(`You, madam, are the eternal humorist,
The eternal enemy of the absolute,
Giving our vagrant moods the slightest twist!
With your air indifferent and imperious
At a stroke our mad poetics to confute -'
from T.S. Eliot, "Conversation Galante")

"THE ENEMY OF THE ABSOLUTE": WOMEN IN THE EARLY POETRY OF T.S.ELIOT

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Master's Degree of English

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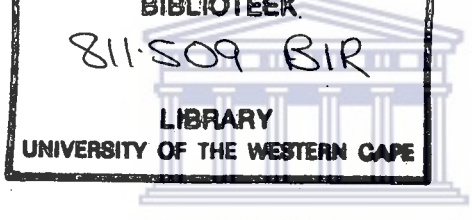

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The financial assistance of the Centre for Scientific Development (H.S.R.C., South Africa) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and the conclusions arrived at are not necessarily those of the author and are not necessarily to be contributed to the Centre for Scientific Development.

I further acknowledge the financial support of this research by the De Villiers Smuts Trust.

I would like to thank Anthony Williams and my parents, Kate and Lindsay Birch, for their help with international communications, Andrew Bank and Claire Cowie for their proofreading assistance and moral support, and particularly Chesca Long-Innes for her invaluable advice and encouragement.

INTRODUCTION

> Ah, love, let us be true
> To one another! for the world, which seems
> To lie before us like a land of dreams,
> So various, so beautiful, so new,
> Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
> Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
> And we are here as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night.
> - Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach", 1867.[1]

> Shall we lay the blame on the war? When the guns fired in August 1914, did the faces of men and women show so plain in each other's eyes that romance was killed?...But lay the blame where one will, on whom one will, the illusion which inspired Tennyson and Christina Rosetti to sing so passionately about the coming of their loves is far rarer now than then. - Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own, 1929.[2]

Mathew Arnold's 1867 poem presents romantic love as a condition of permanence that can offer refuge from a changeable world. Sixty years later, however, Virginia Woolf observes that romance has become rare as a subject of modern poetry. Her suggestion that there is an historical explanation for this change in literary subject matter is the starting point for this study of the representation of women in the early poetry of T.S. Eliot. Whereas Woolf tentatively dates the "death" of romance to the First World War I will suggest that this change in poetic sentiment is evident in Eliot's early work, some of which predates the war. In the poems under discussion, written between the years 1910 ("Portrait of a Lady" and "The Love Song of J.

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1. M. Arnold, "Dover Beach", in A.Allison, H.Barrows, C.Blake, A.Carr, A.Eastman & H.English, eds, The Norton Anthology of Poetry, 3rd edition, (U.S.A.: W.W.Norton & Co.,1983), 794.

2. V. Woolf, "A Room of One's Own" and "Three Guineas" (London: Penguin, 1993), 14.

Alfred Prufrock") and 1921 ("The Waste Land"), heterosexual love is often the stated but unattainable ambition of the male speaker. These failed sexual relations, as several critics note, are a governing metaphor in Eliot's early work, connected to other problems of social and verbal intercourse. In Andrew Ross' words, "Sexual complementarity, or rather its failure, is ... overdetermined as the privileged representation of other forms of ideological crisis".[3]

Andrew Ross has argued that the mistake of modernists is to confuse "subjectivism", or the philosophical privileging of the individual, with "subjectivity" in language. "Modernism, then,... equates a philosophical (or theoretical) attack on the epistemological and metaphysical tradition of subjectivism with a literary (or practical) attempt to dispossess or to purge poetic discourse of subjectivity tout court".[4] Modernism "fails" because it attempts, impossibly, to eliminate subjectivity in language in the effort to attack the notion of a unified self as a philosophical entity.[5] Speaking of Eliot and Pound's doctrines

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3. A.Ross, The Failure of Modernism: Symptoms of American Poetry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 59.

4. A.Ross, Failure of Modernism, xv.

5. For a related view, see M.North, The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot and Pound (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). North suggests that both left and right-wing Modernist writers are concerned to attack "liberalism" and with it, "the notion of a theoretical individual separable from the human community" (10). North argues that for these writers "history"

of "impersonality", Maud Ellmann argues that this attempted purge does not merely fail due to a philosophical confusion; the conceptual instability behind the notion of impersonality suggests that its ambiguities are ideological. Impersonality "can mean anything from the destruction to the apotheosis of the self"[6] and while both Pound and Eliot try to purge their work of "personality", they continually "smuggle" it back into their self-contradictory discourses.[7] Ellmann demonstrates that "[t]he theory of impersonality is one of the main strategies these poets use to preach a `revolution' which would turn the world full circle back to speech and time".[8] As Derrida has shown, in Western thought speech is valued because it guarantees the presence of the speaker and encourages the illusion of communication without loss. Writing, by contrast, disappropriates the subject of his words and separates the writer from the reader. Where speaking is immediate, writing is seen to embody deferral, distance and death. Filtered through the ethos of his era, for Eliot impersonality meant the restoration of traditional

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is the cure to this form of individualism, where Ross emphasises the related concept of tradition.

6. M.Ellmann, The Poetics of Impersonality: T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound (Cambridge Massachussetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), ix.

7. M.Ellmann, The Poetics of Impersonality. "As critics, both suspect that writing is an act of self-estrangement ... yet neither is willing to dethrone the author without salvaging a good deal of his former privilege" (3).

8. M. Ellmann, The Poetics of Impersonality, 14.

authority lodged in speech. Thus both Pound and Eliot "champion an oral culture in order to restore hegemony and to dispel the difference that they call `personality'".[9] The attempt to reconcile subjectivity in language with a critique of a philosophical notion of individuality, paradoxically restores the integrity and authority of the self through speech. In "The Waste Land", as Ellmann reveals, writing finds an accomplice in "femininity"; together they threaten the boundaries and integrity of the unified self.

Sexual relations figure this broader epistemological and philosophical crisis in Eliot's early poetry, as the speaker feels unable to express himself or to establish his subjectivity in language. The subject of speech, according to Emile Benveniste, is a relational entity, defined in opposition to "you", and always implying a listener.[10] The "you" in "The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock"[11] is elusive, evolving into third

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9. M.Ellmann, The Poetics of Impersonality, 13,15.

10. E.Benveniste, translated M.E. Meek, Problems in General Linguistics, (Miami: 1971). The speaking subject, or "referent" is the "individual", the actual person who participates in the discourse, whereas the "subject of speech" or "referee" functions as a signifier, the sign "I". Benveniste notes that the difference between the referent and referee is as absolute as that between "reality" and signification (218). In this essay, reference to the "speaker" or "narrator" in the poems will be refering to the "subject of speech", the linguistic instance of "I" rather than the "individual" who utters it.

11. Henceforth referred to as "Prufrock" in this essay.

persons whom the "I" does not believe will listen to him. The speaker cannot establish his subjectivity in romantic intercourse with a "you", because the women in the poem will not listen to him; they either objectify him or inhabit an exclusive world of their own, out of language altogether, in an ocean of "song". Speech, the ideal form of discourse in Eliot's critical thought, is a persistent problem for the speaker in this and other early poems, and his professed inability to express himself is seen to be caused by both the language and the bodies of women.

Women's written "speech" is presented either as a meaningless song, signifying only the seductions of sound itself, or as a rhetorical and commercial production of merely conventional meaning. Tony Pinkney observes that women in Eliot's early poetry use language in two ways. In "Hysteria", the woman's laughter exemplifies Luce Irigaray's theory that women "live a more inwards, unstable bodily relationship to writing than do men; for the latter, deeply marked as they are by the phallus as the `transcendental signifier', signs are stable and ideal entities external to the body." But, as Pinkney notes, "woman" is also "a suave rhetorician whose linguistic self-possession the poet can only envy and whose command of stylistic resource quells his own stuttering efforts at articulation". He relates this ambivalence between the libidinal language of women and their literary authority to the fact that Eliot's own mother was a

poet, and that his ambivalent precursor is not the Bloomian literary father, but his biological mother. "As the Bloomian precursor the woman incarnates an authority which she at the very same moment undermines in Irigarayan fashion ...".[12]

This ambivalent presentation of women's forms of speech is evident in the early poems. In "Prufrock", for example, the "women come and go/ Talking of Michelangelo" (13,14; 35,36) with apparent ease, while the speaker struggles to articulate his "overwhelming question" (10;94). There seems to be a direct link between his inability to express himself and his exposure to femininity; he asks "Is it perfume from a dress/That makes me so digress?" (66). Where women have an ease with (spoken) language, their bodies threaten what Pinkney would call the speakers' "phallic" relationship to language. Prufrock's words are distracted by women's bodies, and fail to become signs that are "stable and ideal entities external to the body". The women who "say" (41;44) are contrasted to the sea-girls who "sing each to

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12. T.Pinkney, Women in the Poetry of T.S.Eliot: A Psychoanalytic Approach (London: Macmillan, 1984), 24. Harold Bloom argues that Eliot's view of tradition is a conscious misinterpretation of his experience of influence. Eliot represses his true precursors of Whitman and Tennyson, because, in Oedipal fashion, he both wishes to occupy the place of the powerful "father" figure, whilst simultaneously fearing retribution from the father.
For discussions of Bloom's and Eliot's theories of influence, see, for example, S.Sultan, "Eliot and the Concept of Literary Influence", in J.Olney, ed, T.S. Eliot Essays from Southern Review (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). D.Pearce, "Repetition Compulsion and `Undoing': T.S. Eliot's `Anxiety of Influence'", Mosaic, 21,4 (1988): 45-54.

each" (126) at the end of the poem, whose words signify nothing but the bodies that speak them. The speaker's own expression is tainted by the voices in the poem. The objectifying language by which he is "formulated" (56) is echoed between himself and the women in the poem endlessly, until it is no longer clear who has initiated this violence, or what the speaker wants to say about it. Female language tends to be either libidinous or rhetorical, meaningless sound or repetitive formulation and the "I" that claims to have a male referent can no longer use a language that is characterised by this dichotomy. He feels trapped in a solipsistic world where there is no listening "you", leaving him alienated even from his own subjectivity.

The ambiguity surrounding both the bodies and the verbal production of female figures in the poem arises not only from Eliot's Oedipal ambivalence about literary authority, but is also a product of what Frederic Jameson would term the "political unconscious".[13] This concept retains the psychoanalytic distinction between the conscious and unconscious aspects of the psyche, but stresses the fantasy structures of the unconscious as formations based on the specific socio-political conditions of the individual's existence. Pinkney argues that the violence against women described in the poems, especially in the Sweeney

13. F.Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a socially symbolic act (London: Methuen, 1981).

poems where a man has to "do a girl in", is an active strategy to contain and resolve the threat posed by women; the "threat" being manifested through the speaker's psychotic fear of fragmentation and loss of identity.[14] I will suggest that the representation of gender relations in Eliot's early poetry is also an active engagement with socio-historical conditions that give rise to the speaker's perception that relations between men and women have fundamentally changed in the modern world. Where women's writing generally and "middlebrow" literature have been read in terms of these conditions, criticism of "high" modernist writing by men has tended to overlook the important historical contexts that inform representations of women in these texts.

The discussion in Part I of this thesis focussing on "Prufrock" and some of the minor poems published with it in 1917, will suggest that the speakers in these poems find their worlds fundamentally "feminised". The women who populate these poems are seen to appropriate and denigrate cultural forms. In "Portrait", for example, the lady finds the Chopin Preludes "intimate" (10), in a manner that resembles her desire for intimacy with the narrator. In "Prufrock" the women who are "Talking of Michelangelo" are simultaneously evaluating the speaker himself - "They will say: `How his hair is growing thin!'" (41). Women's aesthetic evaluations resemble their social and sexual

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14. T.Pinkney, Women in the Poetry of T.S.Eliot, 18,19.

judgements; their private desires are implicit in their descriptions of various art forms. In both poems the narrators struggle to express themselves because language itself is tainted with the private desires of these women.

The intensely personal problem of male aphasia and sexual impotence becomes universalised in "The Waste Land" through the Grail Legends. In these legends, the questing figure must be able to speak to achieve his own sexual fulfilment (he marries the bearer of the Holy Grail), which is profoundly connected to the political and spiritual health of the King and the land.[15] These legends constitute the basis of the mythical structure of the poem, which, Franco Moretti suggests, is the means by which Eliot produces "significance" in language. In his famous statement on the mythical method in the 1923 "Ulysses, Order and Myth", Eliot argues that:

> [The mythical method] is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is

15. For a discussion of the figures from the Grail legends, see G.Smith, The Waste Land (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1983), pp 88-91. Smith characterises the wounding of the Fisher King as primarily sexual, he is "wounded in the genitals by the Dolorous Stroke", and it is this wound that the quester must repair. Once he has found the Grail castle, he sits at the King's table and a procession of "youths and maidens winds through the hall, bearing the Grail, the Lance, the Sword and the Dish. It is the duty of the Quester then to demand what all these wonders mean". If he does so, "the King stands up cured, the rain falls, the Waste Land is delivered from its sterility." (90)

contemporary history.[16]

"Significance", as Moretti observes, is "a bivalent word that contains the idea of meaning, but links and subordinates it to that of `importance', `relevance' and `value'."[17] This situates Eliot in the middle of an important conceptual debate about meaning, fuelled by the work of Gottlob Frege. The debate surrounds the relationship between the grammatical certainty of meaning in language, and the randomness of the subjective significance attached to it - what Frege calls "ideas" and Max Weber calls "values". Establishing a sense of community between subjects relies on the ability to share meaning or sense, but, on the other hand, this sense in language must also reflect the private values of the speaker. The relationship between "meaning" and "value" must be neither too tight nor too loose to allow for the expression of both this subjective value and shared sense, producing "significance" in both language and contemporary life.

This division between a primarily grammatical or purely subjective meaning is inherent in women's language in the poems under discussion. Their speech takes one of two conflicting forms - that of a "valueless" rhetoric or the "meaningless" form of birdsong that signifies only the body that utters it. The

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16. T.S.Eliot, "Ulysses, Order and Myth", Dial, 75 (1923), 483.

17. F.Moretti, "From *The Waste Land* to Artificial Paradise", in F.Moretti, ed, Signs Taken for Wonders: essays in the sociology of literary forms (London: Verso, 1988), 213.

representation of the relationships between women and their language in the poems under discussion can be read to reflect Eliot's perception of the changes in social and literary space available to men and women during the first twenty years of this century.

In the major metropolises of London and Paris in the late nineteenth century, the rigid allocation of public and private spaces to men and (bourgeois) women intensified.[18] Yet from this situation in the late nineteenth-century, middle-class women in England increasingly began to enter the public spaces of the great cities; a change heralded and contested in literature possibly even before it became widespread practice. This literary representation of social change is the subject of an intriguing study of the powerful myth of the "New Woman", named and propagated in literature in the 1880s and 1890s. Anne Ardis suggests that this figure represents all social ills by virtue

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18. J.Wolff, Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture (Oxford: Polity Press, 1990). Wolff notes that in the late nineteenth century bourgeois men and women share the privatising of personality, and the withdrawal within public life. This is characterised by the anonymity of the flaneur figure, for whom the public spaces of the city are intensely private. However, simultaneously the divide between public and private spaces became sharper, and women were more confined to the latter. Men's clubs replaced coffee houses, and by the late nineteenth century women could not go alone to a cafe in Paris, or a restaurant in London.(40)

of her disruptions of Victorian taxonomies of femininity.[19] Speaking of the 1890s commentator, Elizabeth Linton, Ardis suggests that by naming this figure, Linton attempts:

> to restabilize all of the social hierarchies she sees New Women disrupting. In other words, gender is just one of the many binary oppositions she wants to preserve as she identifies the New Woman as a threat to English middle-class culture - as the social phenomenon that threatens most radically the `purity' of that cultural tradition.

The controversy over the nature and effect of the New Woman intensified over her representation in fiction. Many commentators of the time labelled this figure as more fictional than real. Thus she was seen as a "socio-literary portent of anarchy" before she was dismissed as "`merely' literary".[20]

A literary controversy over the New Woman novel thus replaced the actual figure herself as the focus. Truth claims about sexuality were a significant part of the agenda of these explicitly ideological novels, as well as that of the exponents of a "new realism". While the new realists wished to represent sexuality as it is in "nature", they did not question Victorian notions of

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19. A.Ardis, New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990). Ardis suggests that "[i]n the 1880s and early 1890s, the New Woman was implicated for all manner of `social ills' - from the falling national birthrate to `the Problems of Great Cities' and the `rise of Socialism and Nihilism'" (12).

20. A.Ardis, New Women, New Novels, 28, 13.

female sexuality.[21] By contrast, the New Woman novel's bid for authority was based precisely on their challenge to existing literary representations of women's sexuality.

The intensity of this debate gave the erroneous impression that the New Woman novels were being written by such women themselves, and also that the literary world was being rapidly taken over by women. The perception that women were writing with new authority about female experience sparked a critical reaction whereby new standards of literary value developed that delegitimized the fiction. The concern that art influences social behaviour stimulated both critics' outbursts against such novels and the production of such fiction itself.[22]

The first chapter of this thesis will suggest connections between Ardis' claims concerning the critical response to these novels and the early poetry that Eliot wrote in Paris and Harvard before the First World War, published in his collection of poetry,

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21. It is important to note that the new realists, unlike the New Woman novelists, felt under threat by the large increase in the female reading public in the late nineteenth-century. Ardis' discussion reveals that their attack on nineteenth-century realism is rooted in the raillery of writers like George Moore against the circulating libraries that made it necessary to censor novels for the benefit of the large middle-class female readership. Female readership is part of the speaker's anxiety in Eliot's poetry. A.Ardis, New Women, New Novels, 32.

22. A.Ardis, New Women, New Novels, 38, 43, 52.

Prufrock and Other Observations in 1917.[23] Women are seen to inhabit the social and literary world with great authority, while their language itself is seen as both libidinal and conventional. The sense that the women in "Prufrock" and "Portrait" are contaminating cultural forms by addressing them with the same rhetoric with which they attempt to realise their sexual and social desires, may be rooted in the perception that women's engagement with literature is indeed ideological: an attempt to express and realise their personal, sexual and political ambitions through literature.

The manner in which women speak in the poems thus figures the broader crisis of language. But they also prevent the "sexual complementarity" that would mark the resolution of this crisis. Women are disinterested in the speaker's romantic designs and disrupt the paradigms of heterosexual interactions that he wishes to realise. The romantic aspirations of the poetic speakers are often implicit in the titles of the poems: for example, the speaker's failed "Love Song" in "Prufrock", the flirtatious but cynical conversations in "Conversation Galante", "Hysteria" and "Portrait of a Lady".[24] In the Grail mythology of "The Waste Land" the marriage of the Grail bearer and the questing knight

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23. T.S.Eliot, "Prufrock and Other Observations: 1917" in T.S.Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S.Eliot (London: Faber, 1969).

24. Referred to as "Portrait" hereafter.

symbolizes his fulfilment of the quest for spiritual meaning and political order for his society. But in "The Waste Land", as in the earlier poems, the heterosexual consummation that marks this achievement never takes place.

In Part I, I suggest that "Prufrock" expresses nostalgia for a Baudelairean version of a "love song". The opening words, "Let us go, then, you and I", suggest the journey of a Baudelairean "flaneur" through the streets of the city. This figure is both an artist and a lover, whose privileged vision of the city is guaranteed by his anonymity. The city is, paradoxically, the "home" of the modern, male artist who finds his family in the shared anonymity of the crowd. Charles Baudelaire was an important influence on Eliot's philosophy and poetry. The viewing and speaking position of the "flaneur" is the subject position to which the speaker aspires, but which is unattainable because women do not adhere to the gendered access to space that characterised the nineteenth-century city of the flaneur.

Griselda Pollock's account of the Baudelairean ideal of "The Painter of Modern Life" points to a close connection between the fleeting nature of the artists's aesthetic and the rigid gender divisions that helped to preserve the anonymity of the male observer. She argues that women impressionist painters use space differently in their art, because women had restricted access to

the public spaces of the metropolis.[25] By contrast, the Baudelairean stroller, or "flaneur", could move through the bourgeois home, as well as the bars and restaurants and brothels inhabited by working-class women. Baudelaire's male observing artist takes as his subject matter the areas of a city that are defined by various types of women. As Pollock puts it, "Baudelaire's essay maps a representation of Paris as the city of women. It constructs a sexualised journey which can be correlated with impressionistic practice."[26] Painting, for Baudelaire, could be described as a kind of specular "romance", as the artist moved freely through the city spaces characterised by the presence of women of different classes, and culminating in sexual commerce with a female underworld. As Pollock's analysis implies, this account of artistic practice was sustained by the restricted access of women to the city spaces; bourgeois women and the familial networks that threaten the flaneur's anonymity were contained in the private home, and the working

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25. G.Pollock, Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art (London & New York: Routledge, 1988). Pollock notes that bourgeois women could enter selected locations in the public sphere but that "a line demarcates not the end of the public/private divide but the frontier of the spaces of femininity. Below this line lies the realm of the sexualized and commodified bodies of women, where nature is ended, where class, capital and masculine power invade and interlock. It is a line that marks off a class boundary but it reveals where new class formations of the bourgeois world restructured gender relations not only between men and women but between women of different classes." (79)

26. G.Pollock, Vision and Difference, 73.

class or underworld female figures who were to be found in public spaces were economically powerless, and silent.

In "Prufrock", the female underworld refuses this sexual commerce where he announces of the sea-girls "I do not think that they will sing to me" (127). On the other hand, the middle-class, cultured women that he encounters are not silent and available images but speaking, judging subjects, who threaten his flaneur-like anonymity with their interminable scrutiny. Women's speech, judgements and sexual ambitions challenge the speaker's anonymous placelessness, from which the flaneur could view and speak about his world. Thus they seem to cause the speakers' sense of alienation and aphasia in the early poems. Since the 1890s, as Ardis shows, women seemed rapidly to intrude as writers, subjects and consumers of literatures that reflect their self-seeking sexual and economic desires. This disrupted the Victorian and Baudelairean paradigms of feminine silence as an enabling condition for masculine vision and artistic production.

In "The Waste Land", I suggest, the male narrator's sense of alienation from society is exacerbated and the corollary problem of his inability to "speak" is figured through the Grail quest. The women who dominate the first three Parts of "The Waste Land" eventually drive Phlebas to his death by water in Part IV. This alienation can be read in terms of the radical changes in gender

relations that occurred through the first twenty years of this century, and which, according to Alison Light, accompanied a major change in national consciousness between the wars.[27] Light demonstrates that, since the Great War, women came to internalise hitherto "masculine" forms of consciousness, eschewing Victorian forms of "femininity". Women after the war years came to represent modernity itself.[28] This had an important effect on male writers, often returning from war, who developed a strong reaction against the "emasculated" domestic tone of national life, from which they felt excluded.[29] It also affected the role of literature, for the ideal of domestic life came to depend upon the idea of the "literary" which distinguished middle-class culture from "mass" forms of entertainment.[30]

These changes manifested themselves overtly in the voluntary exile that many men chose from home, a process recorded in some

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27. A.Light, Forever England: Femininity, literature and conservatism between the wars (New York: Routledge, 1991).Light argues that between the wars, "a sense of that other history, a history from inside, gained new significance, that the place of private life and what it represented became the subject of new kinds of national and public interest, and found new literary forms." (5) The overtly political changes that I am referring to are the opportunities that became available to middle class women for doing men's work during the war, and the subsequent enfranchisement of women (in 1916) and their entry into the professions (1919).

28. A.Light, Forever England, 211.

29. See A.Light, Forever England, pp. 6-8.

30. A.Light, Forever England, 12.

detail in Paul Fussell's Abroad. Many male writers sought refuge from this new sense of domestication and feminisation of England, escaping to the romantic and sensual worlds abroad. In the poems under discussion, women inhabit the modern world more confidently than male figures in the poems, and come to represent numerous pernicious aspects of modern life in "The Waste Land" - the automation of the human workforce, the decline of class and national boundaries, the decay of the great metropolises and most importantly, the loss of "significance" in language. Their complicity in modern decay is figured in the poem in the distinction between male and female death. Men's death is potentially redemptive, where women either disintegrate with the metropolis or are associated with legendary female suicide. Women are both victims of modernity and emblems of the self-inflicted social and spiritual decay inherent in modern urban life.

Male death haunts the speakers throughout the first three sections of "The Waste Land". Phlebas' predicted death and the crowds of dead men are a constant anguish of the speaker, who both wishes to resurrect the dead but also fears such rebirth. In Part V, however, men's death acquires the redemptive significance of sacrifice. "He who was living is now dead" (328), contrasts to the "in-betweeness" of life and death in earlier parts of the poem - where the speaker in the Hyacinth garden is "neither/Living nor dead" (40) and Tiresias is "throbbing between

two lives" (218). The "third" (360) who walks beside you suggests the resurrection of the dead figure in the opening lines.

The speaker's fear of death is resolved here precisely because "speech" has become possible. In the early parts of the poem the speaker-quester figure fails to "speak", that is, to ask the question that will resurrect the Fisher King. The culmination of the quest takes place in Part V, however: "Then spoke the thunder" (399, emphasis added). It is this moment that brings rain to the landscape and "significance" to language. The reconciliation between the material written word and the subjective attribution of meaning is expressed in the myth of the god Prajapati and the word "DA". The Thunder, or the God, speaks three times with the identical fragment, which is invested with a different meaning by each of his offspring: "Datta", "Dayadhvam" and "Damyata" - Give, sympathise, control. This narrative about meaning in "What the Thunder Said" is a metaphorical equivalent of Eliot's description of tradition in his 1919 essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent". For Eliot, where "the mythical method" gives significance to modern life, the concept of "tradition" produces a significant poetic language, because it shapes the talent of the individual writer. Through the writer's relationship to "tradition", he is empowered by his authoritative "ancestors", who are themselves thus

guaranteed literary "immortality".[31]

"The Waste Land" foregrounds the problem of enunciation in raising the questions "who is speaking?" and "who is listening?". Ross suggests that these questions point to a failure to establish a speaking identity in the poem. The poem's solution to the problem of identity characterises the secondary phase of modernism which posits "tradition" as a solution to enunciation in that it manufactures new voices and new forms to unify the multivocal past. "[I]n providing the spectacle of history articulating itself - ["The Waste Land"] presents a solution to the problem of identity."[32] However, this solution is only proffered in the last section of the poem, where death, speech and history are simultaneously resolved. This section of the poem, however, describes a masculine setting of a harsh frontier landscape populated by warriors, questers, sacrificial figures and gods. Female voices and female bodies are contained or abandoned. The speaker has escaped the feminised modern world for a distant frontier.

In this section of the poem, the speaking voice attains what might be described as "significance" in language. Yet this is not

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31. T.S.Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent". In F.Kermode, ed., Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot (London: Faber, 1975), 37-45, 38.

32. A.Ross, The Failure of Modernism 60, 63.

figured in terms of the symbolism of the Grail quest, where marriage signifies its success, but rather with reference to the exclusively male relations between father and son in an eastern myth. Sexual consummation has proven impossible because of the nature of modern femininity, and is abandoned as the ideal index of the significant discourse which restores the relationship between self and society.

Tiresias has been read as the unifying and structuring mythical figure in the poem. But, as North points out, his identity with all the men and women of "The Waste Land" is caused by the modern standardizing of experience. This figure thus betrays Eliot's fear of the contradictory process by which modernity both divides and forcibly integrates its members; thus the poem actually recoils from the very process that appears as the aesthetic resolution in its notes.[33] I suggest that it is not Tiresias who is presented as the "aesthetic resolution" to both the repetition and the isolation of modern life, but rather the "Thunder". This voice is also unequivocally paternal, where Tiresias is sexually ambiguous. In Part V of "The Waste Land", the sense of exclusion that the male speaker feels from the modern world becomes the precondition of redemption. The women who represent modernity, and the failure of language are abandoned in the speaker's voluntary "exile" into a mythical desert landscape, an exile

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33. M.North, The Political Aesthetic, 18.

which initiates the possibility of sacrificial death. Both the hordes of dead men in the poem, and the living but alienated male speaker are recast as central to the salvation of society precisely because of their marginal relation to a "feminised" modern existence.

The following discussions of the relationship between Eliot's poetic presentation of gender relations and actual historical changes are premissed on Frederic Jameson's description of "history". For Jameson history is not a text, but "as an absent cause it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and ... our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious."[34] The "real" is only accessible through narrative representations which themselves constitute ideological engagements with the subject's experience of reality. Jameson describes "ideology" in Althusserian terms as "a `representation' of the Imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence".[35] Ideology is more than a "map of the real", but a narrative attempt of the subject to invent a place for him/herself within a collective process which excludes him/her. Seen in this way, the narrative apparatus

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34. Jameson, Frederic, The Political Unconscious, 35.

35. F.Jameson, Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist (Berkeley: California University Press, 1979), 12.

informing ideological representations is not "false consciousness", but ways of dealing with "a Real into which the subject seeks to insert itself through praxis, all the while painfully learning the lesson of its own ideological closure and of history's resistance to the fantasy-structures in which it is itself located".[36]

Eliot's sense of the marginal status of the writer in modern society is transformed in his criticism, North has argued. The poet's "exile" from his society becomes, paradoxically, the very reason that he is indispensible to the well-being of the community: "he [Eliot] situates the poetic observer precisely where his literary criticism would have him, both in and out, a part of the whole only because he is so thoroughly individual".[37] Eliot's ideological engagement with his sense of the writer's exclusion from modern life, is replicated, I suggest, in the mythology of "The Waste Land". As the culmination of Eliot's early work, this poem is concerned not only to situate the suffering and alienated "poetic observer" as a central figure, but more specifically, to invent a place for the male poetic observer, who feels profoundly excluded from social and literary modern life, and from past forms of masculine subjectivity, expressed in particular versions of romance. Through a narrative

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36. F.Jameson, Fables of Aggression, 13.

37. M.North, The Political Aesthetic, 96.

of sacrifice, which restores "significance" in language, the masculine speaker transforms his alienation from society, expressed through his anxieties about the death, social exclusion and verbal impotence of men, into the condition of salvation for the modern world.

PART ONE:

"Prufrock" and other early poems

The opening lines of "The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock" (1917) invite the "you" on a journey that will lead "to an overwhelming question" (10). This may be a metaphysical question about the existence of God, or it may be a proposal of marriage that would be the logical end to the speaker's "love song". However, neither version of the "question" can be asked. Both romantic union and transcendent knowledge are suspended in favour of the merely social event: "Oh, do not ask `What is it'?/ Let us go and make our visit"(11,12).

Knowledge persistently eludes the speaker in the poem. He cannot know time, for though he claims to have "known them all already, known them all"(49), the "all" disintegrates into meaningless disconnected bits of days - "the evenings, mornings, afternoons" (50). The speaker finds that his own life can be quantified in this way for he has "measured" it out with "coffee spoons" (49-51). He cannot perceive the disparate objects that he "knows" as integrated wholes; time as well as people are merely mechanical amalgamations of their component parts. The speaker can only know the recurrence of these parts - "And I have known the eyes already, known them all" (55) and "I have known the arms already" (62) - but fails to synthesise these repetitious metonymic

representations into whole people.

This affects not only his relationships with the women in the poem, but his own subjectivity, for as he represents himself: "I should have been a pair of ragged claws/ Scuttling across the floors of silent seas" (73,74). The "I" in the poem, like the "claws" is disconnected from its body, scampering through the ocean of language alone.

I suggested in my introductory comments that subjectivity in language presumes a listener, a "you" in relation to which the "I" establishes itself. But in "Prufrock", the speaker's companionable "you" in the first line dissolves into multiple female third persons. These women reciprocate the dismembering violence of the speaker's language, representing him metonymically as "a bald spot" (40), and a pair of "arms and legs" (44). The relationship between the speaker and the women in the poem exemplifies the problems of social and romantic intercourse caused by their mutually objectifying and fragmenting language. He cannot "know" the integrated selves of the third persons in the poem, and thus the speaker cannot sing the love song that will establish his "I" in relation to a listening "you" in the poem. The difficulty of this speaker's sexual relations metaphorically figures a broader epistemological crisis, associated with the inability to "speak" in this and other early

poems. However, as I will argue in this discussion of Eliot's poems from Prufrock and Other Observations (1917), women in these poems are also seen to be responsible for the crisis of meaning that the speakers experience.

The epistemological failure of the "Prufrock" speaker to connect the disparate objects of his world into related entities, or indeed irreducible wholes, can be read in terms of Eliot's philosophical and critical concern with the ability to produce meaning, or, as Moretti more accurately describes it, "significance" through language. According to James Longenbach, the motivating impulse behind Eliot's poetry is the conflict that the poet feels between a desire for absolute meaning and a sense of the relativity of all knowledge[1]. Michael North suggests that the tension between part and whole in Eliot's poetry arises from the "historicist" critique levelled at naturalised liberal precepts by Eliot along with his contemporaries, Yeats and Pound; a critique which has paradoxical political implications. Eliot's historicist emphasis on context, North argues, has the ironic effect of legitimating the very present that the critics of liberalism want to change, leading to a relativism which makes it impossible to have a programme for the present. The solution is to cast "relativism" as an absolute which can lead to

1. J.Longenbach, "Guarding the Horned Gates: History and Interpretation in the early poetry of T.S. Eliot" in Journal of English Literary History, 52, 1-2, 1985, 504.

authoritarian cultural imperatives. Thus with Yeats, Pound and Eliot "what begins as a plea for difference...ends... with an atemporal standard that erases all historical difference."[2] Paul de Man argues that Modernist artists pose as a historical dilemma the conflict between relativity and the absolute, part and whole, with its important manifestation of the disjuncture between the individual and society. Modernity itself is seen by Modernists to be responsible for this separation which De Man argues is, in fact, ontological and not historical.[3] In Eliot's early poetry the speakers do experience this ontological discrepancy as an historically specific effect of "modern" life, and I will argue that one important reason for this lies in these speakers' perceptions of sexual relations.

The central importance of sexuality in Eliot's work has been noted by many critics. Edward Larissy, for example, suggests that "the myth of a fallen sexuality deriving from woman, both as the condition and cause of fallenness" is manifest in Eliot's early poetry, which already links sexual with spiritual sterility, the governing metaphor of "The Waste Land".[4] But in these poems women can also be seen to generate the

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2. M.North, The Political Aesthetic, 14.

3. M.North, The Political Aesthetic, 14.

4. E.Larissy, Reading Twentieth-Century Poetry: The Language of Gender and Objects, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 64.

epistemological crises which afflict the male speaker by depriving him of the subject position from which he would speak. In "Prufrock", for example, feminine speech as well as female bodies are directly responsible for the narrator's verbal impotence: "After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor -/And this, and so much more? - /It is impossible to say just what I mean!" (104-106). The speaker is distracted from his meaning by women; synechdochically represented by these domestic items. But he is also threatened by the language and speech of the women in the poem. These women disrupt the paradigms of a silent and contained Victorian femininity on which the speaker's viewing and speaking position relies, and which would make them available objects of the romance narrative that he is unable to enact.

In "Prufrock", as I have suggested earlier, the speaker models himself on the figure of the Baudelairean "flaneur" who could wander anonymously through the city streets. As Janet Wolff puts it, these men "share the possibility and the prospect of lone travel, of voluntary uprooting, of anonymous arrival at a new place".[5] The flaneur or stroller is an artist and a lover, and finds both his sexual and artistic pleasure in the fleeting imagery of the nineteenth-century metropolis. This Baudelairean model of masculine subjectivity rejects romance as a means to

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5. J.Wolff, Feminine Sentences, 39.

procreation and opposes itself to the social structures of the family. For Baudelaire, as Leo Bersani observes, "sterile" sexual joy is the precondition of the profundity of being[6]. This is explicit in Baudelaire's description of the "Painter of Modern Life":

> To be away from home and yet feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world and be the centre of the world and yet remain hidden from the world - such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define. The spectator is a prince and everywhere rejoices in his incognito. The lover of life makes the whole world his family. - "The Painter of Modern Life", 1863.[7]

This paradoxical character finds a "home" or family through his anonymity. As a spectator he familiarises the unfamiliar through his masterful gaze - he turns the public world of the streets and bars into his own private princedom. For Baudelaire the pleasure of being an artist/flaneur consists precisely in an escape from the tedium of family ties and social networks, and finding community with other such refugees, who become family by virtue of their shared anonymity and specular pleasure.

This deliberate recasting of the "family" of the male observer in Baudelaire's world accompanies a new form of "romance", one in which the desired object is a fleeting, sexualised and silent

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6. L.Bersani, The Culture of Redemption (Cambridge Massachussetts & London: Harvard University Press, 1990), 83.

7. C.Baudelaire, "The painter of modern life". Cited in G.Pollock, Vision and Difference, 71.

member of the crowd. Griselda Pollock's study of late nineteenth-century Parisian impressionist art shows how this encounter of male artists with a public world was an assymetrically gendered experience. Male impressionist artists, she argues, experienced the public realm in many forms, including that of sexual exchange with working class women, whereas women artists of the same period had limited experience of many public spaces. Artistic consciousness itself, Pollock convincingly demonstrates, was affected by the gendered experiences of these artists. Women impressionist artists painted differently from their male contemporaries; they did not situate a viewing eye outside of the canvas but rather tried to present the point of view of the subject of the painting. This difference in perspective was a result of the way in which women's access to city spaces was organised.[8]

Pollock's analysis corroborates Janet Wolff's discussion of the gender specificity of the flaneur figure.[9] While men and women

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8. G.Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity". In G. Pollock, Vision and Difference. Pollock observes the differential use of space and points of view in the works of women artists such as Morisot and Cassatt, where the perspective of the female protagonist of the painting organizes the point of view of the spectator (87). By contrast, works by male artists, like Manet, posit a viewing eye that is not situated within the canvas, but outside of it, and which spatially organises the painting's object (85,86). This object is often a woman who holds an ambiguous class position but is the centre of commercial and sexual exchange.

9. See J.Wolff, Feminine Sentences, 47.

shared the "privatising" of experience in the later nineteenth-century European city, the division between the public and private sharpened. The figures who came to epitomise public life - the dandy, the hero, the stranger/flaneur - were all male.[10]

There is no female equivalent to the male flaneur as public spaces become increasingly off-limits to women in the later part of the century. The narrators in "Prufrock" and "Portrait" aspire to becoming such figures, for they long to escape the tedium of social networks in a fleeting, anonymous crowd. However, the flaneur-position is under challenge. Changing social conditions altered the possibilities of male artistic consciousness at the beginning of the twentieth-century, and the demise of the flaneur is important to Eliot's artistic consciousness.

The speaking position of the male flaneur/lover/artist is dependent on two class-specific versions of female sexuality. The subjects of his gaze are non-domestic but silent and visually available women, often working-class objects of sexual exchange. But equally crucial to this figures' position is the Victorian paradigm of a contained bourgeois female sexuality; women's social networks, social conversation and reproductive female sexuality all threaten the flaneur's anonymity. In Baudelaire's description, modernity and artistic engagement with it is

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10. J.Wolff, Feminine Sentences, 41.

located in images of women who demarcate the various regions of Paris. Pollock notes that Baudelaire's chapter titled "Women and Prostitutes" charts the flaneur's journey across Paris in which "the text is itself constructing a notion of woman across a fictive map of urban spaces - the spaces of modernity"[11]. They appear fleetingly to the male observer and contrast with the middle-class women, who constitute the opposing world of private social networks. It is these bourgeois, cultured women, and their irrepressible voices that permeate Eliot's early poetry and pollute the anonymous cityscape, disrupting the silence of the cityscape and returning the flaneur's gaze.

Baudelaire's influence on Eliot's early writing has been noted by many critics. As John Soldo observes, Eliot retains his early respect for Baudelaire in his later writing: "In Baudelaire, Eliot was to find a mature moral philosophy ... Baudelaire gave Eliot, through his urban imagery, the ethical subject matter of his poetry".[12] Soldo's essay never expands on this "moral philosophy" but changes tone abruptly to a focus on Eliot's style. The precise nature of the "new experience" that Eliot finds in Baudelaire remains an absent and undescribed centre in this essay; possibly because of its sexual aspect. Eliot is

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11. G.Pollock, Vision and Difference, 72.

12. J.J.Soldo, The Tempering of T.S. Eliot (Epping: Bowker, 1983), 122.

primarily interested in Baudelaire as one of those who are "`human prototypes of new experience, and only second because they are poets'".[13] This new experience has been described by the feminist critics, Janet Wolff and Griselda Pollock. Both writers note how it conflated sexual and artistic male subjectivity and situated it in a carefully demarcated cityscape, access to which was organised by gender and class.

In "The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock", the narrator aspires to a flaneur's journey through the city; he both seeks an escape from oppressive family structures and a union with the community of anonymous men. The journey is suggested in the very first line, "Let us go, then, you and I". The "you" may be not his female lover but rather the flaneur's male co-voyeur. Eliot himself suggested that the "you" of this line was a male companion to the "Prufrock" and, as Maud Ellmann observes, this "you" puts the persons and positions of the poem in jeopardy.[14] Whether the "you" is a male co-adventurer, or the reader, this companion unites with the solipsistic narrator as "we" only in "drowning" in the last stanza. Like the Prufrock speaker himself, the "you" is as threatened by the implicitly female "human

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13. J.J.Soldo, The Tempering, 122.

14. M.Ellmann, "The Spider and the Weevil: Self and Writing in Eliot's early poetry". In R.Machin and C.Norris, eds, Post-structuralist Readings of English poetry (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp.369-390, 380.

voices" (133) as the "I", and they find a community in their common alienation from society.

The "you" mediates between the body parts of Prufrock's female companions (the "arms" and the "eyes"), and the paradoxical wholeness and singularity the woman achieves when she speaks to him. She becomes the "one" who will "say" (109,110). "You" is the only silent subject position in this poem and can thus be a sympathetic companion to the speaking "I". Speech gives wholeness to the third person other and threatens the integrity of the first person speaker, whereas the third persons observed by the narrator are similarly dismembered by his words.

But the "Prufrock" narrator longs for a wholeness of knowledge, associated with the ability to use meaningful language that will fulfil its aim of union with its objects. The "all" that he has known is merely an aggregation of the fragments of time and human body-parts. Lazarus is the model figure who resolves this problem, for his speech can direct all his experience of social life "into a ball/To roll it towards some overwhelming question" (93,94). Yet Lazarus' full language, that can "tell you all" (96) is threatened by the impenetrable speech of the woman: "That is not what I meant at all./That is not it, at all" (98,99). The knowledge that Lazarus has acquired through death represents a fullness of understanding, a complete answer to the "overwhelming

question" gained through objective experience. But by contrast, the woman's "all" is both negative and subjective - it refers only to what is not included in her own private meaning. In this stanza, the woman not only prevents a romantic understanding between herself and the speaker. Her language threatens meaning itself, for Lazarus' important speech is not "worth it" (88) if the woman cannot make herself understood with words and the lovers cannot communicate.

This interaction exemplifies the differences between the way that male and female figures speak in the Prufrock:1917 poems. Women occupy a double space whereby they are the "enemies of the absolute" who hinder the poems' narrators from making meaning. However, women are also figured, paradoxically, as representatives of "the absolute", or more precisely, of verbal authority, an authority that is not threatening when invested in male speakers. In these early poems male and female figures with parallel roles as conversationalists and sexual adventurers are differently regarded by an anxious male narrator. This distinction reveals the ideological nature of the speakers' fear of both female sexuality and female speech.

The ambiguous representation of women's use of language reflects the speaker's fear of feminine speech. While women are seen to wield signs, as Pinkney observes, the narrator himself must

marshall his style to contain the uncontrollable linguistic and sexual excesses figured by women. In "Hysteria", for example, the narrator's fantasy of being swallowed by the woman's "voracious and cannibalistic vagina", represented by her mouth, suggests that she "threatens to expose the carnal underside of this decorous language, to hound into the light of day the originary and bodily metaphors it ignores in favour of the excessively intellectual figures it concocts."[15] Aggressive female sexuality threatens a "riot of semiosis", dividing time and space.[16] Thus the narrator of "Hysteria" feels that if he can quell the meaningless, irrepressible and overtly sexual activity of the woman he can redeem time: "I decided that if the shaking of her breasts could be stopped, some fragments of the afternoon might be collected ..." (5). Yet it is the women and not the narrators of these poems who halt the play of meaning and are seen to be obsessively controlling of language. In "Conversation Galante", it is the woman who prevents the narrator's soliloquising with "`How you digress!'" (6) and "`Does this refer to me?'" (11). The narrator characterises her as "`the eternal

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15. See T.Pinkney, Women in the Poetry of T.S. Eliot, 19,20. Pinkney argues that Eliot's work constitutes a strategy for working through the paranoid/schizoid position of early psychological development toward the "depressive" position which is valorised in Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic theory. However Pinkney, following Adrian Stokes, claims that this position has pathological dimensions of its own. He uses Klein's reading of the child's ambivalent relation to the maternal breast to account for the violence towards women in Eliot's work.

16. T.Pinkney, Women in the Poetry of T.S.Eliot, 20.

humourist,/The eternal enemy of the absolute,'" (13,14) suggesting her disavowal of meaning in speech. But in fact her voice in the poem is one of insistent authority. To him she is "`indifferent and imperious'" (16). It would seem that only as a lover who should have been produced as such by a "Conversation Galante", could she furnish the "absolute". As a censor of male language, insisting on its referentiality and simultaneously refusing its romantic designs, she doubly threatens the narrator's ability to speak: "At a stroke our mad poetics to confute" (17).

In the poems where a narrator converses with a woman, this is inevitably the result. Thus "La Figlia Che Piange" stands apart in sustaining its lyrical tone, for here the narrator observes from a distance the woman's voiceless postures, fantasising that she is being abandoned by another man. Her notable silence renders her the most unproblematically romantic heroine amongst these early poems, whilst reducing her to an abused, objectified body: "So I would have had him leave,/ So I would have had her stand and grieve,/ As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised,/ As the mind deserts the body it has used" (8-12). The masculine violence is consolidated by the woman's silence, and the romantic tone is supported by the voyeuristic distance of the speaker from her verbal and bodily materiality. This woman is a romantic figure, a torn, passive "body", available to participate

in the speaker's fantasy as she has been to harbour another's "soul" or "mind".

Both female sexuality ("Hysteria") and women's authoritative but unromantic use of language ("Conversation Galante") are threatening to the male narrators in these early poems. By contrast the sexuality of "Mr Apollinax", whilst resembling the irrepressible humour of the woman in "Hysteria", seems to subvert the oppressive social rituals that women represent. Where the narrator remembers only "a slice of lemon, and a bitten macaroon" (22) of his host and hostesses, Mr Apollinax' enigmatic conversation is exciting and explicitly sexual, stimulating a play of associations in the narrator's language. He is seen as the phallic, voyeuristic Priapus "gaping at the lady in the swing" (5) and later the "beat of centaur's hoofs" (16) accompany his "dry and passionate talk" (17). It is this potency of conversation, associated with movement and rhythm that the "Prufrock" speaker attempts to emulate with his suggestion of "Let us go then...". Male adventure should culminate in and be justified by male potency, as the myth of "The Waste Land" makes explicit. Mr Apollinax is seen not to control meaning, for this is the role of his inane hosts, but rather to proliferate it. But where the woman's threatened "riot of semiosis" in "Hysteria" is frightening, in this case it is enjoyable.

It is as a role-model of masculine verbal and sexual potency that the narrator is inspired by Mr Apollinax. His laughter is "submarine and profound" (8), like that of the "hysterical" woman. Despite the "worried bodies of drowned men" (11) that drift in the "old man's" sea, it is not disturbing to the narrator here. Like the appealing sea-girls in "Prufrock", the Bertrand Russell figure is a romantic subverter of social events. "Mr Apollinax" heroically rescues the speaker from trivia, whereas in "Prufrock" the speaker will be one of the "drowned men" lured into the exclusive world of the sea-girls. He does not submerge the speaker's identity but rather aids and inspires his memory.

In "Prufrock", the mermaids' sexuality is lesbian, singing "each to each". This is not only sterile from the male point of view, but fearful, for as Bersani notes, the most accurate sexual metaphor for the hopeless pursuit of one's own desires is heterosexual jealousy of homosexuality in the other sex.[17] Bersani offers another interpretation of lesbianism. For Baudelaire, in desiring themselves outside themselves, lesbians transform sex from biological need to metaphysical pursuit. Thus their narcissism frees love from reproductive servitude "from that multiplication of subjects that we falsely interpret as the

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17. L.Bersani, The Culture of Redemption, 24.

multiplication of l'individuel"[18]. However, this constitutes a problem for the "Prufrock" narrator, for his own capacity for narcissism is threatened by the unavailability of women to constitute the end of his flaneur's journey, for they are either engaged in lesbian narcissism, or they painfully return his objectifying language exposing its ideological roots. By contrast, the sexuality of Mr Apollinax is unproblematic. His impenetrable language guarantees his flaneur-like anonymity, preventing women from tainting it with their repetitions of his enigmas, thus establishing his position as Priapic voyeur and phallic conversationalist.

Where "Mr Apollinax" valorises male sexual and verbal potency, it also indicates the comparative sterility of the social world, mostly represented by women. As I have suggested above, the place of women is unstable in these early poems; where overt female sexuality must be contained by male language as in "Hysteria", paradoxically the critique directed at cultured women in other poems is precisely their loss of value as sexual objects. The thousands of readers of "The Boston Evening Transcript" who "Sway in the wind like a field of ripe corn", passively awaiting the reaping of their minds by consumer society, are represented by "Cousin Harriet", the oppressive Eliotic female relative. These readers are seen as opposed to

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18. L.Bersani, The Culture of Redemption, 83.

life:

> When evening quickens faintly in the street,
> Wakening the appetites of life in some
> And to others bringing the *Boston Evening Transcript*, (3-5)

The "appetites" that are aroused with "evening" smack of sexual adventure in those who are not paralysed by reading. The suggestion is that the narrator's distaste for this field of readers is rooted in the desexualising of women as they participate in social rituals associated with the traditionally male public sphere, and particularly the commercialising of language. Newspapers make this sphere widely accessible. Such a reading would explain why so many of these women are relatives. "Cousin Nancy", for example, is the modern woman who smokes and dances and hunts, and breaks the ancient hills in the process. Where women of the previous generation, like "Aunt Helen", oppose sexuality by stifling it, the modern women either abstain from sex for political reasons or actively pursue it. This is fundamentally related to their participation as readers of the evening papers and critics of the public world. Modern women therefore occupy an authoritative role as both consumers and producers of language which renders them sexually undesirable and intractable as objects of a male romantic-adventure plot. Simultaneously, however, their part in instigating the proliferation of language in newspapers and a culture of reading threatens the "riot of semiosis" akin to that of the woman's laughter in "Hysteria", undermining the narrator's stylistic

attempts to control the sexual and ideological underside of language.

I suggest that the threatening nature of women's verbal production, their consumption of written words and their indifference to masculine sexual ambition within these poems can be read in relation to changing perceptions of the social space of women early in this century. These perceived changes began in literature in England in the 1890s, as Anne Ardis suggests in her study of early modernism, New Women, New Novels. The production and critical reception of the "New Women Novels" of the 1890s reveals how these novels challenge "the `natural' inevitability of the marriage plot...". New Woman novelists replace "`the pure woman,' the Victorian angel in the house, with a heroine who either is sexually active outside of marriage or abstains from sex for political rather than moral reasons".[19] This figure disrupts Victorian, and indeed Baudelairean, taxonomies of womanhood. As I outlined in the introduction, Ardis connects the claims of these novels to present a new, self-interested female sexuality to the reappraisal of realism credited to twentieth-century writers. Where the "new realist" writers were anxious about female readership because it limited their ability to represent sexuality, these novels were suggesting that such new realism did not go far enough in that

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19. A.Ardis, New Women, New Novels, 3.

they did not question Victorian notions of female sexuality.

The antagonism towards these controversial novels, Ardis suggests, contributed to the "formalist" aesthetic by which Anglo-American modernism explains itself. Antagonism to the form of femininity represented within these novels was expressed in the form of censure based on "literary" criteria. In the 1890s art was understood as a guide to behaviour rather than a reflection of life. Thus the New Women novels were dangerous in creating, not reflecting the New Woman. The concern that art affects behaviour in real life stimulated both critical outbursts against such novels and the production of such fiction itself.[20]

> Demanding in true Arnoldian fashion that the public recognize a distinction in kind between "classics" and these "racy" new novels, conservative critics depoliticized "Literature" as they sought to disenfranchise the New Woman novel. They began to valorize the kind of formalist aesthetic we associate with high modernism as they tried to steer readers away from these highly politicized and controversial works.[21]

I suggest that T.S. Eliot's early poetry is concerned with this intrusion of the sexual and political ambitions of women into literature and with the corresponding threat that this poses to the "placelessness" of the male artist. The crucial concerns of Eliot's early poetry involve a male narrator struggling to articulate his relationship to language. The women in these poems

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20. A.Ardis, New Women, New Novels, 52.

21. A.Ardis, New Women, New Novels, 3.

generally occupy the space of private homes. Although they cannot all be characterised as "New Women", their voices, desires and cultural judgements permeate the poems. In "Portrait of a Lady", for example, the lady's voice "returns like the insistent out-of-tune/ Of a broken violin on an August afternoon" (56,57) and thus even when the speaker escapes into the park, he is haunted by her desires:

> I remain self-possessed
> Except when a street-piano, mechanical and tired
> Reiterates some worn-out common song
> With the smell of hyacinths across the garden
> Recalling things that other people have desired.
> Are these ideas right or wrong? (78-83)

As I will show in "The Waste Land", music and particularly song become increasingly associated with female sexuality in Eliot's poetry, functioning as an "inviolable" but purely self-referential form of language, signifying nothing but the body that utters it. Here, however, the woman does not sing, but her use of language to express her private desires is recalled by the repetitive song of the piano. The insistence with which these desires slip into the narrator's world threatens his "self-possession". Writing itself can be seen to be motivated by the narrator's need to distinguish between the lady's use of language and his own. Thus his "self-possession flares up for a second" (94) when the lady says "Perhaps you can write to me" (93). He cannot, finally, distinguish his own language from hers, and this "self-possession gutters" (101) when he sees how inescapably they mirror one another's expression: "I feel like one who smiles, and

turning shall remark,/ Suddenly, his expression in a glass" (99-100). Her reflection of his "expression" renders language meaningless for him, and alienates him from it: "And I must borrow every changing shape/ To find expression...dance, dance/ Like a dancing bear,/ Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape" (109-112). He feels like a tame animal manipulated into using his distinctive language for the purposes of others, precipitating a "riot of semiosis" of his own. And yet he knows that he cannot escape such bondage, for if he were freed from the lady, he could not write. Like the "I" in "Prufrock", who desperately invokes a listener in the "you", this speaker would have no audience and no necessity: "Well! and what if she should die some afternoon.../Should die and leave me sitting pen in hand" (114,116, my emphasis).

The woman has invaded language in both its private and public retreats, exposing it as an instrument for realising sexual and social ambitions. The speaker's conversation with the lady alters his perception of the cityscape, which is not composed of fleeting external public images but of the desires of the woman that insistently contaminate the division between the objective physical world and her subjective intentions. The privacy of the "placeless", voyeuristic flaneur, is tainted with another kind of privacy, that surrounding the woman within the bourgeois home.

The physical world in "Portrait" and "Preludes" is symptomatic of the manner in which female desires refuse to remain private. Both poems begin with an external impression of the cityscape, using the season as the "objective correlative". But this disintegrates into the subjective fantasies of a woman. In "Portrait", the lady intervenes: "Among the smoke and fog of a December afternoon/ You have the scene arrange itself" (12) into the claustrophobic "atmosphere of Juliet's tomb" (6). Similarly the city in "Preludes", which is rendered in a more sustained way throughout the first stanza, dissolves into the lives of people in "a thousand furnished rooms" (23), crystallizing into the female "you" in the third stanza: "You dozed, and watched the night revealing/ The thousand sordid images/ Of which your soul was constituted" (26-28). The morning light through the shutters falls on the woman's reverie about her private fantasies. Her shuttered flat is associated with the multitude of dingy flats, exemplifying repetitive modern living; her sordid desires become implicit in the objective evidence of human existence.

Baudelaire's experience of modernity, I have suggested, is no longer possible by the time that Eliot writes his early poems. This is partly because it relies on a strict demarcation of city spaces that have become increasingly disrupted by the literary, if not actual changes in the social space available to women. As Ardis shows, women have become the subjects, readers and

writers of new literatures, which threaten to precipitate social anarchy if they are not contained. At the same time, women's ideological use of literature resounded loudly through the literary and social world, disrupting the requirement of female silence for the Baudelairean aesthetic and the claims of language to objectively register experience.

The "Prufrock" narrator is aware that this disruption is a possibility inherent in the subject/object distinction essential to the flaneur's position. This figure embodies the contradictions traced by Ellmann in Eliot's critical thought, whereby the dispersal of identity is achieved by reaffirming it. Pound and Eliot's doctrine of "impersonality", according to Ellmann, is contradictory because it is forged out of an urgent political imperative to establish the place and nature of subjectivity in art.[22] An important dimension to this is the desire to distinguish a new, placeless and authoritative self that is not ideologically tainted, in distinction to women's use of language as self-expression. The female voices that permeate the poems represent the modern domination of culture by women, in which art becomes the strategy by which the controversial new

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22. M.Ellmann, The Poetics of Impersonality, 2-17. Ellmann suggests that the urgency of the doctrine of "impersonality" is primarily political. Eliot and Pound's doctrine united the realms of poetry, aesthetics, philosophy and politics and each instils the other with a "borrowed vehemence" (5). The doctrine is probably derived from the very Romanticism that it is designed to attack.

roles and changing sexual behaviour of women is explored. As they come to represent modernity as linguistic and sexual excess, women's language threatens to expose the ideological and sexual placelessness of men's speech and writing. The flaneur is a paradox - that of the anonymous subject, the writing speaker, the artist who speaks for a community from which he is separate, and which he loves to watch but will not know. But this paradoxical position becomes untenable when the silent objects of his gaze begin to speak.

In these poems, the speakers feel that their language is emasculated, robbed of authority as well as the enigmatic disguise with which the speaking subject could escape the women's "formulations". The figure of Mr Apollinax alone demonstrates this simultaneously priapic and cryptic speech. The male speakers cannot emulate this, for it is women's language that is both authoritative and yet disturbingly meaningless. The anxiety caused by women's speech in the poem typifies the modernist distaste for the "femininity" in Romantic poetic language.[23] Modernists characterize Romanticism as "marked by `feminine'

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23. The anti-Romantic impulse of Modernism has been noted by several critics who suggest that this constitutes Modernism's disavowal of its own true roots. See for example, C.Baker, The Echoing Green: Romanticism, Modernism and the Phenomena of transference in Poetry (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). M. Ellmann, The Poetics of Impersonality. M.Levenson, A Genealogy of Modernism: a study of English literary doctrine, 1908-1922 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

vagueness and sentimentality" As Larissy observes:[24]

> Modernist poets believe in the castrated condition of post-Romantic poetry, but claim that by contrast they can gain intuitive access to a mode of apprehension akin to that of the scientist.[25]

Eliot's critical endorsement of such a view is evident in a letter to Dial in 1921, in which he compares the artistic practice of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. The "objective" nature of Joyce's representations is the scientific solution to the emphasis on "feeling" found in Woolf's work:

> The strongest (writers), like Mr Joyce, make their feeling into an articulate, external world: what might be more crudely called a more feminine type when it is also a very sophisticated type, makes its art by feeling, and by contemplating the feeling rather than the object...[26]

His distaste for the gap between artistic emotion and the object of that emotion is the subject of the famous essay on "Hamlet": "Artistic `inevitability' lies in this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion; and this is precisely what is deficient in Hamlet. Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear".[27] Within his poetry, women are seen to destroy the objectivity of language by appropriating it to express their

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24. E.Larissy, Reading Twentieth-Century Poetry, 29.

25. E.Larissy, Reading Twentieth-Century Poetry, 28.

26. T.S.Eliot, "London Letter". In The Dial, August, 1921, 71: 223.

27. T.S.Eliot, "Hamlet", in F.Kermode, ed, T.S. Eliot: Selected Essays (London: Faber, 1951), 141-146, 145.

private feelings and meanings. The speaker can no longer "contemplate the object" without feelings and judgements intruding. The "Prufrock" narrator "drowns" in the voices of women, voices which disrupt the Baudelairean and Victorian paradigms of female silence and women's separate spheres, to express dissatisfaction with Lazarus' masculine claim to metaphysical truth whilst assuming a viewing position of their own from which they declaim artistic and sexual judgements.

PART II:

"THE WASTE LAND"

Where "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" presents sexual failure as unique to the narrating voice, in the "The Waste Land" there appears to be no single speaking subject. Maud Ellmann observes that the speaker has no identity - the disembodied "I" slips from persona to persona and the subject is the victim of the general collapse of boundaries and centricity that afflicts the poem[1]. This slipping subjectivity, I suggest, generalises the problems of the speakers, constructing an "impersonal" record in which the aphasia and sexual impotence that afflicted the "Prufrock" narrator are exacerbated and presented as a cultural, rather than individual, condition. However, I will suggest in this chapter that the universality of this condition is qualified by the rigorously maintained distinctions between the way in which the male and female figures of the poem are represented; distinctions which work against Eliot's own suggestion that the sexes "meet" in the figure of Tiresias.[2]

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1. M.Ellmann, The Poetics of Impersonality, 97.

2. T.S.Eliot, "Notes on The Waste Land", in T.S.Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot. Eliot's note to line 218 suggests that Tiresias is "the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias" (78).

Spiritual and sexual potency are the main aspirations of the figures in Jessie Weston's account of the Grail Legends. According to Eliot, Weston's book suggested "not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem".[3] This organising mythology is only invoked directly in two places in the poem,[4] but Eliot's note is substantiated by the recurring symbolism of the poem.[5] These legends, in Weston's account, establish a connection between the ability of the quester to speak, and the spiritual and political well-being of society. The mark of his success is sexual, for he will marry the bearer of the Holy Grail.[6] This concern within the poem is most explicit in the manuscript for here, as Maud Ellmann notes, the

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3. T.S.Eliot, "Notes on the Waste Land", 76.

4. The narrating voice twice assumes the guise of the Fisher King figure, a central figure in the legends; on one occassion he sits "fishing in the dull canal" (Part III, 189) and later he tells us "I sat upon the shore/ Fishing, with the arid plain behind me" (Part V, 423,424).

5. See J.Weston, From Ritual to Romance: An Account of the Holy Grail from Ancient Ritual to Christian Symbol (New York: Doubleday, 1957). See especially Chapter VI, "The Symbols". In this chapter Weston argues that the central symbols of the Lance or Spear and the Grail or Cup are male and female fertility symbols of ancient and widespread significance (80). The four suits of the Tarot pack, which Madame Sosostris uses to predict Phlebas' "Death by Water" are variations of these symbols (77). Weston argues that the original use of the Tarot was to predict the rise and fall of seasonal waters that brought fertility to the land. This is obviously significant for the recurring references to water in its various aspects throughout the poem, and the sense of hope that the desert rain finally brings in Part V.

6. For a discussion of this mythology, see G.Smith, The Waste Land, especially pp. 88-91.

pilgrim explicitly seeks a single word that "frees".[7]

In the first three parts of Eliot's poem, the questing figures are unable to speak. Ellmann concludes that the failure to utter the right word or question dominates the finished poem: "all that remains of the lightning of the Word is the belated rattle of the sign, the `dry, sterile thunder' of the desert".[8] However, in this essay, I will suggest that Part V does articulate a spoken word that "frees" in the syllable "DA". The "DA" uttered by the Thunder, in conjunction with the final chant of "Shantih shantih shantih", suggests a message of hope at the conclusion of the poem to several critics. In Pinkney's Kleinian terms for example, this hope inheres in the approach to an impulse to "reparation" and is made possible because the poem has finally acknowledged the violence towards women that has been suppressed.[9] North,

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7. M.Ellmann, The Poetics of Impersonality, 106. The sense in which language "frees" in the poem, inheres in its ability to reconnect the material and conventional rules by which we make meaning with the subjective emotions and perceptions of the individual. This "liberates" the speaker from confinement either to merely conventional shared meaning, or the isolation of a language that can only express subjectivity. See F.Moretti, "From *The Waste Land* to `Artificial Paradise'". Moretti maintains that Eliot's critical thought is an attempt to fill this gap between meaning and values. Eliot's intention is that "the artistic form is the means that reconnects expression and emotion, social objective meaning and subjective value" (218).

8. M.Ellmann, The Poetics of Impersonality, 106.

9. See T.Pinkney, Women in the Poetry of T.S.Eliot. In Part V, Pinkney reads the "controlling hands" (422) and the "blood shaking my heart" (402) as sinister moments. They suggest an inverted version of George Eliot's Daniel Deronda in which

however, suggests that the positive message in the "Shantih" seems to occur only when the bottom of despair is reached; it appears to be the result merely of the exhaustion of the negative.[10] This negative is represented largely by the women in the poem, who ultimately drive Phlebas the Phoenician to his "Death by Water" and who do not appear in Part V. While the quest appears to be fulfilled in "What the Thunder Said", sexual consummation does not occur. The Grail bearer, an important figure in the Legends, does not appear in this part of the poem and the "hope" is articulated in relations between male figures.

In this analysis, the sense of "hope in Part V is facilitated less by an acknowledgement of violence towards women than by the notable absence of female figures in these sections. Women, as I will show, are important representatives of modernity and the epistemological and spiritual crises associated with the poem's vision of contemporary urban life. This constitutes a problem for the male speakers who feel excluded from the modern city, except

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circumstances actualise Gwendolen's murderous wish towards her husband Grandcourt, as she watches him being washed overboard from a boat. Eliot's poem is obscure, but, says Pinkney, here it comes close to "acknowledging its elusive and persistent phantasy of a drowned woman. If, on the one hand, this is a reparative gesture (you cannot atone what you have not conceded), it is also, on the other, the last twist of the poetic knife. Reversing the power relationships between Gwendolen and Grandcourt, the text undermines its precursor in good Bloomian fashion, quelling one insolent heroine as it does so." (114)

10. M.North, The Political Aesthetic, 104.

as ghostly absences, and who tend to occupy a time that is a mythical lost age. It is only in exile from the "feminised" modern city, that the narrator can both speak and hear a significant language, and enjoy the community of shared values that this implies.[11] The poem moves towards a timeless mythical, non-urban landscape in the last two Parts. This poetic journey serves the important ideological end of both expressing the sense of male exile from a modern, post-war urban world symbolised by women, and simultaneously asserting that such exile enables the "quest" for a potent language that will heal the multiple injuries of modern society.

The resurrection of the Fisher King figure in the Grail legends is accomplished through the quest of his Knight, which, if successful, also transforms the spiritual and political state of the land. This can only be achieved through the quester's ability to interrogate the Waste Land around him, and to ask his question

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11. See F.Moretti, "From The Waste Land to Artificial Paradise". Moretti describes one aspect of the conceptual debate about language in which Eliot engages, as the loss of social cohesion when meaning and value are separated: " [B]etween sense - which for Frege is fundamentally intersubjective - and value - which instead embraces the most profound individual motivations - the relationship is no longer *sufficiently tight and univocal*, and can no longer assure any cultural cohesion and continuity: whether on the social or on the individual plane: `The same sense is not always connected, even in the same man, with the same idea.'" (214,215)

of the Holy Grail itself, which is borne by a young woman.[12] The quester's ability to speak about what he sees is thus crucial to his personal sexual fulfilment and to the health of the nation.

"The Burial of the Dead", however, presents two questing figures who fail to speak. In the second stanza, the speaking voice becomes that of God, commanding Ezekiel to take his Word to the Jews, but warning him that he will fail: "Son of man,/ You cannot say, or guess," (20/21).[13] In the following stanza, words fail the quester figure in the Hyacinth garden: "- Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,/ Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not/ Speak", (37-41). In "A Game of Chess", the woman figure asks her lover: "Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak" (112). In the context of the Grail myth this plea for communication is also a cry for spiritual salvation.

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12. See J.Weston, From Ritual to Romance.Jessie Weston's account of the Grail legends naturalises this relationship between king and country as a timeless given:
"this close relation between the ruler and his land which resulted in the ill of one becoming the calamity of all, is no mere literary invention, proceeding from the fertile imagination of a twelth century court poet, but a deeply rooted popular belief, of practically immemorial antiquity and inexhaustible vitality; we can trace it back thousands of years before the Christian era, we find it fraught with decisions of life and death today." (65)

13. N.Gish, The Waste Land: A Poem of Memory and Desire (Boston: Twayne, 1988). Gish notes that "Son of Man" is God's name for Ezekiel, whom he calls upon to take his word to the Israelites, but warns him that he will fail (49). She also notes the references to Ecclesiastes in the images of the cricket, the dead tree and dry stone (50).

This repeated failure of male figures to "speak" contrasts with the moment in "What the Thunder Said" when the rain breaks: "Then spoke the thunder/ DA" (399-400, emphasis added). The significance of the Thunder's speech will be discussed later.

The female figures in the poem typically speak more often than the male ones. In "The Burial of the Dead", Madame Sosostris' prediction is introduced by the words "Here, said she" (46), and the voices in the Hofgarten in the first stanza who "talked for an hour" (11) appear to be female, named as "Marie". The words of the woman in "A Game of Chess" whose "nerves are bad" are given in inverted commas, where her male partner's words are merely part of the narration, and one is not sure whether he says them to her or merely thinks them. At the end of "The Fire Sermon" the account of the boat-ride down the Thames is narrated by an identifiably female voice, again in quotation marks.

The women within the poem not only speak, but also write and read with an ease that mocks the "quest" for a meaningful word. The typist's profession, for example, mass-produces words. Madame Sosostris, on the other hand, makes her living out of "reading", or interpreting signs. However, as Ellmann observes, this profession exemplifies the loss of origin that plagues the poem, for in fortune-telling the report precedes the event.[14] Both

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14. M.Ellmann, The Poetics of Impersonality, 102.

these figures imply the purely commercial aims of writing and reading in the modern industry in words. Mass production and consumption of words, reports without events and writing without authors are thus all represented by female figures in "The Waste Land".

Gender conditions the speech of the voices of the poem and figures the disturbances and anxieties associated with language. Maud Ellmann suggests that both writing and femininity in the poem are associated with the fear of displacement and the loss of origin. They represent a threat to separation and integrity, and are seen to threaten identity itself: "It is as if the father's impotence entailed the dissolution of identity, imaged as asphyxiation in the body of the feminine".[15] This dissolution of identity is also caused by writing. Writing in "The Waste Land" necessarily deserts its author, both in the authorless allusions and in the speakerless "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME".[16] Where the writing of the poem is invaded by different voices, femininity, imbibed in the form of the perfumes in "A Game of Chess", infects the wholeness of the subject. Ellmann thus suggests that writing is in league with femininity, and both have overpowered the "priapic realm of voice".[17] Speech is "phallic"

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15. M.Ellmann, The Poetics of Impersonality, 107.

16. M.Ellman, The Poetics of Impersonality, 102.

17. M.Ellmann, The Poetics of Impersonality, 106.

for it has an origin in a speaking subject, where writing is detached from its author. It is the potency of a speech with an origin in a speaking subject to which the quester aspires. This speech must be intersubjective and achieve a shared meaning without threatening the boundaries of the self.

The opening description in "A Game of Chess", that of a woman seated at her mirror, exemplifies the endless displacements that are precipitated by femininity in the poem. In this passage all the objects surrounding the woman multiply and disperse into one another. The chair "glowed on the marble" (77), the "glass" "Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra/ Reflecting light upon the table as/ The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it" (82-84). Her perfumes are "Unguent, powdered, or liquid - troubled, confused/ And drowned the sense in odours" (88-89). This description recalls the opening of the poem, where the spring rain cruelly stirs up life, and causes the boundaries between life and death, earth and plants to disintegrate: "April is the cruellest month, breeding/ Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing/ Memory and desire, stirring/ Dull roots with spring rain." (1-4). The enjambed lines and the proliferation of descriptive language in these extracts further demonstrate the relentless metonymic displacements associated with femininity and with the procreative stirrings caused by the spring rain.

The opening landscape of the poem that establishes the speaker's fear of "mingling", is recalled in the third stanza of "The Burial of the Dead". Here the wet Hyacinth garden connects the speaker's fear of spring time to that of "drowning" in his desire for union with the Hyacinth girl: "- Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,/ Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not/ Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither/ Living nor dead, and I knew nothing" (37-40). To be living or dead requires a boundary between these states, yet these boundaries are dissolved both by femininity and by the water imagery of the poem. The desire aroused by women's bodies overpowers the senses by mixing "memory and desire", life and death, and thus drowns the separate knowing and speaking subject.

Where the male narrator cannot "speak" when confronted with femininity, women also find that their language is conditioned by their sexuality. The Cleopatra parody finds her body infecting her speech: "Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair/ Spread out in fiery points/ Glowed into words, then would be savagely still" (108-110, my emphasis). The woman herself identifies the cause of her fragmented language. It is her bad nerves that make her contract her sentences into a single word, in a desperate parody of the quest for the word or the question that liberates: "`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" (111-114). Similarly, Philomela's fragmentary words, "Jug Jug" (103) originate in her mutilated body.[18] The broken language of women permeates the poem with the "inviolable voice" of Philomela and becomes the song of the Thames maidens, mocking Wagner's Rhine maidens, in "The Fire Sermon". The association between Philomela's "Jug Jug", the woman's "Speak" and "What" and the later "Weialala leia/Wallala leialala" (278-279) imply the material and purely sensual nature of speech. Language becomes mere sound with its only referent being the female body that utters it, which may be mutilated, nervous or seductive. This libidinal song ultimately leads Phlebas to his "Death by Water" in the Manuscript of the poem, where three sirens sit in the masts of the ship and sing it to its wreck.[19] This implication remains in the published poem, where the narrator draws the cards of "Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks/The lady of situations" (49-50) after that of the drowned sailor. Fragmentation and displacement in language ultimately pose an identical threat to the speaker, that of "Death by Water", and both are connected to the female body.

The disintegration of words is associated with the slow decay of

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18. "Jug, jug" (103) signifies the song of the nightingale. In Ovid's tale, Philomela is turned into a nightingale after she and her sister wreak revenge on the king Tereus who has raped her and cut out her tongue.

19. See T.Pinkney, Women in the Poetry of T.S.Eliot, 109.

female bodies, located in modern urban spaces. In "A Game of Chess", Lil needs a new set of teeth, and looks "antique" (156) at the age of thirty-one. At the end of "The Fire Sermon", the speaker recounts a journey down the Thames, in which her gradual "undoing" is associated with city spaces: "Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew undid me"(292-3). Various parts of her body are associated with city areas that she bypasses: "By Richmond I raised my knees/ Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe./ `My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart/ Under my feet" (294-297) and finally on "Margate Sands", she has "the broken fingernails of dirty hands" (303). Her disintegration into metonymically connected body parts is associated with urban spaces which also suffer from inner decay. The typist in particular represents urban living with her "food in tins" and her drying "combinations" hanging out of the window. It is the music from her gramophone that invades London: "`This music crept by me upon the waters'/ And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street./ O City city, I can sometimes hear/ Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street," (257-260). The city, like the body of the woman undone by Richmond and Kew, breaks up into a series of streets, metonymically connected by the music to one another and to the typist's loveless, half-conscious existence.

The disintegration that these figures share with London in "The Waste Land" is suggestive of female suicide, a theme that recurs

in the allusions of the poem. The woman in "A Game of Chess" is presented as a parody of Cleopatra at her first meeting with Antony in Shakespeare's version of the play. This love affair ends in Antony's death and Cleopatra's suicide. This allusion frames the ensuing stanzas in Part II, where Lil's decay, caused by her excessive fertility, is also a form of self-destruction, implicit in the elision of her voice with that of the suicidal Ophelia: "Good night, ladies, good night sweet ladies, good night, good night" (172). Speaking of the typist in "The Fire Sermon", the narrator tells us: "When lovely woman stoops to folly and/ Paces about her room again, alone,/ She smoothes her hair with automatic hand,/ And puts a record on the gramophone" (253-256). These lines parody a verse in Oliver Goldsmith's The Vicar of Wakefield that suggests that the only action for a fallen woman is "to die".[20] The final lines of this part of the poem repeat the connection between female suicide and great cities in the reference to Saint Augustine's Confessions "To Carthage then I came" (307). The line continues "where a cauldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears" .[21] The reference here

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20. A.Allison et al., The Norton Anthology of Poetry, Note 4, 1007 cites the Goldsmith song:

> "When lovely woman stoops to folly/ And finds too late that men betray/ What charm can soothe her melancholy,/ What art can wash her guilt away?/ The only art her guilt to cover,/ To hide her shame from every eye,/ To give repentance to her lover/ And wring his bosom - is to die."

21. Eliot's own note. See T.S.Eliot, "Notes to The Waste Land", Note to line 307, 79.

is to Queen Dido of Carthage, who immolates herself on a pyre because of her love for Aeneas who has abandoned her on his quest to found Rome.

The association of women's disintegrating bodies with the parts of the modern city, and with fragments of words and music, I would suggest, indicates the extent to which they are seen to suffer the isolation and repetition of modern life. This repetition can be seen in the representation of the middle-class woman in "A Game of Chess" as an imitation of Cleopatra, for example, and even more explicitly in the profession of the typist. This is highlighted by the rhythmic iambic pentameter and regular rhyme scheme in which the typist's life is described. But where women's lives are repetitive and lonely, these figures are also presented as being resigned to their fate; as the woman "undone" by the cities asks, "What should I resent" (299). Their acceptance of this suffering represents the modern "waste land", which has lost even the desire to save itself. With the exception of Mr Eugenides' commercial enterprises, the most contemporary figures in "The Waste Land" are women. Marie, Lil and the typist in the first three parts of the poem are all victims as well as emblems of post-war European society.

In "The Burial of the Dead", Marie's situation exemplifies the state of the European aristocracy after 1918. Her anxious

insomnia - "I read, much of the night" (18) - contrasts to her carefree childhood. As she tells us, "In the mountains, there you feel free" (17). This freedom is lost because she is dispossessed and displaced.[22] Lil is also a contemporary, a working class woman expecting her husband back from the Great War. In "The Fire Sermon", the modern "human engine" (216) is represented in the person of "The typist" (222). Madame Sosostris "Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe" (45). The Cleopatra-like figure proves to be eminently modern. She is bored and nervous, occupying herself by waiting for "The hot water at ten./ And if it rains, a closed car at four" (135-136). In the first three parts of "The Waste Land", women in particular are the victims of modern life but their professions and their sexual relationships also typify the problems associated with modernity. Moreover, women's tendency to suicide in the poem, invoked at the outset by the Sybil's wish "to die", indicates their complicity with the spiritual death that is characteristic of the modern age.[23]

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22. See A.P.Frank, "The Waste Land: A Drama of Images". In S.Bagchee (ed), T.S. Eliot: A Voice Descanting (New York: St Martin's Press, 1990), 41. According to Armin Paul Frank, Marie is Marie van Wallersee-Larisch, niece of the Austro-Hungarian Empress Elizabeth and a victim of the collapse of the Empire, who was forced to emigrate to New York in 1918.

23. Pinkney offers a different interpretation of female self-destructiveness in "The Waste Land" as naturalised male aggression, projected onto the women themselves. See T.Pinkney, Women in the Poetry of T.S.Eliot, 96.

The modernity that the women of the poem represent includes social disruption wider than the effects of meaningless sexuality. They represent the disintegration of class and national boundaries, the physical decay of both bodies and cities, and the loss of origin and meaning in language. Thus at the end of "The Fire Sermon", it is a woman's voice that expresses the state of the entire Waste land itself: "My people humble people who expect/ Nothing" (304-305). This representation can be seen to reflect a broader perception common in England at the time that Eliot wrote this poem. Male writers operating within "high" culture after the First World War suffered a profound sense of alienation in what was perceived to be the newly "feminised" Britain.

During the period between the wars, as Alison Light's study argues, a sense of "a history from inside" gained new significance and "the place of private life and what it represented became the subject of new kinds of national and public interest, and found new literary forms."[24] There is a move away from the heroic/masculine public rhetorics of national destiny to an Englishness "at once less imperial and more inward-looking, more domestic and more private - and, in terms of pre-war standards, more `feminine'". The anti-heroic mood that characterised the aftermath of war and with it, what Light calls

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24. A.Light, Forever England, 5.

"a distaste for the romantic languages of national pride" produced a "realignment" of sexual identities which was part of a redefinition of Englishness itself.[25]

Male writers returning from the war reacted violently against these changes, finding Britain in peace time to be "emasculated" after the masculinity of war, and developed a distaste for the new, more "feminine" society which valued domesticity. As Light notes, this can be read as the hysteria about both class and gender based dispossession: "Driven into exile, many modernist prophets and minor cognoscenti lament both the proletarianisation and the domestication of national life".[26] The corresponding "domestication" of the imperial idea between the wars, Light suggests, can only make sense if we realise the extent to which women came to represent modernity in the post-war generation.[27]

In "The Waste Land" women do indeed represent modern life and they are seen to be both victims of it and themselves responsible for proliferating its repetitive and disconnected aspects. The mythical figures of the poem, like Philomela, Belladonna and the Rhine sirens, invite the male narrator to sail away from this landscape, to drown himself in a language that has no social

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25. A.Light, Forever England, 8.

26. A.Light, Forever England, 7.

27. A.Light, Forever England, 211.

significance but refers only to the seductive bodies from which it originates. Phlebas, I suggest, pursues the strong appeal that "abroad" held for men after the First World War, in their attempt to escape to exotica, away from women at home:

> Abroad was culture, romance and sensuality; home was philistine, prosaic and frigid. `Home' was also the place where women were, after 1919, in the majority and where women writers were coming into their own.[28]

The anxiety about the increasing involvement of women in the commerce in words, as I have suggested, is demonstrated by the figures of the typist and Madame Sosostris in the finished poem. Furthermore Gish notes that a possible draft introduction to "The Fire Sermon" consisted of a long parody of Pope "that describes a young woman preoccupied with trivial society and vulgar sex, and under the delusion that she is a poet."[29] Frank observes that there is an important contrast in the fate that awaits the parodically heroic typist and her parallel, the sailor, who are both brought home by the "violet hour" (220). The sailor's death may be preferable to the typist's life.[30] The sailor fails to come home, for he has drowned abroad, in flight from the "home" characterised by the human automation that the typist symbolises.

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28. A.Light, Forever England, 7.

29. N.Gish, The Waste Land, 27.

30. A.P.Frank, "*The Waste Land*: A Drama of Images". In S.Bagchee, T.S.Eliot, 44.

In "What the Thunder Said" women are notably absent except in the seventh stanza. Here, however, the ensnaring female voices that led Phlebas to his death are safely contained and the women's voices that pervade modern urban living are simply absent. The gypsy woman is no longer threatening; unlike Madame Sosostris she cannot read the future and she does not speak. Her "long black hair" is drawn out tight (377). Unlike the female figure in the first section of "A Game of Chess", whose hair is in "fiery points", here the feminine body does not cause displacements. Neither does her music permeate the text, like that of the Rhine maidens or Philomela's bird-song, but it reverberates harmlessly in enclosed spaces: "voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells" (384). Modern urban women are absent and the allure of exotic feminine bodies and feminine song is safely contained.

Phlebas' pursuit of the exotic but meaningless voices of the sirens, who sing in the draft of "Death by Water", and through the first three parts of the completed poem, enacts an escape from the prosaic and "feminised" modern world into one of romantic adventure, signalled by feminine song. Even the name of the "handsome and tall" (321) Phlebas' expresses his masculinity,

according to Grover Smith.[31] This escape from verbal modern women, I would suggest, is the enabling condition for the speech of the Thunder in Part V. This speech exemplifies a language that can overcome human isolation and defeat even "death".

Madame Sosostris predicts that Phlebas' death is nonredemptive, for she cannot find the "Hanged Man" (55), the sacrificial Christ figure. Yet his death initiates the possibility of redemption, for it leads into the crucifixion scene of "the frosty silences in the gardens" and "the agony in stony places" (323-324) at the beginning of Part V. Phlebas' drowning becomes sacrificial, associated with the fertility rituals that underpin the symbolism of the poem.[32] Jessie Weston argues that the Grail Legends mythologise ancient Mystery rites; like the Phrygian cult of Attis or the Phoenician Adonis. These involve the death of a young and handsome god, beloved by a great goddess, inflicting

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31. Grover Smith, The Waste Land, pp 106-109. Smith suggests that Phlebas' name is contrived from the Greek "phlebos" meaning both "vein" and "phallus" (107). In his discussion of "Phlebas as Osiris", he states that "Phlebas not only is called a phallus; he also, like Osiris, represents a phallus" (109).

32. See G.Smith, The Waste Land. Smith suggests that Eliot took the idea of the dying god from Frazer's The Golden Bough, but transforms it through the use of multiple sources. Frazer connects mythology to ancient fertility rituals and "central to the fertility religion is the myth of a dying god (Vols.5,6) who himself has suffered these brutalities [of sacrifice and/or sexual mutilation]. Their meaning, at first limited to the sexual and generative plane, may extend, as in the religions of Osiris and Attis, to a magic of resurrection." (89) Phlebas, as an Osiris figure, introduces the possibility of resurrection.

disaster on human society. For the salvation of the world, the god is resurrected to great rejoicing.[33] Phlebas is such a god-figure, introducing the Christ-like sacrifice that takes place in "What the Thunder Said".

The sacrificial form of death in Part V resolves the narrator's ambivalent horror about both the finality of death and the possibility of the dead haunting the living in the first three parts of the poem. Death and femininity persistently traumatise the male narrating voices in these early parts of the poem.[34] Light's discussion suggests the close connection between male writer's experience of and concern with war and death, and their sense of alienation from the comparatively banal domestic life that women had established in England. At the same time the narrator also expresses continual anxiety about male death.

The speaker is plagued by ghosts and corpses of men that populate the poem. He observes in horror the sighing masses of the unbaptized in Dante's first circle of Hell: "I had not thought

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33. See J.Weston, From Ritual to Romance, 143,144.

34. N.Gish, The Waste Land, 38. Gish argues that the narrator of the poem appears is male, for he is identified with the drowned Phoenician sailor, he speaks as the soldier in "The Burial of the Dead", as the husband in `A Game of Chess' and twice refers to himself fishing.

death had undone so many" (63).[35] The speaker's own demise is predicted by the clairvoyante, for his card is "the drowned Phoenician Sailor,/(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)" (47,48), and this prediction is realised in Part IV. In "A Game of Chess", the nervous woman orders her lover to "Think" and all he can think about is "the dead men": "I think we are in rats' alley/ Where the dead men lost their bones" (115,116). Similarly, when she asks him ""Do/ "You know nothing?/ Do you see nothing? Do you remember/ "Nothing?"" (121-123), he remembers: "Those are pearls that were his eyes" (125). These thoughts are recalled by the next male voice that speaks in "The Fire Sermon". The speaker now poses as the Fisher King, who can hear "The rattle of the bones" (186) and who muses on the wreck and death of his father and brother. He has visions of "White bodies naked on the low damp ground/ And bones cast in a little low dry garret,/ Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year." (193-195).

As suggested earlier, the male speaker is identified at points with a questing figure in the poem who consistently fails to ask his question. There is, however, an exceptional moment where the male narrator does "speak", and it is death in war that prompts his important question: "`Stetson!/ `You who were with me in the

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35. A.Allison et al, Norton Anthology, note 3, 1002."On his arrival in the Inferno, Dante sees the vast crowd of those who "lived without infamy and without praise, ... such a long procession of people, that I would never have believed that death had undone so many." "

ships at Mylae!/ `That corpse you planted last year in your garden,/ `Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?" (69-72). His "question" is about the process of redemption - whether death is the end of life or its origin. Both possible answers are fearful, for as the first few lines of the poem suggest, the mingling of life and death caused by spring rain is cruel. So is the finality of a meaningless death, discontinuous with life.[36] The crowd of dead soldiers in the "Unreal city" want to know if there is any afterlife and whether their corpses will "bloom".

The answer to this question lies in the very process of writing that afflicts the speaker's language with the voices of dead poets, disrupting the boundaries of his subjectivity. Ellmann suggests that the poem can be read as a seance, in which the speaker tries to raise the dead by quoting them.[37] Yet the poem also fears the invasion of the living by the dead even as it invites their return. This ambivalence is evident in the soldier's address to his companion, in which his question about

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36. See A.P.Frank, "The Waste Land: A Drama of Images". In S.Bagchee, T.S.Eliot, 35. Frank notes that the conventional wisdom is that there are two kinds of life and death in the poem, and cites a description of this dynamic from Cleanth Brooks, Modern Poetry and the Tradition (U.S.A., 1967):

> `*The Waste Land* is built on a major contrast... between two kinds of life and two kinds of death. Life devoid of meaning is death; sacrifice, even the sacrificial death, may be life-giving, an awakening to life'(137).

37. M.Ellmann, The Poetics of Impersonality, 109.

death is answered in the words of Baudelaire: "`You! hypocrite lecteur! - mon semblable, - mon frere!" (76). The reader is the "double" of the speaker because he is responsible for hearing his words; the reader or listener controls the poetic "life" of the speaker in the same way that the speaker or writer revives his literary ancestor, Baudelaire. Here there is no guarantee of this literary resurrection, or of the ability of the narrator to retain a distinct identity from the one whose words he uses. He has no choice but to write and to do so in the voices of the poets that he revives.[38] As the enemy of origin and boundaries, writing is also the means of resurrecting the dead. The speaker is preoccupied by the tragedies that befall the drowned Phlebas, and the "kings" who are his brother and father, because these figures are indistinct from the speaker himself.

In Part V of "The Waste Land", by contrast, the speaker no longer fears reminders of death; he tells us that "dry bones can harm no one" (391). Here life and death are distinct and do not invade one another: "He who was living is now dead/ We who were living are now dying/ With a little patience" (328-330). Death is unequivocally sacrificial because the dead predecessor no longer

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38. See N.Gish, The Waste Land, 27. Gish observes that the poems' obsession with imitating the voices of the past, particularly those of other poets, is evident in the original title of the long Manuscript of the poem, "He Do the Police in Different Voices". This title is itself borrowed from Betty Higden in Charles Dicken's Our Mutual Friend.

transgresses the boundaries of the living self; death remains final but a redemptive continuity is established between the living and the dead through symbolic resurrection. This continuity is figured in the Christ-like "third who walks always beside you" (359), who is, nonetheless, identifiably distinct from the narrator, a "third" rather than an invasion of the self by ghosts who recognise no boundaries. This recasting of death, and with it, of language, constitutes an ideological narrative that resolves the narrator's related fears of death, sexuality and the impossibility of potent masculine speech in the first three sections of the poem.

The resolution to the fear of death is profoundly connected to the poem's concern with language. Where writing and femininity have been in league with the ghostly deaths that threaten the narrator's sense of integrity and separateness in the first three Parts, in Part V the resolution to death accompanies a new model of "significance" in language. It is here that language is spoken and is thus restored to its origin in the subject who utters it. The "DA" uttered by the Thunder both has an origin in the paternal authority figure, and yet depends for its significance on the interpretation of the "listeners".

This "originary voice" of the father is understood and interpreted by the individual voices, who invest the "DA" with

significance.[39] The variety of individual meanings are unified by this originary voice which contrasts with the meaningless repetitions and fragments of words spoken by the female voices of the poem: "speak", "what", "Jug Jug", "twit twit", "weialalaleia". The Thunder's speech is based on the fable about the threefold offspring of the god Prajapati - gods, asuras or demons, and men. To each of these offspring, the Thunder utters the syllable "DA" and each construes a different meaning: "Datta" or "give", "dayadhvam", or "sympathise" and "damyata", "control". To each son, the Thunder replies "Omm, you have fully comprehended".[40] Thus the link between generations is established, as is that between the material parts of words and the subjective value-laden meanings with which they are invested. The Thunder is a phallic figure who enables his sons to make their meaning, but who is dependent on their interpretations for his potency. This model of a potent speech is an allegorical parallel to the quest for the Holy Grail in which the speech of the quester is responsible for restoring the power of the king,

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39. "DA" also means "here" in the Freudian account of the child's "Fort-Da" game. "Fort" means "gone", signifying the absence of the child's mother, or the object which symbolises her, where "DA" signifies the return of the absent object. Thus the word also indicates presence and plenitude, once again suggesting the resurrection of the "dead" or the absent persons whose voices reasonate in the poem. For a discussion of the significance of "DA" in Freud's account of the child's development, see M.Ellmann, The Poetics of Impersonality, 108.

40. A.Allison et al, eds, Norton Anthology of Poetry, Note 3, 1011.

a quest which has failed up to this point in the poem.[41]

The Grail Legend symbolism in the poem establishes the dependence of the spiritual possibilities of eternal life on the ability of the "quester" figure to articulate a significant language. The quester is a reader figure - he must both interpret what he sees, and then speak of it. This mutual empowerment of "father" and "son", speaker and listener, suggests parallels between the quester figure and the poet in Eliot's critical writing. Like the quester, the poet's potency is dependent on his ability to interpret the "signs" that he is presented with; for the quester, these are the Grail symbols but for the poet, they are the texts that constitute "tradition".

Eliot's famous 1919 essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent", suggests a poetic use of language in which the individual talent is at its strongest, paradoxically, where the poet's literary "ancestors" assert their influence most powerfully:

> we shall often find that not only the best, but the most

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41. See J.Weston, From Ritual to Romance, 120. In the prehistoric Nature cult rituals which, according to Weston, constitute the basic elements of the Grail Romance, the king is probably originally dead, and restored by mysterious herbs. At the next stage of the myth's development, the king is presented as old, and is restored to youth by the quester. In both cases, however, the important point is the act of substitution - in the enactment of the ritual, the youth who played the quester would then act the part of the restored king. The resurrection of the father/king, who is originally a God in the Nature ritual, is, in her account, actually the empowerment of the son.

> individual parts of his [a poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously.[42].

"Tradition and the Individual Talent" formulates a theory of poetic influence that critics, following Harold Bloom, have interpreted as expressing Eliot's Oedipal "anxiety of influence". Dan Pearce paraphrases Bloom's account of a strong poet's desire for the original Oedipal wish: "Nothing will suffice short of a conviction that they somehow manage to share in the same poetic immortality possessed by the poetic father"[43]. Thus poets face the difficulty of writing original poetry worthy of immortalization under the influence of a rich tradition. Eliot's solution to this problem is repetition compulsion which ironically reverses or "undoes" the original alluded to, thereby providing this paradoxical space.

In "The Waste Land" this paradoxical mutual dependence of the living and the dead, the writer/speaker/quester and his literary or spiritual authority, is not only an anxiety within the poem

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42. Eliot, T.S., "Tradition and the Individual Talent". In Kermode, Frank, (ed.), Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot, 37-45, 38.

43. D.Pearce, "Repetition Compulsion and `Undoing': T.S. Eliot's `Anxiety of Influence'". In Mosaic, 21, No. 4, 1988, 45-54, 46. Pearce explains Eliot's use of allusion in these terms:

> Allusion, unless it is carried to extreme lengths, is the impulse of literary incest carefully repressed into a vague symbolic wish, while the sort of word for word citation which occurs in The Waste Land is a more direct manifestation of the Oedipal wish that is more perverse and obsessive in nature. (52)

but the resolution of an altogether different fear. This fear is the sense of exclusion that male writers have in a literary and social world in which women have verbal authority. By representing that world as fallen, the masculine tradition can be reinserted as the resolution to this state of society and language. The problems of both a meaningful language and a meaningful death are resolved through relationships between men in the mythic wilderness that is an escape from the female voices that dominate the modern world. Phlebas' exile initiates the journey in Part V away from the modern urban landscape, in which the spiritual dereliction is both caused by and figured in the appearance of female appropriation of "culture" and "modernity". Women are either the victims of the modern age, needing help, or proponents of it; mythical female figures offer a contrasting seductive lure away from society and language altogether. The narrator's sense of alienation, symbolized by his fear of death, his attempts to speak, and the final journey to a frontier[44] landscape away from urban modernity, is, I suggest, finally recast as crucial to the salvation of society as a whole.[45]

In this chapter I have suggested that gender relations in this

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44. D.Trotter, "Modernism and Empire: reading *The Waste Land*". In Critical Quarterly, 8, 1 & 2, 1986: 143-153. Trotter suggests that the shaping narrative of the poem in which the metropolis is abandoned for the frontier in an effort to rejuvenate the centre owes a certain debt to frontier-myth.

45. See M.North, The Political Aesthetic.

later poem should be read in the context of post-war Britain, a context which exascerbates the sense of exile from language and society experienced by the male speakers of the early poems. This intensification of the themes of the earlier poems can be connected to an historically specific perception by writers of the period that both social and literary life is becoming rapidly "feminised", a perception rooted in changes in the 1890s that become entrenched in the later post-war years. In "The Waste Land", femininity is seen to represent numerous crises: the disintegration of class boundaries, the "fallen" sexuality to which Larissy refers, the problem of declining upper-class birthrates and rising working class numbers, the commodification of myth and shared cultural symbolism and the reproduction of human individuals into machine-like replications of one another. Yet they can be seen to represent these diverse facets of modernity because, as Light suggests, women did come to represent modernity itself in the period in which this poem was written.

The poem is centrally concerned with the ability of male writers/speakers to "speak" a language with an origin and a listener which can redeem the isolation of modern life. But this sense of isolation is partly caused by the speaker's anxiety about the place of men in this "feminised" society. Despite the claims of Tiresias to be a unifying figure, these anxieties within the poem can be seen in the distinctions that it attempts

to draw between masculine and feminine experiences of modernity, in particular describing gendered experiences of death and speech. Thus romantic love is not and cannot be the appropriate metaphor and mark of a potent speech, despite the role it plays in the Grail Legends which give the poem its mythical structure. I have suggested that the "redemptive" mythology at the end of the poem is an ideological attempt to engage with a "Real" from which the male poet feels excluded. This sense of exclusion from modernity becomes the precondition for salvation. The male narrator abandons the modern metropolis in a poetic journey to the frontier, where society is purified through male sacrifice and language becomes significant in the context of father-son relations.

CONCLUSION

Criticism of male modernist writings have tended to characterise misogyny as the unique pathology of the artist.[1] This approach overlooks important sociohistorical conditions which inform representations of gender, and which have been discussed in criticism of "middlebrow" writings of the same period.[2] This body of criticism is also significant for feminist approaches to modernism.

Certain feminist work on female modernists has found the modernist aesthetic to be "enabling" for women writers. This conflicts with misogynistic representations in male writings. The discrepancy between these representations and the plethora of women's writing as well as the radical use of language of this literary period is an important issue for these critics. Janet

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1. See T.Pinkney, Women in the Poetry of T.S. Eliot; E. Larissy, The Language of Gender. See also D.Holbrook, Where D.H. Lawrence was Wrong about Women (London: Bucknell University Press, 1992). This book resembles Pinkney's thesis about Eliot in tracing Lawrences' fearful representation of women to the fact that he was "idolized" by his mother (17). This sort of analysis cannot account for the more general misogyny in male modernist writing. For a more politicised account of misogyny in male modernist writings, albeit subordinated to class concerns, see Frederic Jameson's comments on Wyndham Lewis's work in F.Jameson, Fables of Aggression.

2. See A.Light, Forever England, 6. Light notes that Modernism has ousted critical concern for the reading habits of the majority in the interwar period. See also A.Ardis, New Women, New Novels, 2, where she claims that most critics exclude the New Woman novels from the genealogy of Modernism.

Wolff's solution to this apparent contradiction is to deny that negative representations of women are an integral part of what constitutes modernism.[3]

In her analysis, the masculinist modernist themes have been seen to define the modernist canon because of the nature of sociological study which has tended to exclude women's experiences of modern life. Raymond Williams' description of modernism, for example, clarifies women's absence from the canon.[4] Williams sees modernism as a response to the need for community, established by artistic practice itself. This practice comes to substitute for the diverse social networks that artists have abandoned in the pull to the metropolis.

> "It is not the general themes of response to the city and its modernity which compose anything that can be properly called Modernism. It is rather the new and specific location of the artists and intellectuals of this movement within the changing cultural milieu of the metropolis."[5]

Women were not party to this experience of the city, Wolff

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3. J.Wolff, Feminine Sentences, 62. Wolff suggests that "key masculinist themes" are not essential to the aesthetic strategy of modernism, and that this still has radical potential for women writers. This aesthetic strategy, she claims, can disrupt the prevailing mode of viewing and expose the ideological character of representation.

4. Wolff, Janet, "Feminism and Modernism" in Feminine Sentences, 58.

5. R.Williams, "The Metropolis and the Emergence of Modernism" in Timms, Edward, and David Kelley, eds, Unreal City: Urban Experience in Modern European Literature (New York: St Martin's Press, 1985), 20.

suggests, and this explanation of modernism thus privileges male experience. By contrast to her critique of Williams, I have sought to argue in this thesis that it is precisely because of women's involvement in the "changing cultural milieu" of the metropolis that male modernists like Eliot experience misogynistic anxieties that are manifest in his early poetry and also in the writings of his male contemporary poets. Women dominate the city spaces of his early poetry, and even where they are located in a bourgeois home, their desires and voices permeate the cityscape.

In Part I, I have argued that in "The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock", the impressionist aesthetic, and the flaneur-like journey through the streets of Boston evoke a Baudelairean aesthetic. The male artistic viewer is also a lover, and his voyeurism is the supreme expression of the modern form of metropolitan consciousness. He finds his sense of community in his anonymity, away from the oppressive social networks of the family, but established rather in the exciting and fleeting encounters with the subjects of his gaze. This mid-nineteenth century figure's viewing position was sustained both by the containment of bourgeois women within a household or limited public places, and by the silence of the more mysterious and especially underclass female figures who form the sexual objects to be viewed in the urban landscape.

Both this containment and silence were perceived to be shattered with the advent of the figure of the New Woman in the 1890s. As Anne Ardis notes, the novels that described a new type of proactive, sexually self-seeking and financially independent middle-class woman were actually perceived to "produce" these figures, and thus the novels themselves were explicitly both written and read as "ideological", expressing the sexual, emotional and professional desires of women. Ardis suggests that the new criteria for literature formulated from around 1900 was partially a "formalist" response to the desire to contain this explicitly ideological and socially disruptive form of literature. It is precisely such an ideological engagement with language that characterises the speech and judgements of the speaking women in Eliot's early poems. The claims of these novels to literary, social and sexual authority brought women generally out of the silent containment on which the "flaneur" relies for his viewing and speaking position, and into the centre stage of the debate. When women speak in Eliot's early poems, the male speaker is "formulated" and his anonymity dissolves.

In "The Waste Land" women embody the failure of language which has evolved into a more widespread crisis than the solipsism that the "Prufrock" speaker tries to alleviate through speech. Female bodies distract the male speaker from his meaning and feminine speech is seen to destroy meaning itself, in a contracted

language that issues from the often mutilated speaking body. Their relationship to language is ambiguous, for these female figures both suffer and cause the crisis. Women also earn a living out of reading and writing in this poem; a situation that exemplifies the extent to which they represent modern life, both as its victims and as accomplices to the social disruption ensuing after the war.

The representation of feminine complicity in the state of the Waste Land, I have argued, is both an important expression of the male speaker's sense of exclusion from modern life, and the enabling representation for the narrative in which this alienation is alleviated. Phlebas' "drowning" in his exile from a feminised society makes possible the fulfilment of the quest to restore significance in language and in life. Alison Light's study of the cultural production between the wars suggests that there is a sense in which male writers after the Great War feel that their very form of expression - literature - has been tainted by women's appropriation of hitherto masculine forms of consciousness. Women, as she suggests, come to represent modern life which is both "proletarianised", "domesticated" and thus seen to be "emasculated" to male writers of the period.

The speaking voices' final exile from both modern women and modern urban life in Part V of the poem is an important turning

point that enables both the Thunder and the Fisher King to "speak" with the full, socially and politically significant potency of the voice. The Fisher King's question anticipates the rebuilding of the fallen world: "Shall I at least set my lands in order?". This section fulfils the ideological narrative that presents masculine death, and male speech, the realms in which the speaker has felt most marginal, to be central to their heroic ability to "save" both language and society from insignificance and spiritual death. This moment anticipates Eliot's later conversion to Anglo-Catholic Christianity, in which spiritual salvation and the concept of tradition are closely linked. But it also signals the final "death" of romance in his poetry; an acknowledgement that under the circumstances, neither male subjectivity nor a sense of shared meaning can be established through heterosexual love.

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