, perhaps, she sees "the drowned Phoenician Sailor."

She is vehement that the person for whom she tells the fortune pay particularly close attention to this individual - his card: "Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!"(54) It is especially important for the man (and the reader for that matter) to pay heed to Phlebas because he is doubly blind; he has lost *both* eyes. Not only has he lost an eye which saw active, affirmative gods, but he also lost the eye which saw the movement of reactive forces. In other words, Phlebas is blind to both affirmation and the possibilities for creating a more noble relationship with reactive forces. Having "gone through the whole human species, from rich to poor"(Deleuze 165), Phlebas has become like a god who turns the wheel on which humanity moves. In occupying such a position, he becomes the absolute worst the reactive life can offer; he becomes "the ugliest of men."

This particular symbol of the higher man "represents reactive nihilism: the reactive man has turned his resentment against God, he has put himself in the place of the God that he has killed, but he does not stop being reactive, full of bad conscience and

ressentiment”(Deleuze 165). This is why Sosostris provides but one warning, immediately following the indication that she is blind to The Hanged Man: “Fear death by water.” In other words, fear the death of Phlebas, fear the passive dying of Prufrock, fear the wholly negative end which awaits one who has “known them all already.”

The question remains as to why such a death is to be feared or even how humanity, which knows no other method for relating to existence, could even experience such fear. A response to such important questions will necessarily re-turn us to the concept of the eternal return and the necessity of the promise - the only way to not choke on the eternal return is to continually remember such a promise. It is this promise (the promise which Prufrock cannot actively make) to which Phlebas’s other eye is also blind. Forgetting the promise to act reactions, forgetting to take responsibility for one’s reactive forces separates cultural training from what it can do and thus makes Phlebas one of “the ugliest men.”

Culture is to be both obeyed and resisted; it’s task is to constantly measure the nobility or baseness of reactive forces, and this task can only be carried out by attending to this double demand. Those forces which separate culture from this task, either by adhering entirely to culture without resisting or believing oneself above the machinations of this culture, seek to betray this activity of culture to base reactive forces. Phlebas is of the latter sort, someone who has labored long and hard with culture but, unlike Lil, refuses to continue the game and instead asserts his superiority and “deifies himself” as the highest of reactive men. Once again, however, the fact that this man appears as something to be

avoided, as relating to reaction in a *very* limited and limiting manner, should remind the reader about the "baseness" of his position: "O you who turn the wheel and look to windward, / Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you"(65).

The situation of Phlebas, like that of Prufrock, is to be avoided primarily because his belief that he controlled his fate, the belief that he had truly taken the place of God and now steers his own existence, represents a decline into the most base of reactive forces. He forgets his reactive well-spring, fails to take responsibility for his reactive forces, and instead elevates himself to a deified position. His profound mistake was to forget "the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell / And the profit and loss"(65). In other words, he was blind to the memory of the song of existence, so distant from human, reactive ears; he forgot the beauty of life, the beauty of difference, the dance which makes not only life but more importantly the eternal return bearable; he was also blind to the movement and rhythm of life, the ebb and flow of existence, the movements of the game - the eternal return itself - and he forgot his responsibility-debt, his need to forever promise to strive for action. This is the reason for both the warning which concludes his section and the vehemence with which Madame Sosostris directs her client to attend to his card.

Important distinctions should be made between Madame Sosostris, Tiresias, and Phlebas for reactive forces triumph among them in very different ways. One (Sosostris) is that higher (wo)man still capable of interpreting the relative nobility or baseness of reactive forces, another (Phlebas) has, like Prufrock, "faded away passively" under the movement of these same forces, and another (Tiresias) is looking "for a sea in which to

drown", but also "throbbing between two lives"(61). Madame Sosostriis is certainly ill, but she remains all the more noble because she has not yet succumbed to the temptation of absolute passivity; she retains her ability to judge the suitability of reactive forces for being acted. Her warnings regarding water and her insistence that the individual whose fortune she tells really "Look!" at Phlebas and his fate points to this nobility. Phlebas, on the other hand, retains no such nobility; he falls prey entirely to his reactive forces, takes God's now vacant seat, and, consequentially, fades away passively where "a current under sea / Picked his bones in whispers"(65). Tiresias is fundamentally different from both.

Sickness, first of all, has a more positive sense in Tiresias than the other reactive creatures in the poem. Rather than using sickness as a means of justifying a passive death, as a reason for negating human life and existence, as a support for the will to nothingness, the blindness of Tiresias confers a deeper vision of life. One can almost hear Tiresias speaking with a somewhat Nietzschean voice regarding sickness: "it reveals to me a new capacity, it endows me with a new will that I can make my own, going to the limit of a strange power. (This extreme power brings many things into play, for example: 'Looking from the perspective of the sick toward *healthier* concepts and values'). . . They [the diseases of reactive forces] separate us from our power but at the same time they give us another power, 'dangerous' and 'interesting'"(Deleuze 66). In other words, Tiresias is physically blind, but this blindness confers a vision of the *potential* for activity and affirmation; it brings to light the necessarily failed product of a human existence but can seemingly foresee the potential for a new kind of life, an inhuman life.

Hence, Tiresias is indeed “throbbing between two lives.” On one hand, he remains in the reactive world. On the other hand, he seems capable of envisioning an active life full of affirmation, a life which affirms the difference *of* and the difference *in* becoming.

However, cursed as he is with the gift of foresight, the gift which allows him to “know them all already,” he remains chained to the belief of a higher unity to be achieved by “the herd” - he remains a proponent of Being rather than becoming. It is his vision (or, better, his illusion of absolute vision) which dooms him to reaction and returns him to the dialectical circle of a reactive life. In fact, an “vision” of an active and affirmative life makes it but another artifact of the dialectic, appropriates and diverts this life from its potential. Like all higher (wo)men, Tiresias (necessarily?) forgets this *a priori* problem of human life; he constantly betrays the original difference which ought to provide the impetus for affirmation to opposition and reappropriation; he succeeds in returning the active life to the reactive herd.

This is why he must continually remind himself of his own vision - his frequent cries that he is the prophet, the one who “knows them all already” is a mechanism for supporting the fiction of his prophetic vision. After all, he must support the illusion, must continually reassert “the image in which the reactive man represents himself as ‘higher’, and, better still, deifies himself”(Deleuze 164):

I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs

Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest -

...



(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all  
 Enacted on this same divan or bed;  
 I who have sat by Thebes below the wall  
 And walked among the lowest of the dead.)(61-2)

Such identifications are more for his own benefit than that of any reader, much less for any of the characters to whom he bears witness, unless of course such individuals fall prey to the temptation and accept as truth the fiction Tiresias supports. In other words, these constant reminders are his own brand of "strange synthetic perfumes."

The concluding lines of this section point to one end, the dialectical end, the end of Prufrock and Phlebas: "Burning burning burning burning / O Lord Thou pluckest me out / O Lord Thou pluckest"(64). Even with all the support of his illusions, even with the constant reminder that he is *the* prophet, the fiction crumbles and the only answer he can see at such points is to be painlessly and quickly removed from life. Like all dialectical creatures, Tiresias ultimately wants nothing more than to fade away passively; the rest requires too much action.

This sheds light on Eliot's position in the notes that "Tiresias . . . is the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest." In him, then, all those manifestations of higher (wo)men to which we have here attended come together and form a unified whole, a unitary fiction of absolute and absolutely reappropriated knowledge (Bergson's supreme intuition). Attending to the reactive nature of this "mere spectator", however, reveals that "the unity of the higher man is . . . a critical unity: made up entirely

of bits and pieces that the dialectic has gathered together, its unity is that of the thread tying them all together, the thread of nihilism and reaction”(Deleuze 164). It is a “critical” unity in the sense that the dialectic, the supreme triumph of reactive forces, requires one who is capable of a complete knowledge and foresight similar in nature to that possessed by Tiresias. Furthermore, this illusion of unity (illusory because it collapses difference into opposition to be overcome) is critical with regard to the desire of such unified personages as Tiresias for some final state of Being. In other words, this unity, this ability of Tiresias to unite not only the characters of the poem, but all of human existence from the “lowest of the dead” to “the nymphs [which] are departed”(61-4), betrays the active life he glimpses to reactive degradation and answers Nietzsche’s question in *Zarathustra*: “You seem to be baked from colours and scraps of paper glued together . . . But how should you be *able* to believe, you motley-spotted man - you who are paintings of all that has ever been believed?”(qtd in Deleuze 218)

Tiresias and other higher men, fictitiously elevated above the herd, are able to believe such a thing because they live in a world of fiction, a world supported and extended by their every move. In short, they are able to believe because they do not see the lies behind their position, they do not see the fact that they are but “paintings”, pictures of an illusory and reactive approach to life and their supposed liberation from such a life. Once again, because they begin with the illusion of unity - either as a source or a goal - and believe this to be true, they are able to continually support the fiction of which they are products. But even Tiresias’s firm belief in Being and his knowledge of Being is

fundamentally shaken at the conclusion of the poem.

In section V, Tiresias, having united the rest of the characters, is now ready to approach the Chapel Perilous which, he thinks, should hold the answer to which even he is blind. The hope is that Being will be found in the Chapel, that "After the torchlight red on sweaty faces / After the frosty silence in the gardens / After the agony in stony places"(66); in other words, after the fall into difference which inaugurates human existence and equates it with pain, a unified Being will be found. But when the thunder speaks, the answer it gives is profoundly and essentially different from this "abortive" and failed goal. Where Tiresias hopes to find The One, he finds nothing but difference.

The voice of the thunder is not the voice of unity which was sought, but the voice of a unity that essentially and necessarily contains multiplicity, or, better, the voices of chance and necessity, of unity and disunity *together*. DA *immediately* becomes "Datta", becomes "Dayadhvam", becomes "Damyata", becomes . . . Where Tiresias hoped to find the one word, the one thing which might make "human, all too human" culture and reasoning finally victorious in and over the world he finds difference, an immediate translation of the symbol into diverse yet related categories of meaning, and the implication is that these there translations but scratch the surface of the incredible difference which is existence, the difference which, if affirmed, holds "the peace which passeth understanding", the excessive peace of Dionysus.

Unable to tolerate this immediately differential translation of The One syllable, Tiresias immediately retreats to the comforting ground of his reactive reappropriations:

Shall I at least set my lands in order?

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down

*Poi' ascose nel foco che gli affina*

*Quando fiam uti chelidon* - O swallow swallow

*Le Prince d'Aquitaine a la tour abolie*

...

Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.(69)

Suddenly all the "fragments" which reactive people "have shored against [their] ruins" come flooding back to lend support to a depreciated life lacking affirmation. From a child's rhyme invoking the fall of human civilization to the refining fires of Purgatory, from The Chapel Perilous to *Spanish Tragedy*, the reappropriated fragments of a reactive life return to provide solace in the face of originary difference; they return Tiresias to the throes of resentment and bad conscience ("Why then Ile fit you.").

When considered from this point of view - that the only "answer" given, the only thing that returns forever, is difference - the beginning of the poem takes on its fullest meaning. There can be no doubt any longer that "April is the cruellest month"(53) because it is that time when, like the voice of thunder at the end, difference returns to the fore. After that time when "winter kept us warm, covering / Earth in forgetful snow"(53) feeding the little, reactive life with all its intoxicating illusions, at the time when our reactive illusions are revealed for what they are, difference again problematizes any comforting sense of Being we may have once possessed; it forces us to remember our

future-oriented promise and disallows our contentedness with the reactive life.

The fact that April inaugurates spring and offers the potential for an active, affirmative renewal is the point fundamentally missed by reactive humanity which immediately turns spring into painful summer:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
 Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,  
 You cannot say, or guess, for you know only  
 a heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
 And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
 And the dry stone no sound of water.(53)

Difference, in other words, is so cruel simply because humankind cannot bear very much of it and must therefore always turn difference into something blameworthy or an opposition to be overcome. Hence, they shall find no relief in affirmation because affirmation means affirming *a priori* difference rather than negation; it means the ability to welcome the eternal return of becoming rather than counting on the eventual return of Being.

This reveals why so much of the bait held out to ever higher (wo)men to actually re-act their reactions to the world is missed in the poem. Birds, for example, are a constant presence in the poem, but their song is always diluted in the mad dialectical game. Belladonna is unable to attend to this possibility and misses the “Jug Jug’ to dirty ears”(56) which is an affirmation of life that “still the world [human, all too human]

pursues.” Likewise, Phlebas forgets “the cry of gulls” and Tiresias himself fails to hear both the hermit-thrush and the “Co co rico co co rico” of the cock in his mad dash to discover Being in The Chapel Perilous.

Bird songs will occupy a major place in *Four Quartets*, Eliot’s attempt to articulate what the conditions for an active and affirmative life might be. In *The Waste Land*, however, these birds serve as reminders to humanity that their approach to life is entirely reactive. It is there to remind even the best of men that they too must be overcome if there is to be any hope of the renewal promised by the episode in section V, a renewal which finds a voice in *Four Quartets*.

### AFFIRMATION SEARCHES FOR ITS PRINCIPLE(S)

The principle lessons of the eternal return are that only difference returns and that this return of *a priori* difference is the *only* being of becoming. In attending to these lessons, Nietzsche will say that only active forces return, only affirmation of essential difference returns, only affirmation has being. This is to say that those who find the eternal return intolerable do so because they only interpret it from the standpoint of reactive forces and a will to negation consequently rendering the eternal return as a fictional (reactive forces always triumph via fictions) return of the same dialectical cycles, a return of Being purged of essential becoming, a return of unity without multiplicity or chance. When, in contrast, the eternal return is interpreted from the position of affirmation - when becoming returns to its proper place as the essential quality of existence, when multiplicity and unity, chance and necessity, are considered in terms of an eternally recurring struggle - it becomes not only tolerable but something to be celebrated, something to which *all* actions must be *joyfully* submitted<sup>6</sup>. This submission comes in the form of a future-oriented promise, a giving over to an unidentifiable futurity which returns the necessity of the promise within the chances of becoming.

Bergson, like Prufrock, did not know *how* to promise, how to account for the necessarily open nature of the promise, but rather established a terminal point (a calculable

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"The negative as the lowest degree of power, the reactive as the lowest degree of force, do not return because they are the opposite of becoming and only becoming has being"(Deleuze xii).

futurity as opposed to the radical openness of the future-oriented promise) in the dialectical cycle, a point where any individual's essential ego is capable of complete intuition of duration and thus complete recollection of the fragments of an intellectual existence. This calculated futurity - grounded in a faith in essential qualities, a faith in Being over becoming - represents the final refuge of a wholly reactive existence, the supreme resting place of the self-dialectic. This sense of a foreseeable response to promising is, more specifically, the reactive method of circumventing the necessity of the future-oriented promise in hopes of closing the future of the promise in the calculated and unified end of the dialectic.

Most modernists, despite being so vehemently opposed to realistic representations of life, eventually retreated to this notion of a stable point amidst the chaos - a hoped for answer to their reactive promise. They shared, for instance, the realist's belief in something essential within existence, something calculable and therefore communicable to all humanity (consider here Eliot's impersonal theory of poetry which he later described as a "bluff"). Despite their frequent attacks on representation presupposing a 1:1 relationship between signifier and signified, they too felt that essentialities were communicable. In other words, they remained attached to so-called factual notions which held that certain qualities, while they may be highly personal, were shared by all and could thus be communicated to all. They held themselves up as free thinkers, as individuals capable of overcoming a rational faith in realism, as poets capable of returning the really real to artistic creation, but either allowed the value of this creation to remain squarely in the realm of Being or forced it into the service of their own unifying structures. Quite simply,



their position was that realists “got it wrong” and they were there to set things right, costing nothing less than their self-betrayal to the negativity and reactive nature of dialectical processes; they did not know how to promise to an open-ended futurity beyond their speculations (radically and essentially open) but counted on a futurity which they could calculate and foresee.

Eliot also made frequent attempts to foresee the essential nature of life and even went so far as to suggest that something must be done to protect this nature from the attacks of a civilization tending toward entropy. What separated him from his contemporaries was the fact that he always confronted this tendency toward entropy and sought to understand the reasons (the wills) behind this tendency in all its manifestations. Whereas most modernists only confronted this chaos in terms of locating the thread leading outward from existence - the promise answered by Being - Eliot gradually confronted the chaos itself and constantly attempted to interpret not only the symptoms of this chaos but also the various methods deployed by reactive creatures to explain this chaos away, the efforts of someone like Pound to impose a unifying structure on the chaos without adequately confronting the chaos itself or the efforts of a Bergsonian to promise only to a dialectically calculated Being.

Such a combative stance is what makes Eliot more Nietzschean, more post-modern, than many of his modernist cohorts, and it rests fundamentally on an effort to account for the eternal return on its own terms (affirmative as opposed to negative terms) and attend to its lessons. This effort begins with thinking from the standpoint of

becoming, the blind spot of the modernist movement<sup>7</sup>. Whereas his early poetry presents the various consequences of proceeding from such blindness, *Four Quartets* is perhaps his most direct attempt to confront the blind spot itself, the aporia of the modernist ethos, and is thus an effort to articulate affirmation over negation, an effort to confront the qualities of affirmation as a positive response and necessary condition of the eternal return, an effort to submit himself and his work to this very return and the eternally returning necessity of the future-oriented promise, an effort to base his action in the world on a will to affirm rather than a will to negate.

This effort begins where Nietzsche's began - with Heraclitus - who, according to Nietzsche, was the only philosopher to adequately express the primacy of becoming over being. The epigraph is, once again, particularly telling in this light: "Although the Law of Reason is common, the majority of people live as though they had an understanding of their own." and "The way upward and downward are one and the same."<sup>8</sup> The second Heraclitean fragment quite simply calls attention to difference over opposition and contradiction, for it is only under the banner of the latter that upward and downward are deemed as essentially opposed to one another. Additionally, this fragment looks forward to the essential interrelationship between negation and affirmation. The first fragment holds important implications for the eternal return which must be held in abeyance as their fullest meaning will only be articulated via the progression of the *Quartets*. At this point,

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Nietzsche will assert that this is, in fact, the blind spot of philosophy, the aporia of human history in general.

<sup>8</sup>These translations were taken from George Williamson's *A Reader's Guide to T.S. Eliot*.

suffice it to say that the Law of which Heraclitus speaks is the Law of becoming (the Law of the promise), the Law of being as such. A faith only in Being, a belief that the promise will be finally answered and unity achieved, blinds individuals to this Law of becoming and the necessarily future-oriented quality of the promise (such is the profound blindness of Tiresias in *The Waste Land*, the very blindness Eliot seeks to overcome in *Four Quartets*). But because everything becomes, the law of becoming provides the only enduring unity of existence, the only active way of considering the differential nature of human life.

The beginning of *Burnt Norton* continues this theme in language similar to Nietzsche's discussion regarding why Being is fundamentally impossible in the sense we would hope, a discussion introducing the difficulties of time which become a central theme of the poems:

The infinity of past time means that becoming cannot have started to become, that it is not something that has become. But not being something that has become it cannot be a becoming something. Not having become, it would already be what it is becoming - if it were becoming something . . . [Furthermore], the passing moment could never pass if it were not already past and yet to come - at the same time as being present. If the present did not pass of its own accord, if it had to wait for a new present in order to become past, the past in general would never be constituted in time, and this particular present would not pass. We cannot wait, the moment must be simultaneously present and past, present and yet to come, in order for it to pass (and pass for the sake of other moments). The present must coexist with itself as past and yet to come. (Deleuze 47-48)

In other words, if becoming had an end, if a repetition of dice-throws could finally produce the essential being of existence, if Being were attainable at all, then it would already have been achieved and there would thus be no point whatsoever in doing anything (consider Bergson's call for inaction in this context). Additionally, present

moments establish this necessary infinity of becoming in the sense that every moment contains not only its own capacity for being past but also its own futurity which means that no moment, no experience of presence, is fully itself but rather both present and absent (both here and there, both plentiful and vacant) from the start - *every* moment becomes.

This is what Eliot means when he asserts that "Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future, / And time future contained in time past. . . / What might have been and what has been / Point to one end, which is always present"(175). Because every moment necessarily contains not only its own pastness, its own becoming-past, but also its own futurity, its own return, every moment is essential differential, every moment becomes but never is; there is truly "a lifetime burning in every moment"(189). *Four Quartets* begins with this articulation of becoming as it relates to time because only by beginning with such an assertion of becoming over being, only through a sense of time which presupposes "Not the intense moment / Isolated, with no before and after"(189), can difference itself (as the generic quality of all there is) be affirmed; this primacy of becoming thus permeates the poems.

For this reason time is (re)doubled in the *Quartets*. Throughout there is both a time-of- being and time-of-becoming, a time where differences are collapsed (perhaps according to succession or evolution - the great dialectical salvation) and a time where difference is celebrated and affirmed. Both times exist in the world, but because the negative reigns, because the will to nothingness is all that is really known about the will to power, it is the former which dominates human understanding. This sense of time, for

Eliot, is the time-sense to be conquered, the time to be aggressively attacked from the standpoint of the latter time, and much of the poems focus on the *struggle* between these time-senses.

A symbolic distinction is established between the differing (not opposed) senses of time in the opening section of *The Dry Salvages* wherein the river represents the time-of-becoming and the ocean the time-of-being. The description of rivers opens by exploring the fate of a time-of-becoming in this "twittering", reactive world:

I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river  
 Is a strong brown god - sullen, untamed and intractable,  
 Patient to some degree, at first recognised as a frontier;  
 Useful, untrustworthy, as a conveyor of commerce;  
 Then only a problem confronting the builder of bridges.  
 The problem once solved, the brown god is almost forgotten  
 By the dwellers in cities - ever, however, implacable,  
 Keeping its seasons and rages, destroyer, reminder  
 Of what men choose to forget.(191)

The time-of-being only sees becoming as something to be conquered, something over which a bridge might be built if only the proper materials are present (for Bergson, one such material was intellectual passivity). But this time-of-becoming, though often forgotten and repeatedly undermined, remains implacable, forever resistant to the efforts of Being to surmount its destructive movements, forever (like the necessity of the promise) haunting the dialectic from within.

The ocean thus relates to the time-sense of Being which privileges the unity of temporal development by understanding the eternal return as the endless recurrence of the same cycle of time. Hence, this sea-time represents various mechanisms which lend support to the reactive life and negative wills. Re-turning to the distinction between conscious and unconscious systems, for instance, the sea serves a function similar to that of the Judaic priest: "It tosses up our losses, the torn seine, / The shattered lobsterpot, the broken oar / And the gear of foreign dead men"(191-2). In other words, sea-time, the time-of-being, lends support to all those manifestations of the ugliest reactive forces - resentment, bad conscience, and passivity - and collapses becoming into so many discrete entities continually tossed up by the movements of the tides, the ebb and flow of time measured as evolutionary succession. Being, that great cornerstone of the dialectic and reactive life, relies on this "time of chronometers" and this is precisely the reason Eliot is compelled - by the promise - to (re)introduce the forgotten sense of a time-of-becoming.

Like "Prufrock" and *The Waste Land* before it, section II of *The Dry Salvages* presents consequences of holding rigidly to this ocean sense of time and the subsequent mood this time-sense engenders. In such time there is "no end of it, the soundless wailing, / The silent withering of autumn flowers"(193), but only the continual repetition of loss or pain experienced tossed up once again, only the continual effort to "leap over" becoming and difference. In this situation, there is of course "no end, but addition: the trailing / Consequences of further days and hours"(193), the constant taking on of reactive and negative burdens, the constant effort to build a bridge over becoming. Thus, "we have to think of them [reactive creatures] as forever bailing"(193), forever resisting difference and

becoming, forever attempting to relieve their ships of Being of the constant flood of difference, forever seeking a concrete and calculable response to the promise. And what is the illusory end of this process? It is the end of Prufrock and Phlebas, the desire for a passive extinction; this is why the prayer offered in *The Dry Salvages* is a prayer for those who refuse to take responsibility for their wholly reactive approach to life.

This distinction between time the preserver and time the destroyer (as is the case with any provisional division of related concepts) is only functional; neither can be expunged from the world but both must be seen as being involved in an interdependent relationship. The mistake of ocean time was to divorce its sense of unity from the multiplicity of rivers which form it while holding only to river time forgets the unity which this multiplicity engenders and supports - the being of becoming. More importantly, privileging only one time-sense forgets the constant struggle (supported by the promise) between them. Therefore, time is always a double time, and it would be a mistake to consider the two time-senses separately without accounting for their necessary relationship and respective functionality. Such is the nature of the double (also the nature of the necessary promise) in relation to difference; it indicates that no sense of time (no sense, in fact, of anything) is complete unto itself but always includes, at the very least, its forgotten and sublimated double (the promise of a destination (re)doubled in the promise of an open futurity). Affirmation of *this* life thus always involves the issue of the double.

Affirmation itself is not only double on the side of "yes", but also and equally importantly, on the side of "no." Affirmation therefore requires two no's: the no which refuses the negative will - the no of "the man who wants to be overcome"- and the no

which refuses all values and value-positing, all senses of Being based on this negative will:

In the man who wants to perish, the man who wants to be overcome, negation changes sense, it becomes a power of affirming, a preliminary condition of the development of the affirmative, a premonitory sign and a zealous servant of affirmation as such . . . In the man who wants to perish, the negative announces the superhuman, but only affirmation produces what the negative announces . . . Sovereign affirmation is inseparable from the destruction of all known values. (Deleuze 176)

These negations should not be confused with negations basing themselves on reactive forces and the will to nothingness; the man who wants to be overcome *is not* the man who wants to fade away passively like Prufrock or Phlebas, not the man who, like Tiresias, wants to be “plucked out”, but the man who takes responsibility for his reactive forces and thus wishes to overcome himself and specifically his blindness in the service of affirmation and a becoming-active. Likewise, the destruction of values is not simply nihilism inaugurating the reign of human subjectivism, but the destruction of *all* values supported by negative and negating forces and the evaluation of the will(s) behind these values. Both negations occur directly in *Four Quartets*.

Eliot’s pervasive humility throughout the poems testifies to his desire specifically and the general necessity to be overcome, his constant taking of responsibility (an active taking as opposed to the passive acceptance of burdens) without falling down the slippery slope of guilt<sup>9</sup>; humility is, quite simply, responsible without being guilty. When Eliot asserts in *East Coker* that he does not wish to hear about the achievements of past masters

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9

This active sense of humility represents yet another turning point between modernism and post-modernism, the acknowledgment of the artist’s own implication in the game of difference, the dice-throws of life. Eliot’s humility is unique among modernists in precisely this way.



“but rather of their folly, / Their fear of fear and frenzy, their fear of possession, / Of belonging to another, or to others, or to God.”(185), he does not mean that they lack the ability to believe in the absolute, but more specifically that they cannot tolerate essential difference, the very idea that the world - life itself - is nothing but becoming, nothing but a continual surrender to something other, nothing but a promise. The “wisdom of old men” is a false wisdom, a fictional wisdom, for Eliot since it is a wisdom based only on reactive forces and their triumph, based only on efforts to depreciate *this* life - efforts to depreciate multiplicity in favor of unity - rather than on a celebration or affirmation of this essential condition. It is the wisdom of men who consistently refuse to be

In the middle of the way, not only in the middle of the way

But all the way, in a dark wood, in a bramble,

On the edge of a grimpen, where there is no secure foothold,

And menaced by monsters, fancy lights,

Risking enchantment.(185)

The one who wants to be overcome is willing to relinquish an attachment to Being and unifying structures, willing to be all the way in the middle “between un-being and being”, willing to promise only to a future without a foreseeable destination. As opposed to those who hope for a passive extinction, the one who wants to be overcome makes no effort to depreciate life’s becoming in favor of a calculable or hoped for state of rest: “that the universe has no purpose, that it has no end to hope for any more than it has causes to be known - this is the certainty necessary to play well”(Deleuze 27), the certainty of one who wants to be overcome and does not want to “leap” over this world in hopes of reaching

another, the certainty that "humility is endless."

A fundamental component of this endless humility is an acknowledgment and celebration, a joyous giving over to the unknown. This brings the will to power and the fullest sense of promising into play and helps to establish the necessary shift in thinking required for an approach to its fundamental character: "the ratio in terms of which the will to power is known is not the ratio in terms of which it exists . . . We will only think the will to power as it is, we will only think it as having being, if we use the ratio for knowing as a quality which passes into its opposite and find in this opposite the ratio for being unknown"(Deleuze 175). The will to power is the plastic, differential origin supporting *all* forces in the world. When this will is interpreted according to the fictional "wisdom of old men", it ceases being a plastic principle and the will to negation becomes its only power, supporting the deceit of reactive individuals. That is to say that the only knowledge available regarding this will is its manifestation as the will to nothingness. Hence, only when this autonomy is denied to the negative will, only when negation is pressed into the service of affirmation, does it pass into the ratio for being unknown; only when an assertion that the knowledge we have of the will to power is not a complete knowledge, only when the differential nature of the will to power is affirmed does that plastic principle enter the world as it truly is: both negation and affirmation, negation in the service of a will to affirm.

Eliot, in addressing the implications of promising, confronts this capacity for being unknown throughout the *Quartets*. From the outset he admits that his disturbance of the world as understood and represented by reactive creatures has an unidentifiable purpose;

he foregrounds the fact that he does not even know the purpose of negation as such; he submits his negation(s) to the futurity of the eternal return, submits the promise to the future: "My words echo / Thus, in your mind. / But to what purpose / Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves / I do not know"(175). To know the purpose would be to deny the plastic relationship between forces, the differential principle of the will to power; to know the purpose of difference and becoming, to know what negation and affirmation finally and absolutely mean, would be to calculate the end of life itself and thus betray this plastic relationship once again to a negative will bent on Being, to a promise of resolution. This is precisely why the constant struggle (like that of Sosostris) is so vitally important, why "for us there is only the trying"(189), only the promise open to an unidentifiable futurity. Throughout the poems there is a great deal of attention payed to the speaker's ignorance as regards both his attempt to affirm and his need to negate ("The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery . . . I can only say, *there* we have been: but I cannot say where"(176-7)), an ignorance pressed into the service of affirming life, a (re)assertion of the unknown destination of the promise.

When both negation and affirmation pass into the ratio for being unknown as opposed to being chained by the drive to know, negation is pressed into the service of affirmation; the autonomy of negation is denied and a radical negation of all values (the "second" no) ensues. This radical negation - always in the service of a will to affirm - is the moment at which all existing values which rest on negation are called to testify as to the will(s) behind them. In fact, a critique of values is only a radical and full critique if these wills and the limitations they impose on the promise are called into question; as long

as values are questioned without penetrating to these wills, values may change but the will to nothingness remains predominant; real transvaluation remains an impossibility.

Much of Eliot's early poetry focuses entirely and reactive forces and the values finding their support within the movement and triumph of these forces. In section III of *East Coker* he explores the will(s) behind this triumph:

O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark,  
 The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant,  
 The captains, merchant bankers, eminent men of letters,  
 The generous patrons of art, the statesmen and the rulers,  
 Distinguished civil servants, chairmen of many committees,  
 Industrial lords and petty contractors, all go into the dark(185-6)

The dark here is the dark of the great nihilistic void - the vacancy without plenitude of the reactive life - to which even the best individuals betray humanity, the darkness at the end of a wholly reactive life where nothing is left but passive fading away into darkness: "the silent funeral" when their calculated promise goes unanswered. The list Eliot offers of these "betrayers" focuses on individuals who have done excellently with their reactive approach to the materials of this world (not at all unlike Belladonna), those "slaves" who have made their living on the backs of other slaves. But despite their status as "higher" they too go into the dark to which they betray others. It is in this sense that Eliot begins to question not only the reactive forces which support the negative, but the very wills behind this support and he further suggests the means and consequences of this support:

Had they deceived us,

Or deceived themselves, the quiet voiced elders,

Bequeathing us merely a receipt for deceit?

The serenity only a deliberate hebetude,

The wisdom only the knowledge of dead secrets

Useless into the darkness into which they peered

Or from which they turned their eyes.(184-5)

The reactive life and those who gain the most from its triumph are supported by fictions (the fictional reversal of repression or the fiction of an essential self-hood, for example) and deception is thus the primary quality of these reactive forces.<sup>10</sup> Such is the nature of the deliberate obtuseness of these supposedly eminent individuals, the willful blindness towards difference and becoming which they propagate, the faith in unified Being which they bequeath humanity. The serenity of a passive extinction results from this deliberate diversion of the gaze, this deliberate fictionalizing of the human condition. This is what makes their gaze particularly useless (hence "the fittest for renunciation"), not only in terms of peering into the true nature of nihilism, but more profoundly in peering into a new sense of darkness celebrated by Eliot - the darkness of becoming, the darkness of the in-between to which the promise calls.

All thus go into a dark very different from the dark Eliot goes on to discuss following this list of even the best reactive men; their darkness is the darkness where no "motive of action" is to be found, the abyss of nihilism into which reactive forces drag the

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This fact is what allows Nietzsche to say that "truth is a mobile army of metaphors" ("Truth" 508).

whole of life. In contrast, Eliot offers a new, affirmative sense of darkness, the darkness of essential difference which can be so liberating. It is the darkness of the in-between time, the experience of being all the way in the middle, the experience of darkness "as, in a theatre, / [when] The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed / With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of dark- / ness on darkness." This is the moment of anticipation, the real moment of "throbbing between two lives." On one hand, there is the reactive life and all its negative and negating principles. On the other hand, there is the active, affirmative life which revels in the play of existence. On a still deeper level, there is the constant throbbing of becoming, the constant sense that life is always, playfully in the making, and only an experience - a willingness that is the willingness of the future-oriented promise - of existing *all the way* in this darkness, all the way in difference, all the way between "being and un-being", can provide the grounds for an affirmative and active response to life; only then can the "hidden laughter" of Dionysus be heard. Still, Eliot's experience of this darkness of the in-between can also be considered within the context of turning away from a reactive life bent on negation and toward an active life springing from joyous affirmation of *all that is becoming*, a turning away from modernism and toward post-modernism.

Once again, however, this turn requires radical negation to be effective, and Eliot does not stop at simply calling the best reactive individuals to testify to their support of the negative will to nothingness and the constant deceit which follows from this. Throughout the *Quartets*, he continues the negation of the values supported by these individuals as well as the negation of their limited understanding of the promise. Time as evolutionary

succession, a fundamental value of the reactive life, for example, continues to be a target:

“the enchainment of past and future / Woven in the weakness of the changing body, /  
Protects mankind from heaven and damnation / Which flesh cannot endure”(178).

Furthermore, the value of foresight and insight, the valued ability to divine the future which conferred special privileges to Tiresias - even in his profound blindness - the notion that the ultimate conclusion of human existence might be calculated and thus promised to us, is thoroughly negated in section V of *The Dry Salvages*.

To value, for instance, the ability “to explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams” is to value scientific exploration in the hope that these efforts will finally produce the final dicethrow and thus return us to Being. But Eliot clearly emphasizes that to place all value in these human capabilities - those “fittest” for negation - results in passive acceptance of their conclusions without questioning the will(s) of the source: “all these are / Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press: / And all will always be, some of them especially / When there is distress of nations and perplexity”(198). Thus it is that valuing human foresight and scientific insight serves, at its worst, to anaesthetize individuals and “lull” them into self-forgetfulness of the necessary promise to act, the promise to affirm, the promise to continue the struggle. At its best, this type of valuation can only confer a certain serenity (highly provisional and certainly illusory) in the times of greatest crisis - the belief that, according to the calculated promise, there will be an eventual resolution. But because such valuation occurs only under the auspices of “shabby equipment always deteriorating”(189), it is never to be trusted and must therefore be called into question consistently and actively; it must be aggressively attacked. Eliot does not shirk from this

responsibility, and, in this way, pushes the second no into the service of an affirmation of life without a need to explain its movement in terms of human salvation; it is in this way that the autonomy of negation is denied in the sense that the negation of values and their supporting wills highlights the existence of another force in interrelationship with the negative.

This radical negation should always follow affirmation which is itself also double, the double of a reflection:

Affirmation is posited for the first time as multiplicity, becoming and chance. For multiplicity is the difference of one thing from another, becoming is difference from self and chance is difference "between all" or distributive difference. Affirmation is then divided in two, difference is reflected in the affirmation of affirmation: the moment of reflection where a second affirmation takes the first as its object . . . In this way affirmation is redoubled: as object of the second affirmation it is affirmation itself affirmed, redoubled affirmation, difference raised to its highest power.(Deleuze 189)

This redoubled affirmation is the movement of the eternal return. On one hand, there is the affirmation of difference itself, the affirmation of becoming as such. On the other hand, there is the necessary yes of the promise, the continual submission of *every* action to the unidentifiable, incalculable becoming of futurity. This promising *yea* takes place whenever there is an action, and it both presupposes and supports the affirmation of difference and becoming. Because, however, every action tends towards being, because acting means the collapsing of differences into an identifiable action or motive for action, the necessity of attending to the promise returns. Moreover, affirmation of only difference forgets the necessity of representation, that every action makes use of unifying structures within difference and thus collapses this difference in the service of that unity; affirmation



only of unity forgets that the unifying structures themselves break down - "will not stay in place" - and eternally return becoming to our efforts (the problem of misinterpretation is a perfect example of this eternal return of difference as well as the eternal return of the representational necessity which eternally returns us to the struggle of the game). Every action thus originates from the unavoidable return of the promise, the unavoidable return of unity and unifying structures, and the unavoidable return of chance within this unity, the unavoidable breakdown of unifying systems. The labor of the dialectic, basing itself on negation, is an effort to circumvent this movement of the eternal return, an effort "riddle the inevitable", either by establishing a unity to be achieved or by making a promise of eventual salvation from chance ("I have known them all already").

Eliot's "intolerable wrestle with words and meanings" throughout not only the *Quartets* but his entire poetic and critical career thus represents a turning away from this negative philosophy towards a more noble relationship to the eternal return, an effort to understand how to promise. Section V of *Burnt Norton* brings this struggle to light:

Words, after speech, reach

Into the silence.

...

And all is always now. Words strain,

Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,

Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,

Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,

Will not stay still. Shrieking voices

Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,  
 Always assail them. The Word in the desert  
 Is most attacked by voices of temptation,  
 The crying shadow in the funeral dance,  
 The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera.(180)

From the very beginning, words are seen as reaching into the future, the unsettling silence of always waiting for a response that may never come, or if it does, will only come in the form of an eternally returning necessity to promise. Furthermore, the ensuing discussion of words both highlights and celebrates their essential difference, the essential fact that meaning will never be completely established or calculated in the end. The very nature of the description - language as tending toward representational unity that will never be finally unified once and for all - and the fact that what follows is a discussion of various means utilized to deny this differential relationship and calculate the promise according to Being, indicates that Eliot is not here to ultimately "leap over" the game of language into some stabilizing pattern but rather to play and dance within the game of language itself. This celebration of *a priori* difference within the unity of language thus continues as a predominant theme throughout *Four Quartets*. The simple fact that words "will not stay still" is enough to bring the entire movement of the eternal return into play in Eliot's (or anyone's) relationship to the world, the eternal return of "a raid on the inarticulate"(189).

This sense of language as an inauguration and celebration of the eternal return has many enemies - many wills resistant to it - perhaps the most appealing of which is the "disconsolate chimera", that amalgamation of "all that has ever been believed" supported

by the unhappy consciousness of the dialectic. Additionally, notions of language held by those “shrieking voices” calling for a complete mimetic relationship between signifier and signified tempt language with meaning, with a sense that “the mobile army of metaphors” we all traffic in are indeed the whole truth of existence.

To settle on these illusory truths, however, is only to affirm the presence of a unifying structure even if that structure has yet to be perfected. This affirmation quickly becomes the ass’s yes to a wholly constructed real, an affirmation to be rigorously avoided. This is why the subsequent discussion of the imprecision of language brings into play the whole movement of the capacity for being unknown considered from under the pervasive desire for knowing. The fact that “words strain, crack and sometimes break” is the fact of becoming, the necessary difference within even the supremely unifying structures of language. This is Eliot’s celebration of the ultimately liberating difference at the origin of language, a celebration that, like the negations of values and reactive value positors, continues throughout the poems and ends with “the complete consort dancing together” - both the chance of language and its tendency toward unification and stability dancing together - and this is why “every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning”, a provisional and conditional end calling out for the further inauguration of the promise.

Saying yes to difference and saying yes to the promise are always necessary in this movement of affirmation. The promise itself is unavoidable, as every action, every utterance, is an act of giving over to this promise to an incalculable futurity. Once again, negative will(s) do not understand the promise in this way and this is why their project -

the human emancipation project in general - is doomed to nothingness from the start. Such a view of the promise hopes for a final resolution to the problems of language and life, a final structure governing all (consider the mythical method in this context). In contrast, an affirmative view of the promise proceeds with the "certainty necessary to play well", the certainty that unity is always provisional, always functional, and the only destiny that awaits humanity is the promise having no final destination: "for us there is only the trying [only the playing], the rest is not our business"(189).

The metaphor of the still point performs a drawing together and openness to promising similar to what occurs with every action and thus presents the most direct statement of the eternal return in the *Quartets*:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor  
fleshless;

Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance  
is,

But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from  
nor towards,

Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still  
point,

There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.

I can only say, *there* we have been: but I cannot say where.

And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time.(177)

This is a submission to the eternal return in the sense that it provides a unifying principle for becoming and attempts to collapse its differential structure into a single conceptual framework (the eternal return of unity, of representational necessity), but remains forever open to an undecideable and incalculable futurity (the eternal return of becoming, of multiplicity and chance). No concrete definition of the still point is given, but *all* definition is held in abeyance in a giving over to a future which neither the still point itself nor Eliot can foresee (the eternal return of the promise). This was precisely the way Nietzsche used the aphorism, a statement always waiting for a future (an other) to decide its interpretive fate, always asking others to repeat the endless process (the game, the struggle) of hermeneutics. This is why Eliot can only discuss what the still point is not, for to establish what it is, once and for all, would be to deny the futurity, the darkness of the in-between to which it calls. In other words, characterizing what the still point *is* means closing-off its own becoming, its own futurity which would betray it once again to a wholly reactive perception.

Eliot is clear on only one point regarding what does exist at the still point: the dance. Within the radical difference established by the negative description, there is the dance of the eternal return, the dance which is the game of life. It is a dance where becoming and being, unity and multiplicity, chance and necessity waltz together in the darkness of the in-between. In short, the dance is the dicethrow of the eternal return, the willing surrender of a good player to an unforeseeable futurity. The moment of the dance is the moment when action is thrown into the future and the moment of the fatal number which returns the player to the game. In this sense, the initial throw is the yes of the

promise, the yes to difference and becoming together with the resounding no's to reaction, and the fatal number is the return of the necessity of the promise, the unity of representational necessity, and the being of becoming. Because Eliot makes a concerted effort to overcome the pervasive blindness of the reactive life and the will to nothingness, he joyfully submits himself and all that he has ever created (consider the submission of *The Waste Land* opening section II of *East Coker*) to this game, and this is why for him (and for us) there is only the game, only the constant effort to play the game well by attending to its lessons as well as the fullest nature of a future-oriented promising, only the joy in an endless giving over such that "the pattern is new in every moment / And every moment is a new and shocking / Valuation of all we have been"(185).

\* \* \*

*That was a way of putting it - not very satisfactory:  
A periphrastic study in a worn-out . . . fashion,  
Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle  
With words and meanings.*

-Eliot

Eliot's playful submission to the eternal return is precisely what constitutes him as transitional between modernism and post-modernism. Most of his contemporaries made an effort to calculate the movement of the eternal return and place bets on the outcome of the game (Pound and Bergson are perhaps the most glaring examples of this tendency) but Eliot made the decision to throw the dice with hands unburdened by this desire. In this

way, he relinquished his yearning for a final sense of unity and actively sought to be overcome in an affirmation of *this* life.

This sense of giving over to an incalculable future is all a human can do, for only Dionysus, only the marriage of Dionysus and Ariadne can complete affirmation in principle. The supreme reflection of their union (Ariadne's thread reflected in Dionysian becoming, Dionysian difference reflected in Ariadne's thread) is the fullest being of becoming, the principle being of becoming beyond human comprehension. This is why what is so important for humanity is the timeless struggle with the eternal return, the constant effort to play the game well, the certainty of "faring forward" without a destination. It is in this way that humanity can once again perceive what the marriage of Dionysus and Ariadne *might* mean. In other words, "We had the experience but missed the meaning. / And approach to the meaning restores the experience / In a different form, beyond any meaning / We can assign to happiness"(194). It is specifically Eliot's effort to approach the meaning of the absent experience, his effort to approach the meaning of *a priori* difference in order to restore the joyous experience of difference and becoming, his consistent attempts to (re)imagine the unimagined within the modernist movement, that separates him from his contemporaries and turns him toward post-modernism.

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