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T.S. Eliot and Otherness: Affects, History and Embodiment

Huiming Liu

Declaration of Originality

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

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Abstract:

This thesis delves into T.S. Eliot's multifaceted portrayal of "otherness" throughout his evolving literary canon, encompassing his early pre-war poetry in the 1910s, and extending through his significant poetic and dramatic contributions from the 1930s to the 1940s. Anchored in societal constructs of race, gender, colonialism, and anthropocentrism, the term "otherness" is rigorously explored through its manifestations in marginalized figures — those who notably diverge from established societal paradigms.

In this examination, this thesis intertwines themes of race, gender, capitalism, and colonialism, showcasing how Eliot's depiction of "otherness" unveils his layered anxieties concerning these subjects. By contextualizing his work within specific historical epochs marked by pandemics, wars, and the intricacies of colonial history, this research presents a comprehensive understanding of Eliot's engagement with "othered bodies" — those marginalized due to their deviation from prevailing norms. Significantly, Eliot's perspectives on otherness emerge as intricate and multidimensional. They oscillate between reinforcing prevalent societal views and challenging them, thereby painting a diverse spectrum of attitudes. Moreover, a profound exploration into the affective and embodied dimensions of his engagement with otherness unveils both his criticisms and potential reparative pathways. This dual perspective is crucial, especially when highlighting the resistance of some themes, like his anti-Semitic sentiments, to reparative interpretations, while others present more intricate engagements.

By merging critical and post-critical reading methodologies, this thesis aims to underscore the potential of affect and embodiment in contemporary literary discourse. In doing so, the research not only offers a renewed, enriched understanding of Eliot's nuanced relationship with "otherness" but also champions a multifaceted, integrative approach in literary studies — one that navigates the depth of critique while being receptive to post-critical possibilities.

Lay Summary

In this research project, I take a close look at T.S. Eliot, a famous poet and playwright, and explore how he represents the idea of “otherness” in his works. “Otherness” refers to how certain groups of people or things are seen as different or outside the norm, and this can include women, people of different races, people from colonies, and even non-human entities.

Eliot lived during a time of significant social and political upheavals, including wars, pandemics, and shifts in colonial power. All of these factors influenced his view of the world and are reflected in his writing. I examine his works from the 1910s to the 1940s to understand how he depicted these “other” groups.

This thesis’s findings show that Eliot’s views are complex and varied. In some cases, he aligns with the common beliefs of his time, while in others, he challenges them. We look closely at how he expresses his thoughts and feelings about these marginalized groups through his writing, exploring the emotional and physical aspects of his work.

By using a balanced approach that combines traditional literary analysis with newer methods that consider the emotional impact of literature, I aim to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Eliot’s work and its implications for today’s society. This research is not just about critiquing Eliot’s views but also about finding ways to better understand and connect with works of literature, especially when they deal with topics like “otherness”.

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Notes on Editions and Citations

This thesis incorporates a range of T.S. Eliot's works, as listed, using specific editions for a detailed analysis. In-text citations adhere to MLA 8 format and are tailored to the type of work cited. For poetry and prose volumes, citations will mention Eliot's last name, the volume number, and the page number. For Eliot's letters, citations will include Eliot's last name, the relevant date of the letter, and the page number, if applicable. The editions cited include:

1. Eliot, T.S. *The Poems of T.S. Eliot*. Vol. 1, edited by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue, Faber & Faber, 2015.
2. Eliot, T.S. *A Choice of Kipling's Verse*, Faber and Faber, 1941.
3. Eliot, T.S. "The Christian Conception of Education", in *The Idea of a Christian Society*, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1940.
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Introduction

T.S. Eliot has left an indelible mark on the annals of world literature. Over the course of his life, Eliot not only distinguished himself as a significant poet, but also as a towering critic, influential editor, and groundbreaking playwright. Eliot's oeuvre extends across various genres and forms, each fraught with rich symbolism, metaphors, and a labyrinth of intertextual allusions. Works such as *The Waste Land* and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" are hailed as classics of modernist poetry. Through these works, Eliot grapples with an array of themes — modernity's crisis, spiritual barrenness, existential angst—always weaving a complex tapestry of religious, literary, and socio-political references.

Yet, Eliot has not been spared from controversy. Eliot's literary and critical corpus is frequently examined for its portrayal of "otherness". This term, which refers to those perceived as foreign, alien, marginalized, non-normative, or distinct from the "self", carries a multifaceted complexity in Eliot's body of work. It lays bare Eliot's anxieties and apprehensions concerning subjects such as race, gender, colonialism, anthropocentrism, and a discernibly Euro-centric worldview. When we refer to "otherness" in the context of Eliot's work, we are particularly referring to the "othered bodies" that occupy marginalized positions in society — people of color, women, colonized subjects, and non-human entities — who are often defined by their divergence from the "norm". This norm, represented by Eliot's anti-Semitic, Eurocentric and male-centric perspectives, provides a point of departure from which the "other" is defined and through which Eliot's anxieties are expressed. By exploring

the theme of “otherness”, we can unpack Eliot’s multifaceted responses to these divergent figures, thereby exposing the deeply entrenched societal hierarchies and power dynamics that pervade his work.

However, while Eliot’s work has often been critiqued for its expressions of prejudice among other issues, it is crucial to note that these criticisms do not encapsulate all of Eliot’s perspectives. His problematic stances, while resulting in disputes over his interpretation of otherness, do not unequivocally define his entire approach to the “other”. The “otherness” in Eliot’s work allows for the exploration and unpacking of his multifaceted responses to these marginalized figures, thereby revealing the nuanced ways in which his poetry engages with those marginalized or seen as different. Hence, this thesis contends that while Eliot’s perspectives are complex and often align with prevailing societal notions of race, gender, and colonialism, they also exhibit moments of divergence or reparative engagement with the “other”. This exploration delves into diverse forms of otherness in Eliot’s work, particularly in contexts that have been less explored, and seeks to identify reparative potential. Such a comprehensive inquiry aims to foster a more nuanced understanding of Eliot’s complex relationship with the concept of otherness.

This thesis positions T.S. Eliot within broader conversations about race, gender, colonialism, and non-human “otherness”, critically analyzing how he engages with these themes in the context of historical events and societal shifts of his time. In doing so, it endeavors to offer a nuanced perspective on Eliot’s viewpoints regarding race, gender, colonialism, and anthropocentrism in addition to his narrowly Euro-centric

worldview. This work neither seeks to defend Eliot unconditionally nor to unequivocally condemn him; instead, it aims to engage critically with his work and offer a balanced critique, thus steering clear of the pitfalls of absolute prosecution or exoneration.

While critically evaluating Eliot's work, this thesis concurrently employs a post-critical lens to lend complexity to Eliot's legacy. Here, critical methodology refers to traditional literary analysis that emphasizes textual interrogation, historical context, and theoretical frameworks to critique and understand literature. In contrast, post-critical methodology embraces affective, emotional, and experiential aspects of literature, moving beyond critique to appreciate texts for their potential to heal, transform, or offer new perspectives. This thesis argues for the complementary nature of these methodologies, particularly in studying controversial authors like Eliot, with a detailed discussion on their application provided in later sections. This thesis contributes to the ongoing discourse around "otherness" in literature, utilizing Eliot's work as a case study that underscores the importance of both critical and post-critical methodologies. It exemplifies the relevance of these approaches, not just in the realm of Eliot studies, but also in critical practice concerning other controversial literary figures. This thesis affirms the role of critique in contemporary literary studies, advocating for it as an indispensable tool for unpacking the intricate political dimensions of literature. It counters the narrative that critique is either overused or outdated, arguing instead that it continues to enrich our understanding of literature, particularly in relation to themes such as gender, colonialism, capitalism, and anthropocentrism, as evident in Eliot's

work. However, while endorsing critique, this thesis simultaneously acknowledges its limitations and underscores that the post-critical emphasis on affects and embodiment can further our understanding of literature's engagement with "otherness". Taking affects and embodiment into account can also foster a reparative approach towards otherness. This thesis suggests that certain facets of Eliot's work model such a reparative stance, although this approach may not be universally applicable across all his poems or with respect to all issues. The thesis will pinpoint areas where a critical or post-critical approach might be more fruitful in dealing with controversial writers like Eliot. In its broader scope, this thesis proposes Eliot's work as a model for demonstrating how critique and reparative approaches can co-exist. It illustrates how these methods can mutually enrich our understanding of the relationship between literature and social issues, which remain relevant today.

The concept of "Otherness" has been a focal point across various academic disciplines, including literature, philosophy, sociology, and psychology. At its core, "Otherness" delves into the binary opposition between a dominant, often perceived as unified or normative, group and an external entity or entities considered different, foreign, or even threatening. In this context, the dominant group defines its identity in juxtaposition to the "Other", reinforcing its own unity and homogeneity in the process.

Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) represents a pivotal exploration of "otherness", demonstrating how the West defined itself in opposition to an "exotic", inferior East. In this binary, the West emerged as the normative Self, the East its antithetical Other. Through this dynamic, Said exposed a potent form of cultural

imperialism, revealing how perceived “otherness” can contribute to a narrative of dominance and subjugation.

However, it is essential to recognize that “otherness” is not limited to geographic or cultural boundaries. It permeates various social constructs, encompassing dimensions such as race, gender, class, and species, among others. Each of these categories informs the dynamics of Self and Other, shaping individual identities and societal relationships.

In the field of literary studies, “otherness” serves as an indispensable tool for analysis. By examining how a text portrays the “Other”, scholars can unearth the implicit biases, prejudices, and power dynamics embedded within it. This exploration can offer profound insights into the socio-cultural, historical, and political contexts surrounding a work of literature. It allows us to question and challenge the norms and values that a text propagates, prompting a deeper understanding of both the text and the society that produced it.

Conceptualizations of “otherness” have evolved over time, incorporating various theoretical perspectives. For instance, postcolonial studies examine how the colonized are “othered” by the colonizers, while feminist theory scrutinizes the “othering” of women in a male-dominated society. Meanwhile, critical race theory investigates the “othering” of racial and ethnic groups, and ecocriticism contemplates the “othering” of non-human entities. Each of these frameworks exposes a distinct facet of “otherness”, contributing to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of this complex phenomenon.

While acknowledging the utility of critique in unpacking “otherness”, it is also crucial to recognize its limitations. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick articulated in *Touching Feeling* (2002), an overreliance on critique—or what she terms a “paranoid” reading approach—can stifle the emergence of alternative perspectives. Sedgwick introduces the concept of a “reparative reading” approach. Although she does not use the term “post-critique” explicitly, her ideas, emphasizing the significance of affect and embodiment, can be considered as fundamental to what have come to be known as post-critical methodologies. These methodologies aim to move beyond an adversarial relationship with the text, fostering a more reparative or holistic reading that fully embraces the complexities and contradictions inherent in the concept of “otherness”. Thus, Sedgwick can be seen as a significant herald for the movement towards post-critique.

Sedgwick, in her exploration of the role of affect in critique, proposes that affect can itself be employed as a form of critical inquiry. This perspective originates from her identification of paranoia as a common characteristic of critique, a stance that routinely anticipates and uncovers systematic patterns of oppression, thereby stifling potential reparative opportunities. With the concept of “paranoid reading”, Sedgwick illuminates a prevalent trend in cultural studies of “otherness”, drawing attention to its potential limitations due to its recurrent emphasis on exposing oppression, rather than proposing constructive or reparative alternatives.

Despite the potential constraints of paranoid reading, Sedgwick acknowledges its value in revealing the marginalized “other” within dominant discourses. She

underscores the necessity of retaining a vigilant, sharp focus on “otherness” in what she introduces as “reparative reading”. However, she also advocates for a shift beyond the cycle of paranoid reading. In promoting a reparative reading approach, Sedgwick advances the concept of a more constructive interpretation, a perspective that embraces alternative affects and enables the exploration of varied pasts and envisioned futures.

Sedgwick further highlights the importance of engaging with a range of emotions within cultural criticism. Rather than confining ourselves to the realm of paranoia, she recommends an investment in alternative emotions, such as shame and therapeutic hope. These emotions, Sedgwick argues, can present opportunities for repair, contributing to a richer, more nuanced set of epistemological or narrative outcomes than those gleaned from an exclusively paranoid reading.

Building upon Sedgwick’s insights about the limitations of “paranoid reading”, Rita Felski, in her influential work *The Limits of Critique* (2015), embarks on a critical examination of the prevailing methodologies in contemporary literary criticism. While Sedgwick’s characterization of critique as paranoid reading might seem somewhat exaggerated, it serves to highlight the drawbacks of relying solely on critique, a viewpoint that Felski shares and further explores.

Felski asserts that literary studies have become excessively reliant on the hermeneutics of suspicion. This interpretative approach, coined by Paul Ricoeur, assumes surface meanings to be deceptive and endeavours to reveal deeper, often ideologically laden, subtexts. This approach has become the norm and is even seen as synonymous with critical acumen in the literary field. However, echoing Sedgwick’s

critique of “paranoid reading”, Felski questions the effectiveness of such an approach, arguing that it tends to narrow the scope of literary analysis. Echoing Sedgwick's observations on the repetitive and predictable outcomes of paranoid reading, Felski identifies a similar issue with the hermeneutics of suspicion. The incessant quest to dissect and expose hidden meanings often leads to banal and predictable insights. This skeptical mode frequently finds itself stuck in a cycle of continuous negation, where everything is interrogated but little is affirmed or constructively analyzed.

In response to this issue, Felski suggests the concept of post-critical reading, akin to Sedgwick's “reparative reading”. It is important to note that Felski's stance does not imply a complete rejection of critique. Instead, she argues for a more balanced methodology that enriches the traditional skeptical approach with alternative methods. One such method she proposes is the “hermeneutics of affirmation”, an interpretative approach that prioritizes understanding the impact and mechanisms of a text, without attributing hidden intentions.

Further, Felski identifies four modes of engagement — recognition, enchantment, shock, and knowledge — that can foster a more holistic understanding of texts. These “moods” capture the different ways in which readers interact with literature, encouraging a more nuanced appreciation of texts, similar to Sedgwick's emphasis on a variety of emotions in cultural criticism.

Just as Sedgwick stresses the role of affect, Felski underscores in *The Limits of Critique* the significance of the relationship between the text and the critic. She advocates for a shift from viewing texts as mere objects of dissection towards

recognizing a reciprocal relationship, suggesting that texts can also affect and transform critics: “This is ... a recognition — long overdue — of the text’s status as coactor: as something that makes a difference, that helps makes things happen” (12). Felski introduces the concept of resonance as an alternative to the latent extractive or even capitalist model of reading, which encourages viewing texts as resources for extraction (Felski, 2020, pp. 3). The concept of resonance is contrasted with the instrumental approach of viewing the world, and the text, as a repository of potential resources: “Resonance, then, is a relation... a heightened sense of aliveness and connectivity that can assume varying forms. Experiencing the world as relation [is contrasted] to treating the world as resource. The latter denotes an instrumental stance that is geared toward both accumulation and acceleration” (Felski, 2020, pp. 2-3).

The concern for “otherness” threads through both critical and post-critical academic discussion. Both Sedgwick and Felski offer frameworks — reparative reading and post-critical reading, respectively — that challenge the prevailing modes of critique, which are often seen as primarily engaged in unearthing oppressive systems or hidden power structures. Their methodologies, while acknowledging the importance of these critical perspectives, also call for an exploration of different modes of engagement with texts, advocating for a more holistic approach that balances critique with an appreciation for texts’ complexity and potential.

Some critics have raised concerns about post-critical approaches, suggesting that by moving away from traditional forms of critique, post-critical methodologies might lose their critical edge and become more focused on aesthetics. Bruce Robbins, for

example, has voiced reservations about the implications of post-critical reading. He questions whether the post-critical turn leads to a form of reading that becomes disengaged from sociopolitical realities, thereby losing its ability to engage critically with issues of power and inequality. As Robbins puts it, “What the post-critique people seem to be trying to get away from ... is not critique but context” (6).

Adriano José Habed’s analysis suggests that Robbins expands upon Raymond Williams’s 1958 conception of culture in “Culture and Society” as a collection of elements that uplift individuals, offering respite from industrialization, strict positivism, and relentless progress (Habed 503). Robbins assigns a unique role to literature, one that defies societal norms rather than echoing them (61). From Williams’s historical insights, Robbins discerns an inherently critical aspect of culture, positioned in opposition to societal realities (Robbins 61). Thus, critique emerges as more than a philosophical disposition — it is seen as a historical reaction to modernization (Habed 503).

In “Culture and Society” (1958), Williams situates culture as a response to the societal changes brought about by the industrial revolution. It is a unique domain of intellectual and moral activities that counterbalance modern society. Building on Williams’s arguments, Robbins asserts a compelling perspective on the nature of critique. In his view, critique is not merely a philosophical ethos, an intellectual exercise detached from practical realities. Rather, it is a historical response to modernization. Robbins distinguishes literature, not for its mirroring of societal trends, but rather its intentional deviation from them. This unique standpoint emphasizes literature's

potential role in challenging norms, contesting established views, and catalyzing change. For Robbins, the value of literature lies in its capacity to diverge from the mainstream, thereby positioning it as a vehicle for critique and resistance. He takes Williams' observations a step further, seeing culture as inherently oppositional to social actuality. Robbins, building on Raymond Williams's conception of culture, views literature as inherently critical, challenging societal norms. This stands in contrast to the post-critical approach of Sedgwick and Felski, where literature is often seen as complicit with societal oppression, requiring the critic to expose this complicity. Robbins's perspective emphasizes the text's inherent critical nature, while Sedgwick and Felski's approach positions the critic as essential in revealing the text's role in societal dynamics.

Robbins's conceptualization of critique positions it as a form of historical resistance against the prevailing power structures engendered by modernization. Yet, it is essential to consider counter perspectives to this understanding. In response to Robbins, Michael Docherty (2021) challenges the status quo of critique, also known as "suspicious reading". He proposes that this traditional process mirrors colonial extraction techniques, comparing it to critical analysis models that endeavor to excavate beneath resistant ground or trace textual surfaces.

According to Docherty, conventional forms of critique establish sovereignty over their subject texts, mirroring colonial conquest by emptying them from within. This places the critic in a position of power, invoking control and dominance over the text (954). Consequently, Docherty suggests a post-critical approach to address this issue.

This method enables us to contemplate the implicit imperialist attitudes ingrained within the form of critique and to contribute to the decolonization of institutionalized mechanisms of traditional critique. It further promotes the enrichment of textual practices, adding depth and nuance to our understanding of literature.

As we navigate the diverse perspectives of these scholars, a key area of focus is the nebulous, disputed, and occasionally fluid relationship between text and context. This relationship greatly influences the positioning of “otherness”, which underpins much of literary critique. For instance, Felski illuminates the risks of othering inherent in Marx’s ideal of abolishing the working class. She suggests that this stance might overlook the pride and sense of belonging that the working class might have towards their own social strata. Recognition of this sense of belonging, she argues, is crucial.

However, Robert I. Scott (2022) counter-argues that Felski’s premise, which assumes recognition in advance as an ideal, is flawed. He contends that without a fundamental emancipation from bourgeois property and class relations, this presupposed recognition remains an unattainable ideal. Thus, he challenges Felski’s position, asserting that structural changes are a prerequisite for genuine recognition and understanding.

The discourse between Scott and Felski reveals the intricate entanglement of critique and post-critique with the problem of text and context. Debates around whether the working class’s sense of pride and belonging precedes economic betterment mirror the “chicken-or-egg” dilemma. Marx’s *The Communist Manifesto* underlines the importance of a shared proletarian identity and collective struggle. While Marx does

not explicitly address “pride”, his notion of class consciousness —the proletariat’s awareness of common class interests and their exploitation — hints at a form of pride rooted in shared identity and transformative potential. This consciousness, which acknowledges systemic exploitation, can be equated with a “pride” based on collective identity and the potential for societal change.

Nonetheless, recognizing the working class’s pride and sense of belonging does not imply that economic otherness ceases to be a pressing concern. In our contemporary world, where critiques against capitalist and neo-colonialist labor exploitation are pertinent, highly exploitative colonial indentured labor still persists in the Global South. Both emotions of pride and shame are deeply interwoven within the working class’s relationship to their labor, transcending simplistic binaries and highlighting the multifaceted emotional connections they hold with their work.

In a parallel vein, Sedgwick, in “Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity”, reinterprets shame not as a mere negative emotion, but as a transformative force capable of shaping new identities. She postulates an interdependence between pride and shame, with both collectively informing identity and social relations. She contends that pride and shame, rather than being opposites, are intertwined and collectively shape identity and social relations. Even when associated with positive experiences like coming out, shame can emerge alongside pride. Yet, this accompanying shame can spur change, foster empathy, and fuel resistance and solidarity, thereby serving as a potent force in identity formation. Emotions such as shame and pride can be simultaneous and intertwined. Both critique and post-critique

should recognize these emotions in conjunction with their working conditions under capitalist or colonialist regimes, and should aim to envision reparative alternatives. Thus, both critique and post-critique, akin to context and text, should be examined in a closely intertwined manner that can uncover the ‘othering’ of marginalized groups, while also shedding light on their multifaceted affective engagement.

In summary, while post-critique possesses the potential to generate novel insights and innovative engagement with texts, critics like Robbins caution against an overemphasis on aesthetics, which they argue could detract from critical engagements with sociopolitical realities. Robbins’s interpretation of resistance suggests an antagonistic relationship between critique and post-critique, context and text. However, it is crucial to understand that post-critique does not reject resistance or context. In fact, the historical response to modernization is not singular but multifaceted. Post-critique seeks to challenge the limitations of existing critiques, striving to expand our understanding of the various reactions to modernization, particularly in relation to affective and embodied connections. This understanding sets the stage for literature or criticism to explore ameliorative or therapeutic avenues.

This thesis, therefore, aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on critique and post-critique by challenging their often-antagonistic representation, seeking instead to integrate these two perspectives. It adopts a lens of affect and embodiment to investigate otherness. This approach underscores the importance of a contextualized reading of historical backgrounds and their influence on discourses of “otherness”. It retains a critical lens while also incorporating post-critical methodologies to highlight the

affective and embodied connections within these discourses. Concurrently, contextual considerations raise questions about the universal applicability of reparative reading. For example, certain contentious issues, such as the anti-Semitic sentiments evident in Eliot's poems, may resist a reparative reading approach.

In executing this nuanced methodology, the thesis will continually navigate between critique and post-critique lenses to examine various forms of otherness. It remains committed to contextualizing potential discourses in Eliot's poetry, highlighting Eliot's affective engagement with depictions of otherness, and investigating how different affects and embodiments could potentially constrain or liberate Eliot's literary engagement with significant social and cultural issues such as gender, race, capitalism, and anthropocentrism. This integrative approach serves as the consistent thread throughout the thesis.

Reassessing Eliot: Affective Otherness and the Modernist Canon

My examination of T.S. Eliot's works in this thesis is guided by his significant role in shaping the concept of the "classic", as articulated by Ankhi Mukherjee in her book, *What Is a Classic* (2013). Mukherjee's critical engagement with Eliot transcends an assessment of his influence on literary criticism and the idea of the classic. She challenges Eliot's Eurocentric perspective and his contention that classics are the cultural products of a mature society, focusing particularly on Eliot's positioning as an American poet striving to cultivate his European identity whilst advocating a Eurocentric notion of the classic.

Mukherjee, in response, promotes a broadened understanding of the literary canon to encompass traditionally marginalized or excluded voices and perspectives, thereby nurturing a postcolonial and global viewpoint. This thesis aligns with Mukherjee's call for clarity in declaring one's interpretive lens, specifically addressing the "epistemic violence" inherent in colonial canonical formation and other marginalized identities. It underscores the value of analyzing Eliot's works through the lens of the "othered", an angle that includes marginalized groups delineated by gender, race, colonialism, capitalism, and human-centrism. This interpretive avenue provides an opportunity to bypass colonial epistemic violence, fostering a comprehensive reevaluation and reinterpretation of literary classics and encouraging a critical engagement with T.S. Eliot from various "othered" perspectives.

While the reevaluation of classics necessitates a deeper critical engagement with "otherness", Mukherjee argues against reducing literary works to political propaganda and the canonization of literature purely for political representation. Likewise, this thesis's examination of Eliot's works will not exclusively rest on the political representation of the marginalized and the "othered". Mukherjee's argument, which emphasizes the importance of critique in reevaluating classics while allowing room for literature to exceed this scope, leads her to consider aesthetics. This is particularly pertinent in the context of Eliot's poetry, which has walked a fine line between admiration for its aesthetic and linguistic mastery and criticism of his contentious political representation of "othered" groups.

While Mukherjee's approach is instrumental in understanding classics, her

reference to aesthetics can be further enriched with an exploration of affective studies, as demonstrated by Sianne Ngai in her seminal work *Ugly Feelings* (2005). Mukherjee does not explicitly elaborate on her aesthetic considerations, yet it is evident that she posits that literary evaluations should not be solely ideologically driven, suggesting a certain degree of disinterest and autonomy in literature. In this vein, Ngai's work serves as a beneficial extension, illuminating the often nebulous notion of aesthetic disinterest, a concept rooted in Kantian aesthetics. By examining a multitude of affects, Ngai offers insights into how readers interact with literary works, moving beyond a mere appreciation of form or content to a deeper, emotional engagement. This exploration of affective responses not only challenges and expands upon the traditionally understood one-dimensional concept of the sublime as suggested by Kant but also provides a rich context for understanding Eliot's poetics of impersonality.

In his pivotal essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), Eliot articulates an impersonal poetics that resonates with the conventional interpretation of the classical literary canon, emphasizing an unwavering pursuit of a singular aesthetic sublimity. Rooted in Kantian aesthetic philosophy, this sublimity is posited as an entity detached from personal emotions and corporeal existence. While Eliot's oeuvre firmly situates itself within the esteemed realm of literary classics, it simultaneously necessitates a nuanced interrogation of his conceptualization of literary classics. Ngai's focus on affects contributes to our evaluation of classics by deconstructing this one-dimensional hegemonic aesthetic aura commonly ascribed to canonical works. It enables us to consider a spectrum of affects, particularly when examining the representation of

“otherness”, a perspective often unconsciously suppressed by canonical works’ impersonal exterior. Hence, the fusion of Mukherjee’s approach with Ngai’s exploration of affect forms the foundation of this study’s methodology on Eliot. It not only deepens the understanding of literature within ideological confines but also extends beyond them.

Following in Mukherjee’s footsteps and influenced by Eliot’s own journey, this thesis proposes a fresh interpretation of classics and the canon, one that champions an outsider’s perspective through the lens of affects. This reevaluation encompasses Eliot’s lesser-known works and places him within a globalized, multi-identity context. Simultaneously, an affective lens is adopted, aiming to provide a more nuanced understanding of the representation of “otherness” in the reevaluation of Eliot as “the modernist classic”.

Ultimately, this approach aspires to transcend the binary opposition between the deconstruction and unchallenged veneration of classics. It advocates for a more nuanced appreciation of modernist canonical works, mirroring Mukherjee’s plea for a departure from the traditional center-periphery model of literary criticism. Employing an affective lens aids in understanding “othered” groups within “classic” works, fostering a reevaluation of the modernist canon that expands to include diverse demographic frontiers beyond patriarchy, racism, colonialism, capitalism, human-centrism, and the like.

By illuminating the discussion of “otherness”, its relevance to both critique and post-critique, and its significance in the reevaluation of the classics, we establish a

foundation for our forthcoming exploration into Eliot's work. How does "otherness" manifest in Eliot's oeuvre? What insights can we glean from a critical and post-critical examination of his texts? These questions form the cornerstone of my study, guiding us as we navigate the intricate terrain of Eliot's representations of the "other".

Contours of "Otherness" in Eliot

The manifestation of these questions comes alive in our discourse on Eliot's anti-Semitism. The dialogue concerning anti-Semitism signifies a pivotal moment in the reassessment of Eliot's canonical status within modernist poetry, shifting the focus from the endorsement of his formalistic and autonomous craftsmanship. Anthony Julius, a scholar known for his work on literature and anti-Semitism, and Christopher Ricks, a distinguished literary critic and scholar who has significantly contributed to Eliot studies, bring to light the intersections of various forms of "otherness" in Eliot's works. Julius's examination of anti-Semitism in Eliot's work not only points to the presence of this "otherness" but also underscores the role of affect in the author's and the reader's engagement with it. This debate also further emphasizes the importance of contextualizing these affects in relation to their social and historical background. My forthcoming analysis of this exchange aims to deepen the understanding of these multifaceted aspects within Eliot's works.

Recent years have seen a surge in scholarly interest concerning the way T.S. Eliot represents "otherness", with the presence of anti-Semitism in his poetry being particularly contentious. Julius provides a detailed analysis of the specific instances of

anti-Semitism in Eliot's literary depictions. Before Julius, Ricks wrote comprehensively about Eliot's biases, including anti-Semitism. The depiction of "otherness" in Eliot's works, particularly concerning anti-Semitism, has prompted differing perspectives, especially from critics like Ricks and Julius. In 1988, Ricks proposed in "T.S. Eliot and Prejudice" that the biases found in Eliot's poetry were largely a projection of critics' own cultural biases onto the text. Although Ricks's analysis mainly concentrates on gender prejudices, he expands his argument to address alleged anti-Semitism in Eliot's works. Advocating for a New Critical perspective, Ricks emphasizes the autonomous nature of the text and posits that critics' preconceptions can cloud the understanding of Eliot's poetry.

In his defense of Eliot, Ricks asserts that labeling Eliot's remarks about "too many free-thinking Jews" as anti-Semitic may be a hasty conclusion, given the complexity inherent in defining Jewish identity (Ricks 43). To elucidate this, Ricks points out that even a rabbi might disapprove of an overabundance of freethinkers within the Jewish community (43). Extending the discourse, Ricks argues that Eliot's poetry operates within an autonomous realm of wordcraft. This applies even when the material engages with contentious socio-cultural themes. While Ricks accepts the need to spotlight the poet's biases, particularly those regarding anti-Semitism and various forms of "otherness", he insists that Eliot's poetry should not be simplified to mere reflections of these prejudices.

However, Ricks's defense of Eliot runs the risk of neglecting the inherent context and perspective of the poetic persona – elements that are essential to the poetic artifact

itself. For instance, he invokes the hypothetical stance of a rabbi objecting to “too many free-thinking Jews” to dispute the idea of a stereotypical, essentialist definition of Jewish identity. In doing so, Ricks overlooks the nuanced difference between the perspectives of Eliot and the rabbi. Likely, the fictional rabbi is commenting on the issue of “free-thinking”, while Eliot seems to emphasize the perceived threat posed by a stereotyped Jewish racial identity. This interpretation gains relevance in the context of Eliot’s statement about “too many free-thinking Jews” in “After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy” (1933), a lecture championing the significance of a homogeneous Christian society.

Ricks interprets Eliot’s process of poetic creation as a transformative engagement with cultural discourses. He argues that poets like Eliot sculpt the readily available prejudiced discourse into literary language. Once the composition process concludes, despite its potentially contentious source material, the artifact is perceived as having metamorphosed into an aesthetic product, infused with a Kantian sense of impersonality and detachment.

Ricks’s argument anchors Eliot’s poetry within a “high modernist” framework. It suggests that poetry retains an autonomous and detached status, generally transcending its cultural, social, and political contexts. Ricks operates under an underlying assumption that classic works are artifacts, invariably offering more than what critics can interpret. The autonomy attributed to Eliot’s poetry implies that it resists reduction to controversial phrases or words that could be construed as reproductions of prejudice. Further, Eliot’s view of poetry as impersonal and devoid of emotional influence aligns

with the New Criticism's understanding of literature.

Nevertheless, the autonomy championed by New Criticism, and targeted by critics of gender, racial, and class issues, has been unmasked as a façade in Eliot's "high modernist" poetry. Beneath it lies a maze of anxieties regarding various forms of cultural "otherness". The problematic substance of anti-Semitic discourses is prominently apparent in Eliot's work. Thus, Julius proposes that Eliot's work does not rise above the contemporary anti-Semitic discourses of his time. Instead, anti-Semitism intrinsically shapes some of his compositions.

Julius contends that Ricks's portrayal of anti-Semitism as mere prejudice diminishes the inherent violence embedded within Eliot's poetry. Julius contemplates the hermeneutical problem posed by Ricks: to what extent do prejudices against othered identities stem from critics' impositions versus intrinsic manifestations within the poem itself? After the Holocaust, critics are inevitably preoccupied with extreme forms of anti-Semitism. According to Ricks, we should resist the urge to reductively interpret Eliot's anti-Semitic poems — especially those composed pre-Holocaust — through the lens of historical hindsight. Julius concurs, arguing against conflating Eliot's poetic anti-Semitism with the Holocaust. Julius acknowledges the difficulty of exploring the relationship between modernism and anti-Semitism, due to the risk of either trivializing the atrocities of Jewish history or oversimplifying the complexity of the literary movement.

With these challenges in mind, Julius suggests that the discourses of anti-Semitism have shaped Eliot's poetic imagination and underscores the necessity of scrutinizing the

contexts interwoven in literature. He emphasizes that anti-Semitism extends beyond the singular event of the Holocaust, permeating historical contexts and violent episodes throughout Europe and the United States, where Eliot resided. Julius criticizes the scant attention given to the contextual discourses caught within Eliot's anti-Semitic language, contending that Ricks overemphasizes the transcendent creativity of literariness in relation to the issue of anti-Semitism in Eliot's poems. Julius points out the lifelessness of Jewish depictions in Eliot's poetry, such as the portrayal of Bleistein in the mud in "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar". He argues that such depictions may not directly contribute to real-world violence against Jews, but instead enact a parallel form of persecution — one of terror, scorn, and contempt — against their fictional counterparts (38). Julius highlights the uncanny resemblance between the fictional Bleistein and the real victims of the Holocaust, despite poetry's purported existence in a parallel, fictional world separate from the reality of the actual Holocaust. The striking similarity between fictional and actual violence necessitates a reassessment of Modernism's intertwined history with anti-Semitic discourse.

Using Eliot as an example, Julius scrutinizes anti-Semitic discourses within specific cultural and historical contexts, and their depiction in literature. He elucidates how Eliot's anti-Semitic views were shaped by a range of influences, encompassing his American upbringing and exposure to anti-Semitic ideas in Europe. Julius remarks that the anti-Semitic stereotypes of materialistic, wandering Jews were intrinsically tied to the image of America. These stereotypes contributed to Eliot's affinity for Europe and European culture, which he considered superior to American culture.

Julius also sheds light on Eliot's encounter with literary anti-Semitism in France, where writers infused their work with anti-Semitic themes without coming off as crude. This provided Eliot with a literary tradition where unfavorable depictions of Jews were congruent with high-quality creative work. In England, according to Julius, anti-Semitism was more subdued yet pervasive, often expressed through the neglect, exclusion, and marginalization of Jewish communities. English anti-Semitism not only defined social boundaries for Eliot's biases but also fostered a hostility and contempt for Jews that lacked any element of fear. Julius concludes that Eliot's anti-Semitic writings often marginalize Jewish people, either physically or socially, associating them with wandering, materialistic pursuits. Eliot deftly taps into the rawness of these prejudices as a source of poetic imagination, persecuting his Jewish characters within his works.

The discourse around Eliot's anti-Semitism represents a microcosm of broader scholarly debates concerning problematic authors like Eliot, and extending to entire literary movements such as modernism. Discussions by scholars like Julius and Ricks are not limited to this particular prejudice, but instead widen to tackle various aspects of societal discourses related to "otherness". These include gender, capitalism, race, nationalism, colonialism, and narrow-minded forms of religious orthodoxy. Eliot's works have been critically analyzed within these cultural discourses, either separately or intersectionally. This exploration of the representation of marginalized groups within distinct contexts enhances our understanding of how Eliot, as a privileged and canonical figure, has either reinforced or challenged the dominant cultural discourses related to

patriarchy, white supremacy, anthropocentrism, and capitalism, whether purposefully or inadvertently.

Julius's analysis reveals how Eliot's adoption of anti-Semitism perpetuates offensive stereotypes, blaming Jewish individuals as the root cause of capitalism's ills. Therefore, Julius's critique illuminates a method of analyzing the representation of specific forms of otherness in Eliot. Julius asserts that an investigation into anti-Semitism does not necessarily simplify the interpretation of Eliot's poetry. Rather, it sheds light on how Eliot deliberately incorporated anti-Semitic motifs into his creative expression. This thesis will continue to scrutinize Eliot's works from a cultural critique perspective, emphasizing intersectionality and tackling issues of gender, race, capitalism, colonialism, and anthropocentrism.

To encapsulate this scholarly exchange, the contrasting interpretations of Eliot's portrayal of otherness by these two scholars reveal a crucial divergence. Ricks situates it within the autonomous sphere of the poet, urging critics to introspectively examine their preconceived imposition during their analysis. On the other hand, Julius cautions against undermining the linkage between literature and the actual socio-political landscape to prevent oversimplified interpretations. This dialogue highlights the inherent complexities present in both Ricks's approach and the broader cultural critique methodologies when exploring themes of anti-Semitism and other forms of "otherness" within Eliot studies.

While New Criticism and post-critique differ substantially, they share a common concern about the risk of a homogenized critique approach potentially draining

literature of its richness and imaginative power. This shared concern is manifest in the perspectives of both Ricks and Sedgwick. Yet, their viewpoints diverge, unveiling varied attitudes towards literary critique, thereby illustrating the differences between New Criticism and post-critique.

Sedgwick's conceptualization of post-critique, although resonating with New Criticism's faith in a somewhat autonomous literary space, refrains from confining the text's potential to self-referentiality. Sedgwick's reparative reading underscores the significance of contextualizing relevant cultural discourses, an approach inherited from methodologies of critique. Concurrently, she explores possibilities for instigating transformative change within prevailing oppressive structures. Through this, she emphasizes the pivotal role of emotional engagement when interpreting how literary works contend with diverse forms of otherness.

Julius brings attention to the differing affects in Eliot's portrayal of feminine and Jewish otherness. He suggests Eliot is both drawn to and scared of femininity, while Jewish otherness is presented as detestable and untouchable. He identifies Eliot's expressed contempt for women, often conveyed through "defensive posturing and a dramatization of male panic" (22). This is apparent in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", where women are cast as threatening figures, their femininity simultaneously attracting and undermining male power (22). Conversely, Eliot's anti-Semitism has a unique tone, characterizing Jews in an "untouchable abject position" that calls to mind a "landscape in the wake of a pogrom" (22). This seems to reflect an ingrained disdain and revulsion, as opposed to a defensive reaction to a perceived threat.

According to Julius, while Eliot's representation of women allows for possible evolution, his depiction of Jews remains primarily static and devoid of life, implying that his anti-Semitism is beyond repair.

This thesis will expand on Julius's examination of Eliot's emotional engagement with femininity and Jewishness. It will incorporate the historical backdrop of the 1918-1920 pandemics and the Great War to add layers of complexity to these interlinked and divergent emotional representations. Insights from Sedgwick's and Ngai's research on varying emotions, such as paranoia and shame, will be used as alternative knowledge and perceptual frameworks. These studies of affects will enable a better understanding of Eliot's rigid and irreparable representation of Jewish otherness under paranoia, and how shame impacts Eliot's interaction with gender discourses of femininity and masculinity, identifying potential areas for change and a reparative alternative. Concurrently, analysis of other emotions and forms of otherness in Eliot's work will not only underline the physical harm and violence exerted on marginalized groups in Eliot's historical contexts; it will also assist in identifying possible restorative measures in modern scenarios that bear similarities to Eliot's era, an era marked by pandemics, war, capitalism, and neo-colonialism.

The subsequent portion of this introduction will offer a broad review of existing cultural critiques of Eliot's works, such as from feminist and post-colonialist perspectives, thereby setting the stage for later in-depth exploration of various forms of otherness. Julius primarily probes anti-Semitism in Eliot's works, but other critics, such as Lyndall Gordon, accentuate the concept of gendered otherness. Utilizing

biographical resources, Gordon identifies a link between Eliot's misogyny and anti-Semitism, contending that they arise from his ascetic, patriarchal, and orthodox religious beliefs. Her view offers an intersectional lens on religious, gendered, and racialized otherness, contrasting with Julius's stance that distinguishes between the representation of femininity and Jewishness. Gordon proposes that Eliot's narrowly orthodox Christian upbringing was one of the causes of his misogyny and anti-Semitism and she points out Eliot's portrayals of femininity as being suffused with misogynistic stereotypes (36).

Rachel Blau Duplessis further underscores the role of gender issues in Eliot's early writings, which not only left an indelible mark on his personal life but also on the cultural landscape of modernism. Duplessis exemplifies with *The Waste Land*, a poem riddled with gender and sexual conflicts that encapsulate themes of hysteria, impotence, unfulfilled desires, homoeroticism, and degradation. She interprets Eliot's work, particularly his poetry, as a site of conflicting attitudes towards women, sexual energy, and power, while also noting sympathetic representations of male characters wrestling with their masculinity and heteronormativity. The depictions of women in Eliot's later works, especially those penned in the late 1920s, shift from being sexualized temptresses to spiritual guides steering the speaker towards prayer and vigilance. Eliot's societal standing and personal sense of unworthiness are seen as mirroring the paradox of masculinity, a blend of power and powerlessness. Particularly in Eliot's early poems predating the First World War, gender surfaces as the main form of otherness. Expanding on Duplessis's portrayal of Eliot's view of masculinity as a paradoxical

blend of power and powerlessness, this thesis will delve into Eliot's fraught engagement with both feminine and masculine otherness. Special attention will be given to embodied sensory perception and the emotional impacts of shame and exhaustion. The analysis will draw upon a contextually-informed historical comprehension of energy consumption, libidinal exchanges, and imperialism.

Gabrielle McIntyre delves into the intersection of gender and colonialism as presented in Eliot's poetry. McIntyre's extensive examination of Eliot's poem featuring the character Columbo, a colonial explorer loosely modeled after Christopher Columbus, unveils Eliot's portrayal of early European expansion as a narrative laden with excessive and aberrant sexuality. She highlights that the poetry engages in satirical exploration of sexual desire, humiliation, and physical excess as critical components of colonial conquest and expansion. McIntyre posits that the poem's unapologetic focus on sexuality and eroticism provides an innovative critique of the crossroads of cultural memory, erotic desire, and colonialism. Additionally, the poetic form itself exemplifies Eliot's parody of the colonial narrative by combining elements of traditional bawdy verse forms that satirize both historical narratives and literary genres. McIntyre concludes that the poems' explicit portrayal of sex and race, along with their satirical depictions of colonial history, necessitate a radical reconsideration of Eliot's previously assumed detached attitude towards issues of race, sex, and colonialism, as well as the broader context of his poetic and critical oeuvre. She observes, "The pornotropic poems surprise us, illuminating and foregrounding Eliot's obsessions with sexuality, race, and the corporeal" (300).

McIntyre highlights Eliot's subversion of colonial history narratives in his literary exploration. However, David Trotter offered a contrasting perspective in 1986, suggesting that Eliot's literary imagination adheres to tropes of imperialist thought. For instance, in *The Waste Land*, the persona seems to embody a sentiment common in imperialist ideology: "The Imperialists believed that the vitality of their culture or nation could be renewed by journeys to the frontiers of the British Empire" (145). Furthermore, Trotter interprets the depiction of "swarming hordes" in *The Waste Land* as an illustration of Eliot's eugenicist concerns and cultural apprehensions, a perspective that resonates with the racialized "Yellow Peril" imagery of the time (148).

Eliot's complex relationship with imperialism is thus made apparent through the insights of McIntyre and Trotter. More recently, Beci Carver (2020) has argued that Eliot challenges financial imperialism, inspired by the economic thought of John Maynard Keynes and Rudolf Hilferding, while he was working in Lloyds Bank. On the other hand, Trotter's reference to the imperialist "Yellow Peril" trope can be observed in Eliot's racially charged depiction of animality in his poem "Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats", an overtly problematic representation that has not yet been systematically addressed and will be a focal point in this thesis. Moreover, this thesis will enrich the conversation around Eliot's engagement with financial imperialism, with a focus on embodied experiences of libidinal exchange, the commodity market, and colonial agriculture. These perspectives will also be explored in the context of Eliot's written materials during his time at Lloyds Bank.

By investigating the tangible and material engagement with financial colonialism,

this thesis will aim to position Eliot's modernist classic *The Waste Land* within a broader, global context. It will seek to explore the possibility of reparative potential in confronting the neo-colonialist and capitalist global order, fostering affective connections amid the fragmented world depicted in *The Waste Land* within the framework of colonialism. This thesis will also envision alternative modes of nature-cultural interaction that extend beyond traditional anthropocentric frameworks that view the environment and non-human entities solely as potential resources for extraction.

The burgeoning field of Anthropocene and non-human studies concerning T.S. Eliot enriches our understanding of his work from multiple perspectives. This thesis will examine the racialized representation of animality in Eliot's "Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats", further extending the groundwork laid by Emily Essert's exploration of Eliot's use of animal imagery as it pertains to human sexuality, gender, and the human-animal divide. In her illuminating work, "Cats, Apes, and Crabs: T. S. Eliot among the Animals" (2014), Essert probes Eliot's profound and multi-dimensional exploration of sexuality and the human-animal relationship through his extensive use of animal imagery and motifs. Echoing Essert's observations, Henry Hart's "T.S. Eliot's Autobiographical Cats" (2012) reveals a connection between unrestrained femininity and canine figures, drawing upon biographical elements from Eliot's marriage to Vivienne Haigh-Wood. Conversely, feline entities, particularly cats, are depicted in Eliot's work as embodiments of spiritual pursuits.

This thesis aims to build upon the insights of Essert and Hart, highlighting Eliot's

engagement with racialized, imperialistic, and Orientalized portrayals of animality. It also aims to highlight his efforts to dismantle prevailing dichotomies such as human/animal and culture/nature. The thesis proposes that Eliot suggests a moment of reparation via cross-species nature-cultural cooperation. This aspect will be specifically examined through his portrayal of interspecies collaboration as depicted through the character of Gus, the theatre cat, in “Possum”. In addition to the studies focusing on Eliot’s relationship with animality, the field of Anthropocene studies has also expanded to encompass eco-critical analyses of Eliot’s work. Such analyses scrutinize his representations of the environment and climate, thereby adding an ecological dimension to our understanding of Eliot’s oeuvre.

Sarah Kennedy’s analysis (2023) of *The Waste Land* delves into the poem’s reflection of our current environmental crisis. Considering it as both a product of its era and a pertinent critique of our Anthropocene epoch, Kennedy identifies strong ecological themes within the poem, notably “solastalgia”, a term coined by Glenn Albrecht describing emotional distress caused by environmental change. She explores the transformation of the concept of a wasteland, from productive common land to inhospitable location, during Eliot’s era. She positions *The Waste Land* as a critique of the ecological consequences of industrialization, urging a shift towards sustainability.

Kennedy also suggests correlations between Eliot’s wasteland and Central Australia’s landscapes. She introduces indigenous cultures into the discourse, critiquing the cultural disregard for indigenous knowledge’s value. The poem, she argues, encourages readers to consider different locales and communities’ peculiarities,

resisting a reductive vision. It cautions against thoughtless consumption and environmental neglect. Kennedy's analysis ultimately presents *The Waste Land* as a testament of marginalized communities. Despite its desolate portrayal, the poem deftly interweaves themes of environmental sustainability and social inequality, painting a stark picture of the ecological consequences of industrialization. It underscores the pressing need for transformative action, rallying for a world that is not only sustainable but also equitable.

Building upon Kennedy's concentration on affective responses and potential reparative measures, this thesis expands the geographical boundaries of Eliot's poetry by incorporating diverse locales such as Algeria and India, as suggested by Eliot's banking records. This broader contextual framework allows for a comprehensive exploration of the intersections between capitalism, neocolonialism, and ecological degradation. My aim is to enrich the existing discourses on Eliot, the Anthropocene, and global modernisms, thereby underscoring the relevance and enduring impact of Eliot's work in our understanding of the complex entanglements between cultural, economic, and environmental processes.

This thesis also seeks to extend beyond discussions that focus on anthropocentric perspectives in literature, where non-human entities are predominantly viewed through the prism of human utility and capitalism. It explores T.S. Eliot's nuanced and contemplative understanding of non-human ontologies, presenting an alternative perspective on his perception of the natural world and its intrinsic value beyond human-centered interpretations. This involves examining Eliot's engagement with non-human

states and agencies in *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*, enriched by his affinities with Buddhist and Hindu philosophies. This approach seeks to uncover a deep, meditative understanding of the non-human world, offering fresh perspectives on Eliot's work beyond anthropocentric interpretations.

Furthermore, Eliot's cross-cultural and cross-species engagement aligns with Felski's concept of resonance in her pursuit of a post-critique mode that transcends the capitalist mode of reading. Felski's concept of resonance in "Resonance and Education" (2020) is presented as an alternative to the latent extractive model of reading, which treats texts as resources to be mined. Instead, resonance emphasizes relational connections and rejects the instrumental approach that views the world and text solely as sources of exploitable resources.

By adopting the concept of resonance, this thesis aims to unveil the interplay between Eliot's engagement with diverse cultural and ecological perspectives and the critical exploration of the text. It seeks to challenge the instrumental view of texts, revealing how Eliot's contemplative approach fosters a deeper understanding of the non-human world and promotes a mode of reading that transcends capitalist paradigms.

Having conducted an extensive and comprehensive literature review on Eliot's exploration of otherness through the lenses of gender, race, capitalism, animality, colonialism, and the Anthropocene, an outline of the chapters will be presented, demonstrating their engagement with these various forms of otherness while attending to different affective responses and contextual frameworks. The analysis will operate within the realms of critique and post-critique, aiming to identify specific areas where

a critical or reparative approach might yield more fruitful insights when confronting the complexities surrounding controversial writers like Eliot.

In the opening chapter, I explore gendered otherness in Eliot's pre-war poetry, spotlighting the tension between masculine detachment and feminine sentimentality. Through detailed analysis of "Eeldrop and Appleplex" (1917), "Nocturne" (1909), and "Portrait of a Lady" (1915), the chapter challenges Eliot's possible misogynistic representations while introducing a reparative reading that emphasizes the transformative role of shame in countering toxic masculinity. This approach fosters a layered perspective on gender dynamics and seeks to deconstruct long-standing gender norms. "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" (1915) exemplifies Eliot's deviation from traditional gendered sensory experiences, especially within urban contexts. Furthermore, by contextualizing "Preludes" amidst avant-garde trends, the chapter highlights its critique of capitalist productivity, interweaving themes of dominant masculine energy and "othered" femininity.

The second chapter delves deeply into Eliot's engagement with themes of gendered otherness, anti-Semitism, and imperialism, set against the tumultuous backdrop of World War I and the 1918 pandemic. These significant historical events indelibly shape the fabric of Eliot's poetic expressions, giving rise to dominant themes of paranoia and the exclusion of different forms of "otherness" — whether they manifest as women, Jews, or colonial subjects. Drawing extensively from Julius's illuminating study, the chapter positions the 1918 pandemic as a critical lens through which to view and understand Eliot's poetry, with poems like "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" (1918),

“Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar” (1917), and “Gerontion”(1920) emerging as exemplars. The chapter also leans on an immunological framework and Julia Kristeva’s concept of abjection, elucidating the exclusion of “otherness” in Eliot’s poems and essay. While Eliot offers a critique of capitalism, his narratives, tinged with economic anti-Semitism, unfortunately diminish the radical potential of his reflections on the capitalist structure. Ultimately, the chapter underscores the continued relevance of dissecting the interplay of paranoia, war, pandemics, and capitalism in Eliot’s work, reflecting the broader societal constructs and biases mirrored in literature.

Chapter three delves into *The Waste Land*, underscoring its intricate connections with financial colonialism, the Anthropocene, and gender dynamics. Drawing inspiration from Eliot’s experiences at Lloyds Bank and his references to Algeria and India in his writing, the analysis illuminates the larger issues of global financial colonialism and its tangible effects, particularly the environmental and agricultural devastation it triggers. Within the layers of *The Waste Land*, poignant portrayals of violence against femininity and fertility emerge as embodied parallels to the realities of colonial plantations and their environmental degradation. Further enriching this account, Eliot’s discourse on libidinal economy is explored, bringing to the forefront an interplay between the energy market, perceptions of sexual energy, and burgeoning consumerist desires. Following the discussion of colonial agriculture and energy extractivism, the chapter delves into the modernist reinterpretation of the myth of the golden bough, examining it through the dual prisms of colonialism and eco-criticism. This chapter positions *The Waste Land* as a pivotal text via which to comprehend the vast scope of

global financial colonialism and its multi-faceted ecological aftermath, and one that suggests the potential for meaningful reparative measures within the fractured world Eliot paints.

In the final chapter, the analysis will continue to engage with Eliot's ongoing exploration of capitalism, the Anthropocene, and imperialism, all viewed through the lens of religion, given his conversion to Anglicanism in 1927. This chapter will delve further into the examination of Eliot's portrayal of Asian otherness, employing Edward Said's concept of Orientalism as a critical framework, with specific attention given to the anti-Asian stereotypes depicted in "Possum". Additionally, the chapter will explore how Eliot's works, such as *Four Quartets*, demonstrate meaningful and therapeutic cross-cultural resonance and dialogue. While Eliot's Christianity during the 1930s and 1940s often leans towards Euro-centrism, there are indications of his openness to embracing Hinduism, Buddhism, and Chinese arts. By situating Eliot's portrayal of these "unorthodox" cultures within the reparative and postcritical framework put forward by Sedgwick and Rita Felski, the analysis adopts a resonant reading approach that promotes cross-cultural dialogue while actively distancing itself from Orientalist discourses. Through this exploration, the chapter aims to illuminate Eliot's multi-layered engagement with different cultures and spiritualities, along with his complex understanding of capitalism and imperialism, and their intersections with religion and the Anthropocene.

Chapter One: Eliot and Gender: Affects, Senses and Energy

The first chapter of this thesis delves into Eliot's early poetic endeavours, exploring how his personal experiences and the prevailing literary culture of his era shaped his portrayals of gender. Notably, the period's masculine image emphasized detachment — devoid of affect — and vigour, which often left no room for the expression of emotional vulnerability that Eliot subtly channels through his verse. Contrasting his public affirmation of rigid gender roles in correspondence with contemporaries like Ezra Pound, Eliot's poetry reveals attempts to peel away the masculine façade.

The exploration begins with what might seem an unreliable candidate, the poem "Portrait of a Lady". Here, I reveal the coded expressions of masculine anxieties and shame. Although Eliot's letters suggest a staunch endorsement of masculine ideals, this poem opens up a narrative that questions these very gendered expectations, showing reparative potential in introspecting masculinity that grapples with shame and vulnerability.

The analysis then progresses to "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" and "Preludes", where Eliot adopts what was regarded a "feminine" approach to sensory experiences. These poems stand in stark contrast to the male-dominated aesthetic of the Vorticist movement, championed by figures such as Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis. In "Rhapsody" and "Preludes", Eliot's use of intense sensory detail and the portrayal of disempowered male figures subvert the Vorticist celebration of a virile, capitalist view of the human body, fueled like an internal combustion engine, which extends to the libidinal economy of sexual aggression in *The Waste Land*. This subversion not only

challenges the prevailing norms but also illustrates a broader palette of emotional and perceptual experiences that transcend traditional gender boundaries.

This chapter proposes an original investigation into the role of shame, senses, and exhaustion as crucial affects in Eliot's portrayals of masculinity. These affects do not merely reflect emotional states but are pivotal in revealing the complex psychological landscapes of his characters. By engaging with these affects, we can gain deeper insights into the tensions and contradictions that underlie Eliot's poetic constructions of gender identity.

Adopting a reparative reading approach, this chapter explores the possibilities for reinterpreting Eliot's construction of masculinity. This method opens up avenues beyond the critique of Eliot's apparent gender biases. Drawing on Eve Sedgwick's concepts of "paranoid reading" and "reparative reading", the latter emphasizes the variety of affects that can open up spaces for reparation and new understandings. By moving towards reparative readings, I situate my analysis within the ongoing scholarly debate between traditional critique and post-critique.

In the early poetry of T.S. Eliot, composed before the outbreak of the First World War, gender surfaces as a prominent aspect within the expansive motif of "otherness". A letter Eliot addressed to Conrad Aiken on December 31st, 1914, grants insight into Eliot's perspectives on gender and sexuality between 1910 and 1914. Within this correspondence, Eliot elucidates his gendered experiences in Paris and Oxford, particularly mentioning a period of heightened self-consciousness and anxiety related to sexual thoughts and feelings during his time in Paris: "How much more self-

conscious one is in a big city! I have been going through one of those nervous sexual attacks which I suffer from when alone in the city” (vol. 1, 81). This psychological strain may have influenced Eliot’s reflections on assertive masculinity, a perspective that diverged from that of some of his contemporaries. This aligns with the aforementioned Duplessis’ observation of a “powerful powerlessness” in Eliot’s portrayal of masculinity. Such introspections appear to permeate the poetic landscapes of “Preludes” and “Rhapsody on a Windy Night”, works crafted during his stay in Paris, characterized by an ambiance of overflowing sexual desires juxtaposed with a disempowered masculine poetic voice.

Within the same correspondence to Aiken in 1914, Eliot reflects on his Parisian life and suggests, “One walks about the street with one’s own desires, and one’s refinement rises up like a wall” (vol.1, 82). Here, Eliot grapples with a dichotomy between personal desire and societal decorum. Additionally, the letter indicates Eliot’s awareness of pronounced gender distinctions. While he associates Paris with an unrestrained liberation of sexual desires, he concurrently expresses his discontent with Oxford’s atmosphere. Eliot, in his 1914 correspondence with Aiken, mentions his reliance on “a female society”, highlighting a contrast with the predominantly all-male environment of Oxford at the time (vo. 1, 82). The “refinement” Eliot alludes to can be construed as either societal norms or self-imposed limitations stemming from his cultural and familial background, a theme further explored in “Preludes”, which mirrors a Bostonian social setting. Eliot’s expressions indicate the manifestations of an ingrained sense of gender distinction. Consequently, women in his writings often

appear disembodied — entities he yearns to engage with but ultimately perceives through a lens of “feminine otherness”, entrenched in male-centric stereotypes.

This chapter seeks to undertake a two-fold analysis of Eliot’s work. While it critically examines the pervasive feminine stereotypes and marginalization stemming from ingrained notions of gender distinction — much like previous critiques — it also ventures beyond conventional interpretations. This chapter introduces a reparative reading of selected Eliot poems. Instead of solely focusing on manifest misogynistic undertones or objectifying desires, this approach endeavors to interpret the texts through diverse affective lenses. The aim is to carve out a space for reconciliation, thereby envisioning potential avenues for fostering genuine cross-gender conversations within Eliot’s oeuvre.

Lyndall Gordon criticizes Eliot’s portrayal of women, noting an evident “feminine otherness” in his writing. Gordon posits that “Eliot chose to write about woman as a baffling and alien creature, frozen in an image” (36). She enumerates the recurring stereotypes of Eliot’s female characters, including the “romantic ditz, the dangerous seductress, [and] the languid socialite” (36). Such characterizations will be critically assessed in subsequent sections of this chapter. Another illuminating correspondence, this time between Eliot and Ezra Pound, dated April 15th, 1915, delves into how such gendered perspectives influenced Eliot’s literary understanding. He contrasts the rigid academic approach of German institutions with American universities, dismissively remarking that the latter “only have words”, whilst the former “at least have a few facts”. Eliot ascribes superficiality to feminine influences, critiquing wryly what he perceives

as the feminine monopolization of literature. In the same vein, he chides these institutions for their emphasis on “How to Appreciate the Hundred Best Paintings, the Maiden Aunt, and the Social Worker”. Eliot’s correspondence expresses a view that literature influenced by femininity is overly aesthetic and devoid of serious meaning when juxtaposed with “hard facts”. To delve deeper into the nuances of gendered literary and artistic preferences, the theories of Pierre Bourdieu can be useful.

Artistic Gender Dynamics in Eliot’s Early Work

Pierre Bourdieu’s exploration of cultural capital and artistic taste illuminates the intricate interplay of gender and class as instruments of social distinction. During the 1960s, Bourdieu initiated an empirical study in France, delving into the nuances of aesthetic preferences across varied socio-economic backgrounds and genders. His findings elucidated a tendency among upper-class males to adopt a more detached, autonomous, and disinterested approach towards artistic appreciation, often valuing non-conventional aesthetic objects. Conversely, female participants tended to display a pronounced emotional and personal resonance in their artistic evaluations.

Bourdieu’s seminal work, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1979), posits that individual tastes, encompassing aesthetic inclinations, are inextricably tied with one’s social milieu. Such preferences are significantly molded by cultural factors such as upbringing, educational background, social class, and overarching societal constructs. Consequently, within Bourdieu’s framework, it becomes evident that artistic perceptions are predominantly influenced by societal and

cultural factors (including gendered ideological assumptions) rather than by inherent or biologically determined gender differences.

While Bourdieu conducted his experiments in France during the 1960s, he also incorporated early twentieth-century British authors into his discourse on the impact of class and gender on taste, including Virginia Woolf. Woolf criticized figures like H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy, expressing that their works evoked “a strange sense of incompleteness and dissatisfaction”, compelling readers toward action such as “joining a society or, more drastically, writing a cheque” (12). In contrast, certain books, like *Pride and Prejudice*, are described as “perfectly self-contained”, leaving readers with only the desire to revisit them (12). Bourdieu perceived parallels between Woolf’s aesthetic of detachment and the prevailing tastes of the upper class. In his discussions on gender and taste, Bourdieu observed that educated women, or those from an elevated social class, often adopted a detached appreciation of art, potentially as a means to gain acceptance within male-dominated circles (40). He also highlighted the marginalized status of female artists in the early twentieth century. Despite Woolf’s overt expression of a more detached aesthetic, her work was labeled by Wyndham Lewis as subjective, introspective, emotional, and representative of the “feminine phenomenon” of “stream of consciousness” (168). Other contemporaries of Woolf, such as Ezra Pound and F. Scott Fitzgerald, directly associated feminine taste with overindulgence in personal sentiment or intellectual inertia.

Bourdieu’s study illustrates how upper-class males may adopt aesthetic positions as a form of masculine posturing, reflecting societal expectations rather than inherent

tastes. Turning to literature provides an additional avenue for exploration. Examining the works of Eliot, an individual similarly hiding in an aura of masculine detachment, allows for an in-depth investigation into the emotional complexities within his writings. This, in turn, has the potential to further diminish gendered distinctions and contribute to the healing of toxic masculine narratives.

The distinction between sentimentality and reason has further contributed to the unease experienced by male authors when it comes to expressing emotionality in their writing. H.L. Mencken, for example, dismissed Fitzgerald's portrayal of Jay Gatsby, likening it to "the simplistic sentimentality found in a somewhat sclerotic, old woman" (88). Fitzgerald himself acknowledged his propensity for sentimentality and intellectual fragility, attributing these traits to the feminine aspects of his writing: "Women are so weak, really emotionally unstable", yet he confessed, "I think half my mind when I was writing was feminine" (Turnbell 264). Pound, with stark and controversial language, characterized his literary mission as an attempt to rejuvenate what he termed the "passive vulva of London", as stated in his "Translator's Postscript" to Remy de Gourmont's *Physique de l'Amour* (translated as *The Natural Philosophy of Love*) (207). His vision of avant-garde poetics idealized literary writing as being inherently masculine, austere, hardened, devoid of emotion, and impersonal. Pound also expressed his disdain for what he perceived as the feminine taste in literature, condemning it as "weak, flabby and excessively emotional" (207). Frances Kerr encapsulates the modernists' gendered perception of emotional expression, stating: "The modernists' fear of being too lazy, leisured or domestic for the labor of real creation, of being too

emotionally self-expressive in their thinking and writing, and of being popular among those ‘semi-intellectual’ masses — these fears were often expressed as fear of the feminine” (408).

The literary community at the beginning of the twentieth century shared a gendered perspective on emotional expression akin to the findings in Bourdieu’s sociological studies. Feminine taste was construed, through a male-centric lens, as intensely emotional yet inherently weak. The perceived frailty of feminine taste was characterized as limited, confined to the domestic sphere, and passively reliant on the masculine. Women were perceived as intensely emotional, yet lacking the robust agency to control their feelings and effectively participate in the male-centric society. This portrayal of feminine sentimentality emanates from a backdrop of male hegemony. Feminine sentimentality was seen as personal, indulgent, and devoid of broader societal impact. As most women remained confined within their domestic spaces, devoid of public agency, their literary tastes were portrayed as merely consumerist, bereft of the creativity required for artistry. Allison Pease in *Modernism, Feminism and the Culture of Boredom* (2012) observes that the depiction of ennui-stricken women in modernist literature predominantly features upper-middle-class women — those acquainted with art, yet barred from the public creative domain. These upper-class women were painted as bored and inactive, devoid of the capacity to produce intellectual art. This gendered caricature of feminine sentimentality was used for cultural distinction, differentiating women’s perceived inferior literary preferences from the dispassionate, cerebral, and creative male stance. Andreas Huyssen in *After the Great Divide* (1986) articulates that

from the nineteenth century onwards, women were categorized as sentimental readers with a preference for pulpy literature, while men were heralded as authors of objective and disinterested aesthetics (46). Women were relegated to the role of passive consumers of mainstream culture, deprived of the capability to contribute to the creation of art. This literary and cultural gender demarcation echoes the societal confinement of women and their financial reliance on their spouses. Such delineations captured the anxieties of certain modernist authors who dreaded their literature being perceived as domesticated, confined, frail, overly emotional, and inert.

Huysen traces the feminization of mass culture back to nineteenth-century France with his analysis of *Madame Bovary*. Concurrently, in Britain and the United States, there was a similar situation of gender division. Feminine sentimentality and sensibility were framed aesthetically through a male perspective. Anne Anderson highlights that in nineteenth-century Britain, taste became a facet of feminine identity: “Ladies were deemed to be more emotional and sensitive to artistic beauty” while “artistic endeavors like painting and sculpture were deemed too strenuous for them” (Anderson 44). Intriguingly, while women were acknowledged for their innate aesthetic sensibilities, they “required cultivation and refinement”, lest they be beguiled by superficially attractive but substandard items in what were regarded as lower-class establishments (Anderson 45). Anderson’s research indicates that while home decoration was integral to feminine identity in the late nineteenth century, it was often viewed as an innate feminine instinct rather than a serious artistic effort. Consequently, women’s natural inclinations were seen as inferior to the more cultivated artistic tastes embodied by

figures like Oscar Wilde. This association of femininity with nature fostered stereotypes of emotional excess in women, reflecting the era's male-centric ideologies that simultaneously celebrated and patronized feminine artistic sensitivity, often excluding women from the intellectual realm of artistic creation.

Eliot's early years in the United States, before 1910, were influenced by these gender dynamics. Michèle Mendelsohn notes that Oscar Wilde's Aestheticism and appeal to women were sometimes perceived in the U.S. as challenging traditional gender roles (169). However, during the fin-de-siècle and early 20th century, in both the U.S. and Britain, while women were predominantly seen as emotional artistic consumers, they were also active as writers and artists. Their contributions, often trivialized as mere domestic or personal adornment, indeed reflect the period's rigid gender demarcations, which separated domestic from public spheres and emotion from intellect.

The prevalent stereotype associating masculinity with emotional detachment created a complex challenge for male authors. Displaying emotions in their work risked being labeled as "feminine". F. Scott Fitzgerald, for example, attempted to distance *The Great Gatsby* from a perceived female readership while grappling with his own writing style, which he acknowledged as having "feminine" qualities (A. Turnbull 264). In a letter dated October 31st, 1917, Eliot expressed his determination to keep his writing distinctly masculine, revealing a mistrust for the "Feminine in literature". In another correspondence with Ezra Pound on September 23rd, 1917, Eliot expresses his opinion that an overabundance of women "lowers the tone". He references the character Eeldrop,

discussing “the feminization of modern society”. “Eeldrop and Appleplex”, first published in the *Little Review* in 1917, is a lesser-known work in Eliot’s oeuvre. The narrative, categorized as a philosophical short fiction, revolves around two characters, Eeldrop and Appleplex, who engage in deep discussions about modern society and a female artist Edith. The text is known for its exploration of social stereotypes. At the outset, the main characters Eeldrop and Appleplex challenge social stereotypes in their conversation, drawn to a disreputable part of town in their quest to “apprehend each individual soul” (vol.1, 525). This setting and the ensuing dialogue provide a rich backdrop for Eliot’s exploration of gendered themes.

Within “Eeldrop and Appleplex”, Eliot’s portrayal of a female artist unambiguously mirrors gendered stereotypes. Appleplex, with his materialist tendencies, collects information on disreputable cases, while Eeldrop, the mystic, seeks to understand the individual soul through non-materialistic means (vol. 1, 526). They both aspire to transcend social stereotypes, refusing to pigeonhole a drunken man in a restaurant as a “provincial Spaniard” (vol. 1, 526). Eeldrop challenges societal categorizations, yet his mystical leanings occasionally reinforce the very prejudices he seems to challenge, particularly when referencing Edith, a female artist, echoing his deep-seated gender biases.

Eeldrop’s depiction of Edith intertwines rationality with irrationality. He admires her “curiosity and passion for experience”, qualities that have led her across various geographies (vol. 1, 529). Yet, he paradoxically denies her artistic identity, suggesting she lacks the characteristics of a “drifter”, essential to an artist’s nature according to

Eeldrop (vol. 1, 531). Eeldrop's own words elucidate this contradiction: "The artist is part of him a drifter, at the mercy of impressions..." (vol.1, 530). Eeldrop and Appleplex's disdain for Edith's "romantic past, eccentricities, and migration" (vol. 1, 530) is palpable. Edith, in their minds, remains an ephemeral figure, devoid of tangible substance. The underlying message is Eeldrop's apparent eagerness to undermine her artistic potential based solely on her personality traits. Eeldrop's fear of her rationality and simultaneous dismissal of her passion and curiosity highlight their inability to categorize Edith, inadvertently adhering to gender stereotypes despite their initial intent to challenge them. Their analysis deprives Edith of her artistic identity, aligning them with prevailing biases that relegate women to the domestic sphere and out of the artistic domain.

Eeldrop remains steadfast in his belief that Edith lacks genuine artistic talent. His imagination envisions her future as a stereotypical middle-class wife, living with "nothing but a fierce appetite, a maid in her small flat" and a stockbroker husband (vol. 1, 529), effectively quashing her creative aspirations. This anticipated domesticity mirrors societal expectations of women, aligning with Eeldrop's subjective biases. In a different imagined scenario for Edith, she is seen living in a rundown apartment, a struggling artist who must force herself to face another day (vol. 1, 530). Despite acknowledging the inseparability of an artist from their work, Eeldrop offers no meaningful critique of Edith's poetry, dismissing it as a failed artistic endeavor due to her being "too rational but also too irrational" (vol. 1, 530). These debasing remarks,

rooted in contradictory descriptions of rationality and irrationality, resonate with Ngai's concept of the diminished agency attributed to the "othered".

Throughout the discussion, Eeldrop is not truly engaged, opting instead to rely on his preconceived notions rather than considering Appleplex's input. He "prefers to wonder what has become of her", missing the points of Appleplex's remarks (vol. 1, 529). Eeldrop's comments about Edith reveal a masculine irrationality that perceives female artists through a self-contradictory and misogynistic lens. "Eeldrop and Appleplex" ultimately captures the gendered stereotypes pervading Eliot's era: the relegation of women to domestic roles and their perceived inferiority as artists. Women in Eliot's works are more frequently depicted as consumers of art, with their feminine tastes deemed unreliable, reflecting a broader societal tendency to undervalue women's contributions to the artistic world.

Gender Performativity and Shame in "Nocturne" and "Portrait of a Lady"

Eliot consistently associates feminine taste with exaggerated sentimentality. In his poem "Nocturne" composed between 1907-1910, he depicts female readers being moved to tears by a murder scene, interpreting it as a sentimental act of romantic sacrifice. The poem commences with a nighttime rendezvous of Romeo and Juliet, but it takes a dark twist when the "lady" is stabbed and "sinks into a swoon": "Stab, and the lady sinks into a swoon / Blood looks effective on the moonlit ground--- / The hero smiles; in my best mode oblique / Rolls toward the moon a frenzied eye profound / (No need of 'Love forever?'---'Love next week?)" (ll. 9-13). The classic romantic

narrative is subverted, transformed into a tale of murder. The hero, rather than being a sentimental Romeo, is a murderer, smiling at his crime. The poetic persona, disenchanted, finds the romantic encounter between Romeo and Juliet dull and clichéd: “Beneath a bored but courteous moon; The conversation failing, strikes some tune banal” (4-6). In an ironic twist, the poem concludes with the female readers in tears, proclaiming this to be “the perfect climax all true lovers seek” (14). In the poem, a feminine readership comes across as ensnared by its emotional attachment to the classic romantic conclusion, overlooking the metamorphosis of a love narrative into an act of brutality. Feminine readers are portrayed as so engrossed in their sentimental attachment to their “Romeos” that they lose sight of reason and agency. In stark contrast, the poetic persona stands detached, unimpressed by the original story and distanced from the women’s sentimental tastes. Within the brief scope of “Nocturne”, Eliot’s portrayal of women adheres strictly to stereotypes, cohering with Eliot’s aforementioned attempt to defeminize literature by rewriting the romantic classic. The use of Romeo and Juliet as a motif is also mirrored in another of his works, “Portrait of a Lady”. While the male persona in “Nocturne” successfully adopts the guise of a distant and ironic observer, “Portrait of a Lady” tackles similar gender stereotypes, yet the underlying affective tone dismantles the purported ideal of masculine detachment and rationality.

Composed in the same period as “Nocturne”, “Portrait of a Lady” captures the complexities of gendered interactions. The poem spans the course of a year, where the male poetic persona and the lady engage in seemingly intimate yet ultimately

superficial conversations. The lady, nostalgic and emotional, expresses her sentiments and loneliness, while the young man maintains a detached and observant stance. Through musical and theatrical imagery and intertextual references, Eliot explores themes of gender distinction, the performative nature of social interactions, and the contrast between genuine sentiment and superficiality.

The lady in “Portrait” appears to align with Lyndall Gordon’s list of feminine stereotypes: “the gushy romantic, the dangerous enchantress, the languid socialite”. She is portrayed as a Bostonian socialite who attends concerts and expresses overtly romantic views about music. The speaker in the poem clearly despises her taste and tries to detach from her. Like Gordon, Rachel Potter in “T. S. Eliot, Women and Democracy” (2009) also points out that Eliot associates bourgeois femininity with romantic egotism and that he also mocks “the cadences and sentiments of pretentious Boston drawing rooms” (224). Eliot’s portrayal of the lady appears offensive and misogynistic to many readers. However, Cyrena Pondrom argues that Eliot “refuses to ally with either figure in ‘Portrait’ but instead offers a critique of the gender roles that each acts to the fullest” (328-329). Pondrom points to the fact that the gender roles of the lady and the man in this poem are artificially performed to the fullest from a single perspective of the masculine poetic persona. Building on Pondrom’s analysis, this thesis interprets the exaggerated and unreliable performativity of gender roles as the male persona’s underlying shame and his defensive response to it.

Like in “Nocturne”, “Portrait” invokes the trope of Romeo and Juliet to highlight the gendered artificiality and performativity. The poem unfurls in a meticulously staged

setting, pervaded by a dull and lifeless ambiance. The male speaker adopts the viewpoint of an observer, viewing the lady's behaviour as if she were orchestrating a theatrical play. He portrays her as immersed in performance, meticulously preparing every detail: "Prepared for all the things to be said, or left unsaid" (I, 7). Through this lens, the lady's actions seem contrived, an elaborate display of feminine sentimentality in the male speaker's eyes. The speaker draws a parallel to "Juliet's tomb," alluding to the quintessential tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, traditionally synonymous with romantic fervor. However, the speaker's depiction emphasizes the inauthenticity of the scene: "You have the scene arrange itself — as it will seem to do — with 'I have saved this afternoon for you'" (I, 2-3). The lady's performance appears insincere, a crafted display of emotions. The depiction of gendered performance in "Portrait of a Lady", particularly through the lens of the male gaze, underpins the socially constructed nature of gender roles, illuminating how these roles are performed rather than inherently possessed. However, more importantly, this portrayal, coming from a single masculine perspective, does more than merely highlight the performativity of gender — it also reveals the undercurrents of masculine anxiety. By framing the woman's behavior as a calculated performance leading to the demise of the male, the poem inadvertently exposes the male persona's deep-seated fears and insecurities. The choice of Juliet as a reference point is particularly telling; she is a character who embodies intense emotion and tragic love, and in this portrayal, she becomes a symbol of feminine allure and deception, a figure set on a stage to perform a role meticulously designed to captivate and, ultimately, lead to destruction.

“Portrait” delves into the gendered dichotomy of masculine detachment and feminine sentimentality by revealing the intricacies of desire, interpretation, and representation. Eliot’s personal correspondence to Conrad Aiken on September 30th, 1914, is illuminating in deciphering the subtext of “Portrait”. In this letter, Eliot associates wax candles with sentimentality, nicknaming himself “sentimental Tommy” when alluding to their presence. The context becomes even more illuminating when one considers his subsequent remark about his longing for feminine affection: “I should find it very stimulating to have several women fall in love with me”. This intersection between wax candles, a longing for feminine affection, and sentimentality in Eliot’s personal life grants a deeper layer of understanding to the setting in “Portrait”. The staging is not merely a random backdrop. The wax candles, given their associations in Eliot’s personal narrative, become emblematic of a space charged with feminine sentimentality, romantic imagination, and an underlying masculine desire. However, central to the scenario is the exposure of the male speaker’s latent desires. Recognizing this concealed longing adds layers to the portrayal of the lady. By highlighting this masculine desire, it not only reveals his own desire in contrast to the detached persona he wishes to maintain in the poem, but also leads readers to question whether the portrayal of the lady is an amalgamation of his desires, biases, and predispositions.

The speaker maintains a pronounced detachment, striving to distance himself from what he perceives as the lady’s poor taste and excessive sentimentality. The lady’s appreciation of Chopin is intensely sentimental, aligning with Romantic ideals. She places herself in an intimate circle of Chopin aficionados, expressing a personal

connection to his work: “So intimate this Chopin, that I think his soul should be resurrected only among friends, some two or three” (I, 10-12). Music becomes a vessel for the expression of feminine sentimentality and subjectivity. The speaker’s resistance to the lady’s artistic taste becomes apparent in his description of the music: “Among the winding of the violins / And the ariettes / Of cracked cornets / Inside my brain a dull tom-tom begins / Absurdly hammering a prelude of its own / Capricious monotone” (I, 29-34). Eliot sabotages the original Romantic piece, emphasizing the speaker’s distance from the lady’s sentimentality.

In Eliot’s depiction, there is also a clear gender dichotomy between the public realm, dominated by males, and the domestic sphere, associated with femininity. The male persona in the poem consciously distances himself, engaging with public affairs and aligning his time with public clocks, as illustrated by the lines: “Admire the monuments / Discuss the late events / Correct our watches by the public clocks” (I, 37-39). In stark contrast, the lady’s world is limited to the confines of her home or salon settings.

This association of femininity with domesticity is captured by specific objects referenced in the poem, ranging from bric-a-brac and tea to various decorations. The household’s bric-a-brac was popularly seen as reflecting feminine decorative tastes in the nineteenth-century United States (Anderson 45). Joyce E. Chaplin (2014) also notes that, in the late nineteenth-century U.S., women were prominently tied to the tea table (156). Notably, women were positioned as consumers rather than producers in this context, emphasizing their role within the domestic sphere (156). Eliot’s portrayal of

women thus reflects a patriarchal viewpoint, one that not only restricts their presence to limited circles but also objectifies their tastes and aesthetic choices.

The speaker's detachment from the lady's feelings is also prominently reflected through the stylistic elements of her speeches. The lady often resorts to repeated and lyrical phrases filled with sentimentality. One notable instance is: "You do not know how much they mean to me, my friends / And how, how rare and strange it is, to find / In a life composed so much, so much of odds and ends / (For indeed I do not love it ... you knew? you are not blind! How keen you are)" (I, 19-23). Such repetitiveness, with phrases like "in a life composed so much, so much of odds and ends" and "you let it flow from you, you let it flow", emphasizes her nostalgic lamentations for her lost youth and feelings of shame for not seizing her time. However, the poetic persona's response to these heartfelt outpourings is notable in its absence. He seems to merely observe and record her sentiments without engaging with them, emphasizing his detachment. The lady's speeches, though laden with emotion, are perceived as monotonous by the speaker, echoing his earlier remarks on music. Through both musical and literary engagements, the poetic persona appears to navigate a landscape of emotion. These mediums not only expose his underlying confession of shame but also serve as conduits, bridging the initial chasm between him and the lady at the end of the poem. The music of "some common worn-out songs" (II, 40) from a street piano breaks down the male persona's self-possession towards the end, evoking memories of his concealed emotions. He recalls "things other people have desired" (II, 42) through familiar sentimental images recurring in the lady's monologues: the hyacinth, sunset, and

garden. The poetic persona now seems influenced by the very elements he sought to distance himself from: the perceived sentimentality and performativity associated with “feminine taste”. The piano music resonates with him instead of causing noises in his head as it did earlier in the poem, and the Romantic lamentation of the lady’s speech over the buried life reverberates, conveyed in a similarly “feminine style”.

Distancing oneself from personal inclinations or bonds, particularly from the lady’s preferences, seems symptomatic of a defense mechanism steeped in shame. The subsequent scene vividly portrays the male persona’s desperate search for words to mask his humiliation: “And I must borrow every changing shape / To find expression ... dance, dance/Like a dancing bear / Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape” (III, 26–29.). His humiliation stems from her direct exposure of the emotional distance between them: “I have been wondering frequently of late / (But our beginnings never know our ends!) / Why we have not developed into friends” (III, 13-15). The scene unfolds as the poetic persona is about to travel abroad. It seems plausible to infer that he was anticipating yet another “performance” from the lady, a display of sentimental farewell. However, the lady’s candid confession and directness appear to shatter his previous perceptions of her feminine taste and enacted sentiments. He confronts not just her genuine emotions, but also the reflection of his own projections of femininity. This forces him to grapple with his own masculine desires and the facade of detachment he has maintained.

Both Gordon and Pondrom remark that humiliation stands as a pivotal emotion in “Portrait” (Gordon 65; Pondrom 328). To delve deeper into the affect of shame exhibited in the poem, Elspeth Probyn’s perspectives in *Blush: Faces of Shame* (2005)

can be illuminating. Probyn articulates that shame is experienced when one's affective investments are disrupted, resulting in a crisis of identity and a severed connection between the self and others (71). In this instance, the poetic speaker's affective bond with the lady is abruptly disrupted, challenging his detached masculine identity and placing his gender identity under scrutiny. This disruption is palpably felt in his language, marked by broken lines and ellipses: "To find expression ... dance, dance" (27). The masculine persona loses mastery over his body and speech, aligning with Probyn's assertion that shame can physiologically infiltrate a person, bypassing cognitive control (71). Initially, the poetic persona conceals his affective resonance with the lady behind a façade, framing her actions and words as mere performances of femininity, while also deliberately detaching from and even disparaging "feminine taste". However, his loss of control in speech and action, as he succumbs to the overwhelming influence of shame, reveals a rupture in his self-perception, casting doubt on his views of both the lady and his own masculinity. This affective resonance with what he has labeled as feminine taste exposes the fragility of his desired image of masculine detachment, indicating his internal conflict of gendered identities.

Eve Sedgwick's theories on "reparative reading" and "paranoid reading" in *Touching Feeling* (2003) delve deep into gender dynamics through the lenses of shame and humiliation, offering an insightful take on their reparative potential. As discussed in the introduction, Sedgwick observes that cultural critique often gravitates towards a "paranoid" mode of reading, which emphasizes unveiling systemic oppressions and crafting strong theories against similar oppressions in the future (130). But Sedgwick

contends that paranoia is but one form of knowledge, and we should create space for other affective forms of knowledge.

In her work, Sedgwick centers on shame when critically analyzing gender dynamics in literature. She paints paranoia as a rigid defensive narrative, echoing a repetitive temporal cycle: “it happened to my father’s father, it happened to my father, it is happening to me, it will happen to my son” (147). On the other hand, reparative reading — like the kind focusing on emotions such as shame or hope — offers readers a chance to break free from this loop. It paves the way to contemplate alternative pasts and futures, fostering more nuanced epistemological or narrative pathways (146). Importantly, it is not about rejecting systematic oppression. Instead, after recognizing this oppression through paranoid reading, reparative reading discerns the avenues for healing and restoration. As Sedgwick articulates, “It is sometimes the most paranoid-tending people who are able to, and need to, develop and disseminate the richest reparative practices” (150). When it comes to Eliot and gender dynamics, revelations of gender oppression by feminist scholars like Potter and Gordon have paved the way for nuanced discussions centered on shame and a reparative interpretation of the poem.

Within the framework of paranoid and reparative reading, it is fitting to delve into the gender complexities in “Portrait” that can be explained via “paranoid reading”, primarily the gender role expectations that humiliate the poem’s speaker. From the perspective of “paranoid reading”, the male speaker’s unease with femininity translates into him confining the lady within gendered expectations. Given that the lady’s portrayal stems solely from the humiliated speaker’s perspective, there is room to

suspect that perhaps her “enchantress” characterization merely functions as an excuse for the speaker’s fragile masculinity. His detachment and contemptuous demeanor stem from societal expectations surrounding masculinity, hampering genuine communication and culminating in the climax of his humiliation.

Yet, a pivotal shift emerges towards the poem’s conclusion, transitioning the shame dynamic from a lingering memory tainted with masculine anxieties to an avenue for reparative introspection. Reflecting upon his past with the lady, the speaker strives for reconciliation, dissolving the previously rigid gender boundaries. Eliot illustrates the collapse of emotion-bound gender politics as he writes in the lady’s style. Echoing her sentiments regarding the passage of time, the speaker seems to abandon his detached, masculine artist persona, adopting her sentimental tone with repetitive phrasing and similar images to highlight his regrets, as evident in lines like “You let it flow from you, you let it flow” and references to the fleeting nature of time such as “Yet with these April sunsets / that somehow recall / My buried life”. The closing sentiment, “Well! and what if she should die some afternoon / Afternoon grey and smoky, evening yellow and rose / Should die and leave me sitting pen in hand” (III 32-34), further mirrors this alignment, echoing shared concerns over the irreversibility of time.

Yet, the speaker momentarily reverts to masculine paranoid terminology, introspecting on the dynamics of their relationship. Yet, contrasting his earlier defensive gesture, he now leans into his own vulnerability, giving her the advantage: “Doubtful, for a while / Not knowing what to feel or if I understand / Or whether wise or foolish, tardy or too soon ... Would she not have the advantage, after all” (III 35-38).

This hesitation mirrors his yearning for a divergent outcome. The poem's conclusion, where the speaker contemplates the potential loss of the lady, suggests reparative potential. This reflection is not just about regret; it is a recognition of the superficiality in his perception of their relationship and her fading presence. It is reparative in the sense that the speaker, acknowledging these overlooked aspects and his own emotional shortcomings, moves towards a deeper understanding and appreciation of the lady beyond his initial stereotypical views of her femininity. This introspection represents a shift from defense to a more empathetic engagement. In this reparative quest, he seems finally to accept his shortcomings not just in conveying his emotions but in overlooking the lady as a real person and misunderstanding her via a stereotypical portrayal of sentimental femininity. The portrayal of shame thus captures both the defensive reflex in response to past events (as seen in the early poem's gender performances) and the reparative potential to genuinely surpass entrenched gender biases.

The poem culminates in an altered emotional state in which the gendered division is temporarily repaired. The poetic persona reverts to musical references, which have previously been deployed to exaggerate the lady's sentimentalism, and aligns them with Orsino's experience in *Twelfth Night*: "This music is successful with a 'dying fall' / Now that we talk of dying— / And should I have the right to smile" (III. 39-41). The smile represents a positive embrace of past shame. However, his contemplation of mortality awakens memories of the lady's musings on time, leading to his hesitation to smile. Ultimately, the poem encapsulates the persona's emotional changes: remorse over past shame, recollection of his interrupted desires, joy in reconciling these

sentiments, and melancholy regarding loss and the past. The poem not only exposes misogynistic stereotypes but also reveals the psychological toll that these stereotypes impose on all involved. This emphasis on shame offers a reparative lens, showcasing the speaker's gradual transcendence of these gender constructs.

It is crucial to note that reparative reading does not overlook the entrenched gender biases within the poem. Even if the speaker attempts to reconcile the gender division by adopting the lady's sentimental style at the end, the poem still reinforces stereotypical gender division. Yet, one can also opt for a different reading that could construct a space for reconciliation, even if such a space may seem to be too personal or utopian. Sedgwick articulates: "The vocabulary for articulating any reader's reparative motive toward a text or a culture has long been so sappy, aestheticizing, defensive, anti-intellectual, or reactionary that it's no wonder few critics are willing to describe [it]" (150). It remains vital to explore diverse emotional responses when engaging in cultural critiques like gender analysis in literature. Seeking a realm of reconciliation not only enriches the discourse but also envisions a future where existing gendered notions of otherness and estrangement can be transcended.

Despite the potential of reparative reading, its application to Eliot's works has its boundaries. Texts like "Nocturne" and "Eeldrop and Appleplex" offer scant evidence for a reparative interpretation, serving more as mirrors reflecting the gender biases ingrained in Eliot's writing. If Eliot does not sufficiently distance himself and introspect his masculine anxieties and paranoia, reparative reading would seem to be an elusive choice of interpretation that inadvertently reinforces the underlying patriarchal

dominance. “Portrait of a Lady” embodies the potential for reparative reading, and similar interpretative approaches could be applied to other Eliot poems, such as “Preludes” and “Rhapsody of a Windy Night.”

Senses, Energy and the Avant-garde

Contrary to “Portrait”, where femininity is intertwined with domestic realms, “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” and “Preludes” depict femininity in relation to another space: the street. As previously noted, Eliot wrote the latter two poems during his stay in Paris, capturing his experiences of uninhibited desires on the streets of Paris. In “Portrait”, the masculine detachment is directly portrayed, almost as an intentional barrier between him and the lady. However, in “Rhapsody” and “Preludes”, this masculine detachment remains evident, and yet is depicted as being more profoundly challenged than in “Portrait”. In “Rhapsody”, masculine detachment is largely framed by the gendered hierarchy of sensory perception, whilst “Preludes” depicts such masculinity as a passive weariness, marked by drained vitality.

Eliot’s “Rhapsody” and “Preludes” found their place in the avant-garde magazine *Blast* in 1914. Ezra Pound, in his 1914 article “Vortex”, emphasized a visually-focused art perspective, defining the vortex as “The point of maximum energy... using only the primary media of art. The primary pigment of poetry is the IMAGE” (153-154). This vision associated masculinity with energy and form, highlighting a longstanding hierarchy of senses in European philosophical tradition. As Constance Classen notes, many European mythologies historically assigned reason and sight to male gods and

darkness and irrationality to female deities (69). The moon, central in “Rhapsody”, resonates with this gendered imagination. Pound and Lewis’s avant-garde stance also echoes F.T. Marinetti’s celebration of machines, reflecting capitalist mechanics. Yet while appearing in *Blast*, these two poems by Eliot subtly engage with these themes. “Rhapsody” immerses itself in the “feminine” senses of touch, taste, and smell, departing from the lamp’s illumination (representing sight), whereas “Preludes”, visually-oriented, exudes weariness, almost rebelling against the magazine’s masculine ethos. Given this context, this section aims to reinterpret Eliot through the lens of embodiment, energy, the senses, and their intersection with avant-garde movements, specifically Vorticism, Imagism, and Futurism.

The gendered idea of masculine detachment shaped the sensory hierarchy. In “Rhapsody”, all senses are vivid, except sight. Carolyn Korsmeyer in “Taste And Other Senses” (2017) and Robert Jütte in *A History of the Senses* (2005) provide in-depth explorations of the historical links that associated masculinity with the “upper senses”, particularly sight, in European tradition, while femininity was linked to the “lower senses” like touch, taste, and smell.

Korsmeyer points out that the senses of sight and hearing were privileged in the philosophical tradition because they were considered to be more distanced from bodily existence (20). Jütte traces the origins of this sensory hierarchy, noting its varied manifestations across different cultures, and identifying its roots in Aristotle’s theories on the soul (61). Korsmeyer notes that philosophers across ages have solidified this hierarchy, often demeaning the bodily pleasures associated with the lower senses. For

example, Korsmeyer argues that Kant's benchmark aesthetics of disinterest excludes sensory pleasures from the pure appreciation of art (6). Eliot's philosophy professor George Santayana also deemed the pleasures derived from taste and smell inferior to those of sight and hearing (107). Henri Bergson, to whom Eliot's "Rhapsody" directly owes a debt, also positioned images at the core of attaining an idealist vision. Bergson in *Matter and Memory* (1911) believed that the images in pure memory are "perceived when his senses are opened to them, unperceived when they are closed" (1). The bodily senses are regarded as merely the tools for reaching the images of an idealist vision. In *Creative Evolution* (1907), Bergson concludes that "the mechanism of our knowledge is of a cinematographical kind", underscoring a visual-centric epistemology (306). Susan Sontag, in *On Photography* (2014), expresses her concerns with such discourse, articulating the power dynamics inherent in visual knowledge and their implications for questions of dominance: "[Photograph] puts one into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge, and therefore power" (4). This visually-centered knowledge can be related to the masculine power of dominance.

For the modern era, Constance Classen indicates that despite Futurism's initial interest in other senses, the movement in Italy remained visually dominant (128). Aimée Boutin in "Rethinking the Flâneur: Flânerie and the Senses" (2012) also advocates that the study of the flâneur should shift its focus from the panoramic elements to other sensual experiences (124).

The gendered division connoted by the hierarchy of senses was also evident in literary movements in the twentieth century. Korsmeyer underscores the gendered

nature of this sensory ordering, illustrating how it perpetuates stereotypes of irrational, sensory-bound femininity versus rational, detached masculinity (32). This ties back to the theme of masculine detachment and feminine sentimentality, casting women as inferiors requiring male regulation of their senses and emotions. This dichotomy extends into a hierarchy that positions the masculine mind above the feminine, urging a detachment from the lower bodily senses and maintaining a rational, intellectual sight. Korsmeyer exemplifies with Kant's view that "the man develops his own taste while the woman makes herself an object of everybody's taste" (222). The male perspective viewed women as inconsistent observers and mere subjects of the male gaze. Korsmeyer also points out that in the patriarchal fantasy, women were associated with food to be consumed and the passive objects of sensual touch (168). Thus, associating women with the "lower senses" became a patriarchal tool, both elevating "high" art and objectifying femininity. Such stereotypes necessitated the masculine intellect to distance itself from the feminine's embodied senses and retain a rational, observant perspective.

The gendered interpretation of senses was prevalent in some twentieth-century literary movements. Constance Classen delves into this by exploring the moon's literary representation. Korsmeyer and Classen both highlight the connection between femininity and the lower senses (93). Classen posits that the sun god Apollo represented the masculine light ideal, while the moon's darkness was often seen as feminine. The moon, with its changing phases, contrasted with the sun's consistent presence. By the sixteenth century, the moon had links to senses like taste, touch, and smell (69).

Feminine senses were perceived as threatening to masculine detachment and rationality. The Latin word for moon is the root for “lunatic”. Associating feminine senses with insanity parallels the imagery of witchcraft. The senses of women were deemed as enchanting, capable of destabilizing male reason. Classen notes that the story of Eve connects the “evil woman” trope with taste. She was the epitome of wicked femininity, believed to be manipulated by the devil in terms of sight and hearing. In early modern England, witches, while associated with repulsive smells and toxic cooking, could allure men with their deceptive appearances (Classen 80). In Ireland, it was believed that a witch’s gaze was poisonous to men (Classen 81). These feminine stereotypes, linked with volatility, insanity, and inferior senses, have origins in Greco-Roman myths and Christian beliefs, persisting into the twentieth century.

The moon, symbolizing femininity, was a debated emblem in various twentieth-century literary currents. F.T. Marinetti’s *Let’s Murder the Moonshine* (1909) advocated for eradicating the moon in art, equating it to abolishing femininity (46). The Futurists detested the Symbolists’ darkness, dubbing them the “last lovers of the moon” (Classen 127). They championed avant-garde, virile, and luminous artistic ideals. Pound resonated with this perspective, pioneering the visually-focused Imagist movement. Allyson DeMaagd argues that in H.D.’s “Imagist” novel, *HERmione*, the emphasis on vision aligns with traditional male perspectives, a stance Hermione resists or fails to embrace (33). Conversely, Eliot’s “Rhapsody” occupies a nuanced space, as it wavers among various literary movements regarding the moon, senses, and femininity.

“Rhapsody” was first published in Wyndham Lewis’s avant-garde magazine *Blast* in 1914. In *The Poems of T.S. Eliot* (2015), Ricks and McCue draw attention to Eliot’s acknowledgment of Laforgue and French Symbolism’s influence on his work (418-419). Laforgue’s poetry often weaves themes of the moon, madness, and geraniums (418-419). As previously established, Pound and Lewis firmly opposed literature’s “feminization”. Pound’s critique of Symbolism mirrors Marinetti’s, both displaying a disdain for femininity within literary contexts. In the article “On Vorticism”, Pound saw Imagism as expanding poetry’s boundaries to more direct visual representation, a stark contrast to Symbolism’s “mushy techniques” (201-203). Vincent Sherry, in *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism* (1993), suggests that Pound’s ideogrammatic aspiration within Imagism purposefully neglects the auditory essence of the Chinese language, favoring a visual focus (61). Sherry interprets “mushy” as being primarily about sound (61), but the term also encompasses softness, tactile experience, and over-sentimentality, alluding to the descriptors of femininity given by male-centric authors. Pound’s misogynistic aversion to Symbolism seems rooted in its perceived “mushy” femininity. Similarly, Marinetti disdainfully termed Symbolism the “last sickly lover of the moon”. This analysis reveals Pound and Lewis’s adversarial view of Symbolism. Yet, Pound and Lewis’s *Blast* published Eliot’s Symbolist-inspired poem. Given this, Marjorie Perloff (2011) perceives “Preludes” and “Rhapsody” as incongruous to “the vituperative, scorn and exuberance” of the avant-garde ideology (253). I aim to reveal how “Rhapsody” can be related to the gendered ideology of some

of Eliot's contemporaries concerning bodily senses and how "Preludes" contrasts with the avant-garde propaganda in *Blast*.

In "Rhapsody", the portrayal of masculine detachment relates to the senses of vision and auditory perception. As argued earlier, these senses, given the distance between the observer and the observed, are deemed superior and masculine. This distancing was regarded by many European philosophical traditions as the guarantee of rational or intellectual thinking. In "Rhapsody", the male persona seems to melt into a state of irrationality or madness: "Dissolve the floors of memory / And all its clear relations, its divisions and precisions" (ll. 5-7). Nevertheless, the poetic persona remains detached from his surroundings. The entire poem is structured by the pronouncement of time, the lamp's voices and the male persona's seemingly digressive thoughts during a midnight stroll in the street. In the poem, the protagonist continually observes from afar, maintaining a distance from the "danger" of the woman's pin-shaped eyes. The male persona's detachment and objectivity manifest through the emblem of nocturnal luminosity.

This poem's juxtaposition of masculinity and sight is evident in its utilization of "feminine" motifs such as nighttime, lunacy, and subdued senses. For example, the moon is anthropomorphized as a woman, shrouded in night's obscurity, "who has lost her memory" (l. 55). The poem's portrayal of the moon also taps into traditionally feminine sensory experiences: "She smooths the hair of the grass"; "The smell of dust and eau of Cologne / She is alone / With all the old nocturnal smells"; "And female smells in shuttered rooms" (ll. 54, 58-60, 66). Notably, the initial plunge into madness,

prompted by “lunar incantations” (l. 4), draws from longstanding associations of the moon with mysticism and derangement. Such incantations also evoke gendered lunar connotations. Hence Eliot’s symbolist writing aligns with the gendered perspectives of the Imagist avant-garde, particularly concerning the feminization of the moon, the repressed senses, madness and Symbolism. The poem suggests that the masculine detachment is at risk of being overwhelmed by sensory experiences in the feminized forms of “lunar incantations” and associated scents. Yet, the lamp, a symbol of sight, endeavors to maintain the male persona’s position of detachment and distance.

Nonetheless, it appears that the male persona intentionally diverts his attention away from the lamp, symbolizing masculine sight. In the poem, the lamp represents not just sight, but also the overarching structure tied to time. The lamp makes its appearances following the declaration of the precise time, guiding the male persona through the street’s imagery. Thus, the lamp can be perceived as an extension of the persona’s eyes amidst the urban landscape. However, he chooses to abandon his sense of sight, instead synesthetically tuning into the voices of the lamp on the street: “Half past one / The street-lamp sputtered / The street-lamp muttered / The street-lamp said”; “The lamp hummed” (ll. 12-15, 49). In doing so, the male persona actively avoids the city’s gaze.

The lamp’s utterances express gendered and classist biases, eliciting feelings of fear, disgust, or desire. For instance, it alerts the speaker to a woman with pin-shaped eyes, dressed in a sand-stained gown. Additionally, it speaks of a cat devouring rancid butter and a solitary woman exuding alluring scents and touch. Estelle Murail notes that

in the nineteenth century “lone women-walkers were either categorized as conspicuous sex workers or destined to remain invisible as reporters or flâneuses dressed in masculine attire in Paris” (163). Given that “Rhapsody” was penned in Paris between 1910 and 1911, the lamp’s voice reflects a patriarchal viewpoint: solitary women are either sexualized through their feminine scents or deemed threatening due to their ambiguous identity (indicated by the pin-shaped eye and sand on the dress, suggesting a possibly homeless woman). Thus, the lamp’s view channels the perspective of the traditional male flâneur, with detached and impersonal eyes.

Yet, in the poem, the persona does not engage with the lamps, hinting at his reluctance to rely on sight or follow the seemingly impartial or realistic descriptions. Instead, he transitions from the lamp’s discussion of the woman’s eye to addressing touch and taste: “A twisted branch upon the beach / Eaten smooth, and polished / As if the world gave up / The secret of its skeleton” (ll. 25-29). By leaning on the senses of touch and taste, the male persona experiences a reciprocal relationship between the eater and the eaten, the toucher and the touched — a stark contrast to the flâneur’s one-sided, authoritative gaze. The smooth branch, “eaten smooth” by the world, mirrors the famished body of a sleek skeleton. The embodied sensation of touching a tight and twisted spring conveys an impression of being on the brink of imminent breakage: “hard and curled and ready to snap” (l. 32).

Eliot deconstructs the hierarchy between the “higher” and “lower” senses, the dichotomy of distance and contacts, and the contrast between rational structure and emotional attachment. The poetic persona redirects his attention from merely

confronting the prejudiced judgments emanating from the intimidating, twisted eyes to fully immersing himself in the tangible sensations of the mistrusted, twisted objects, by means of touch and taste. This shift underscores a transformative journey from a defensive stance against external judgments to a more introspective and experiential connection with the world around him. By turning to touch and taste – two intimate senses – he seeks a deeper understanding and connection between oneself and the environment. Ultimately, the male persona's detached, masculine sight reveals its true nature: a deep-seated fear of unidentified women on the streets. Ultimately, the male persona's shift from detached, masculine sight to embracing the twisted branch through tactile and gustatory senses reveals a transformation. This acceptance of the twisted branch, symbolizing the unfamiliar, signifies a deeper engagement with his own vulnerability. It marks a transition from fear of the unknown, embodied by the unidentified women on the streets, to a recognition of his own fragile and precarious existence.

The protagonist's nuanced exploration of touch, juxtaposed against the traditional reliance on sight, unveils the unspoken desires for connecting with the urban landscape lurking beneath the surface of perceived masculine detachment. As the lamp narrates the scene of a cat indulging in rancid butter, the protagonist is notably recalling an intimate moment of a child instinctually clutching a toy, contrasting with the detached and voyeuristic eyes that yearn to see through the child's eyes or lighted shutters: "I could see nothing behind that child's eye / I have seen eyes in the street / trying to peer through lighted shutters" (ll. 40-42). It can be inferred that these prying eyes represent

the persistent and often invasive male gaze of that era. Yet, the child's unfiltered act of grabbing the toy, akin to the cat's uninhibited feasting, challenges this distanced voyeurism. Their actions, described using Eliot's word "slip", highlight an immediacy and authenticity in experiencing life without the filter of sight: "Slips out its tongue"; "Slipped out and pocketed a toy that was running along the quay" (ll. 36, 39). This divergence from the traditional gaze reveals a significant flaw in the supposed masculine detachment: while it may present itself as distant and objective, it is inherently driven by a deeper, often suppressed, yearning to connect with others. As previously noted, Eliot aptly observes his urban experience: "One walks about the street with one's desires, and one's refinement rises up like a wall whenever opportunity approaches". In essence, "Rhapsody" is a critique of this pretense, urging a more genuine and tactile engagement with the world around us.

In "Rhapsody", the poetic persona actively rejects the conventions of masculine detachment and visual perception, opting instead for a profound engagement with the world through the senses of touch and smell. This shift is exemplified in his deep connection to the moon and the nighttime atmosphere, as he resonates with lines like: "The moon has lost her memory / A washed-out smallpox cracks her face / Her hand twists a paper rose / That smell of dust and eau de Cologne / She is alone / With all the old nocturnal smells / That cross and cross across her brain" (ll. 55-61). This movement towards touch and smell is not merely sensual; it represents a deeper yearning to connect with the obscured history of the city beyond its visual spectacles. Such a tactile exploration is vividly conveyed by the dust in crevices, which remains hidden from the

eye but can be discerned through touch. Donald R. Hopkins, in “The Greatest Killer” (2002), underscores the historical prevalence of smallpox in Paris, highlighting the outbreak in the 1870s following the Franco-Prussian war (89). This history is felt through the crevices and cracks of the city, akin to the scars of smallpox on a woman’s face.

Additionally, the poetic persona’s reflection on the sunless, dried geranium, triggered by the scent of old Cologne, signifies a conscious shift from visual to sensory perception. In the poem, the geranium becomes noticeable primarily through its fragrance. The geranium’s history in Paris is laden with significance. As Geoffrey Jones illustrates in *Beauty Imagined* (2011), the geranium, crucial in the perfume industry, found its way to Europe from colonies like Algeria (8). This botanical migration, unveiled through scent and touch rather than sight, highlights the poetic persona’s journey to connect with history on a sensory plane, distant from mere visual knowledge.

Eliot artfully weaves a rhapsody of intertwining aromas, from dust to Cologne, with dust’s scent intricately described as, “And dust in crevices / Smells of chestnuts in the streets / And female smells in shuttered rooms / And cigarettes in corridors / And cocktail smells in bars” (ll. 64-68). Here, the dust’s smell serves as a testament to vibrant interactions and a coexistence of diverse identities, painting a picture of a communal, hybrid urban space that transcends identity barriers. The city life, as portrayed in the poem, transforms into a complex, naturally fused cologne.

However, the specific mention of the geranium’s scent and the differentiated “female smells” beckon us to scrutinize how these fragrances are extracted, refined, and

ultimately essentialized. This draws attention to histories of gender and racial otherness. Instances such as the overlooked and erased body of the dried geranium after extraction connected to colonial history, and the objectification of women's lives under the male gaze in the city, underscore the deeper layers of historical and social complexities woven into the fabric of urban living.

The poem seamlessly weaves together knowledge, memory, and history, underscoring the significance of connecting with the past through sensory experiences. This approach blurs the lines between personal perception and the surrounding environment, fostering a deep, embodied connection. By doing so, it counters the prevailing norms of masculine detachment and visual focus, highlighting a more immersive and tactile way to interact with the world. In "Rhapsody", Eliot challenges the dominance of visual knowledge, opting instead for a multisensory approach to memory and history, which manifests in vivid descriptions of tactile and olfactory sensations, such as dust-filled crevices, faded smallpox scars, and desiccated geraniums.

In "Rhapsody," Eliot subverts the tradition of visually-centered knowledge and power with a suicidal gesture at the poem's conclusion. After the lamp instructs the poetic persona to "sleep and prepare for life", he ironically appears to take his own life with "the last twist of the knife" (ll. 77-78). The concluding implication of suicide can be interpreted as a futile effort to recapture the earlier moments of delight in the poem since lamps and time symbolize a fatalistic return to masculine sight and detachment: "Every street lamp that I Pass / Beats like a fatalistic drum" (ll. 8-9). Experiences of the dark city through taste, smell, and touch become more vivid to him than seeing the city

bathed in sunlight after he wakes up in the morning. The flâneur shifts from a panoramic, commanding gaze to a more intimate contact with the city's marginalized elements. Eliot contends that the city's memory should encompass the material existence of the unseen. However, this constructive knowledge is acquired through a gendered lens. His portrayal of the moonlit city as feminine aligns with the gendered ideologies of avant-garde groups like the Imagists. The poem conveys a desire to understand the city through senses that facilitate close contact — taste, smell, and touch — which are associated with femininity. “Rhapsody” can be interpreted as an exploration of anxieties and desire beneath the façade of masculine detachment. The parallel sensory experiences between the feminine moon and the poetic persona can be seen as both a fulfillment of male fantasy and an acknowledgment of the “feminine” power of creation through the subdued senses. Ultimately, it is the “feminine” lunar incantations that draw the poetic persona into the sensory exploration of the city's hidden realities and history. As mentioned in the previous section, Fitzgerald admitted that he felt like embodying a feminine perspective while writing. “Rhapsody” appears to undertake a similar poetic endeavor, narrating the city's history through engaging in the so-called “feminine” sensory experiences. However, in the end it is worth emphasizing that despite challenging the visually dominated traditions of philosophy and literature, Eliot's literary imagination remains influenced by gendered stereotypes of femininity/senses.

“Rhapsody” has often been perceived as a poem depicting a flâneur wandering through the nocturnal city streets, critiquing and yearning to break free from the repugnant and grimy urban scenery. Christopher McVey, in “T.S. Eliot, Modernism

and Boredom” (2018), delves into the poem’s overarching theme of boredom, positing that the speaker’s act of self-harm epitomizes the profound emptiness and nihilism inherent in such ennui (67-86). Lyndall Gordon maintains that while Eliot attempted to weave the decayed fragments of the urban environment into a cohesive and unifying vision, he was ultimately unsuccessful (76). Echoing Gordon’s sentiments, Carol L. Yang (2009) also highlights the ominous urban imagery prevalent in the midnight setting. Contrary to these perspectives, this analysis posits that while the speech of the lamp may chime with the sentiments of these critics, the poetic persona actively immerses himself in the realms of touch, smell, and taste, seeking connection rather than detachment and escape. This deep indulgence, bordering on ecstasy, in sensory experiences uncovers a concealed pleasure found in embracing the aspects of the city’s hidden, nocturnal corners. As discussed previously, sight has traditionally been associated with distance, masculinity, and power within the Western tradition. Eliot challenges this visually-centric tradition and its accompanying masculine detachment, choosing instead to employ other senses as tools for uncovering the city’s concealed history and knowledge. Thus, this analysis shifts the focus from a negative, judgmental, and escapist view of the ominous urban imagery to offer a more reparative interpretation of Eliot’s portrayal of Paris.

Energy, Gender and Capitalism

Unlike the active sensory engagement in “Rhapsody”, “Preludes” is a visually-centered poem that delves into the theme of exhaustion. The poetic persona in “Preludes”

also adopts the role of a flâneur, observing the street from late afternoon until morning. This poem is woven with images that depict exhaustion, articulated through the experiences of burnout. The “burn-out ends of smoky days” and stuffed pipes echo the imagery of an individual resembling a spent matchstick (l. 4). These burnt-out ends can be seen as an embodied experience of daily life and the draining of energy. Ulrich Bröckling (2017) points out that a burnt-out feeling directly relates to time, particularly compressed or accelerated time (218). Time references in the poem suggest a rigid daily routine and the precise ticking of clock numbers: “Six o’clock” (I,3); “At four and five and six o’clock” (IV, 4). The morning scene detailed in the second section illustrates the compressed time as people mechanically “press to early coffee-stands” (II, 4-5). Time is imbued with the power to resume the masquerade of people’s lives. It is depicted as a cyclical force that holds dominion over the poetic persona. The poem encapsulates the sensation of burnout through allusions to a relentless and pressing passage of time. Although the poem was published in *Blast*, it bears little resemblance to the robust propaganda of Pound and Lewis, who championed vigorous masculine energy.

As highlighted above, both Pound and Lewis passionately argued for the rejuvenation of literature via masculinity as they perceived femininity as frail and passive. Their vision of masculine vigour closely aligns with the workings of an internal combustion engine within a capitalist framework. For instance, Wyndham Lewis, in his “Manifesto” from the first volume of *Blast* in 1914, declares his intention of “bursting up the lump of compressed life” (30), drawing parallels to the mechanics of an internal

combustion engine. The avant-garde movement was distinguished by its vigorous “blasting” of conventional institutions. Such a pronounced focus on energy can be traced back to the adoration of technological advancement and rapidity in the modern era. Garry Leonard (2009) posits that the lives of modern individuals mirror engine machines, characterized by “tension, contradiction, cycles of engagement, explosion, resolution, renewed engagement, explosion—the rhythm of the internal combustion engine” (223). Within an internal combustion engine, the gradual burning of coal culminates in an explosive release of energy. However, this entire sequence is confined within the machinery. The cycle of the engine mirrors the capitalist ethos of efficiency and the exhaustive exploitation of an individual’s time and energy.

Considering Leonard’s perspective, the proponents of Vorticist and Futurist poetics seem to mimic the optimized energy use seen in internal combustion engines. A vortex is expected to transmit energy at its utmost capacity, mirroring the accelerated pace of machines. Additionally, Pound and Lewis intertwined the capitalist interpretation of energy with masculinity. Eliot’s “Preludes” interlaces themes of energy, gender, and capitalism through the metaphor of the body as an internal combustion engine.

As previously argued, cigarettes and pipes in the poem serve as embodied metaphors for the exhausted burnt-out body. A delicate cycle of resilience becomes evident when someone smokes a cigarette for energy after the exhaustion of a day’s work, yet the cigarette itself parallels the burnt-out body. The burnt-out ends of cigarettes represent the energy waste awaiting disposal. However, with respect to the exhausted human body, the act of smoking pipes or cigarettes is a means of energy

stimulation. This burnt-out body appears resilient, turning to tobacco for an energy boost. Yet, this creates an illusion of energy recycling akin to the workings of an internal combustion engine discussed earlier. The “certain certainties” assure us that body parts will rejuvenate through pipe-smoking and sustenance, yet the poem underscores the mechanical nature of body parts caught in a daily cycle of exhaustion. Coffee, too, is seen as a morning stimulant for the semi-conscious body. When Prufrock declares, “I have measured out my life with coffee spoons”, he captures a perspective of life quantified in a manner resonant with capitalist energy consumption logic. This drive for maximizing energy consumption spotlights concerns about energy waste, encompassing even the wearied human body. Consequently, Eliot disrupts the avant-garde reverence for energy, exposing an obsession with energy waste and the deceptive resilience of bodily energy.

Pollution is also a byproduct of rapid energy release coupled with the inability to efficiently dispose of the resultant waste. Eliot also expands the cigarette metaphor to encompass the environment. References to smoke and grime in the streets highlight the concern for pollution and energy waste post-burnout. A plausible historical context can be traced to the intense pollution and smoke in St. Louis during the late nineteenth century, as documented by David Stradling and Peter Thorsheim in “The Smoke of Great Cities” (8). Eliot wrote the first two sections of the poem while still in the United States. Both grime and smoke allude to energy wasted post-coal combustion. In the poem, a gusty shower clears the smoke, effectively diluting the flames and casting aside grimy energy residues into vacant lots. The poetic persona contemplates the destination

of this energy waste. The polluting smoke is swept away by an unexpected gusty shower, while the grime is deposited in vacant lots. The male persona merely observes and contemplates the traces of the pollutant waste, whilst the women in the poem collect from the dirt for fuel.

In the third section, the poem challenges the idea of masculine sexual energy by illustrating its inconsistency within a capitalist framework. The narrative assumes a second-person perspective, contrasting with the third-person view of weary street crowds seen earlier. The poem adopts an almost voyeuristic stance, observing a solitary woman asleep at night. As stated in *The Poems of T.S. Eliot*, the initial epigraph for this section, sourced from *Bubu de Montparnasse* (a novel by French author Charles-Louis Philippe, first published in 1901. The story is inspired by a brief liaison Philippe had with a sex worker), suggests that the woman in question is likely a sex worker (vol.1, 412). The translated French epigraph reads: “Wherein you sell your soul at the same time you sell your body”. It is worth noting that in the late nineteenth century, working-class women in Paris grappled with the policing of sex workers. According to Jill Harsin (2019), working-class women were often mistakenly presumed to be sex workers during that era (3). The persona in “Preludes” aligns with the male gaze that perceived working-class women as potential sex workers. The poem paints a vivid picture of a myriad of sordid images that constitute her soul, casting shadows against the ceiling: “The thousand sordid images / Of which your soul was constituted / They flickered against the ceiling” (III, 4-6). “Flickering” hints at the feeble and unstable combustion of libidinal energy as perceived by the poetic narrator. While this section’s personal

address seems to set sexual energy apart from the drained bodies in other segments, the capitalist consumption concept is unveiled through the voyeuristic masculine projection of libidinal energy onto the woman. The soul, disassociated from the slumbering woman, can also be viewed as an energized entity distinct from the ostensibly resting body. This is why the soul's flickering presence perceives its own reflections. In the original epigraph, drawing a parallel between selling one's soul and body can be interpreted thus: while the body recuperates, the soul, in its animated state, remains under the yoke of capitalist desire and consumption. This suggests that masculine energy is also ensnared by the capitalist myth that influences libidinal investment.

"Preludes" thus offers an almost complete defiance of the view of masculinity and energy presented in *Blast* by highlighting the male persona's exhausted physical and mental states within a capitalist context. The capitalist system strives to maximize masculine desire in voyeuristic attempts, yet only results in a restless, feeble-minded reflection of masculinity's exhausted self-image. It is crucial to note that the representation of the sex worker is highly problematic, as she appears to be merely an object upon which the male persona projects his desires. The poem exposes how both the male persona's and the sex worker's sexual energy are ensnared by the capitalist mechanism. They are neither sexually energetic, nor are they able to rest well at night, whether their desires are for intimacy or money.

The portrayal of sex workers in this poem can be interpreted as being offered in an embracing tone, one that transcends mere male sexual fantasy. The woman is depicted differently from the exhausted street crowds: "You had such a vision of the street / As

the street hardly understands” (III, 10-11). The poem is saturated with images of exhaustion, including burnt-out cigarettes, grime, smoke, and the half-conscious states of morning and evening personified. Yet the woman’s gesture seems to be full of energy, with active movements, as she clasps “the yellow soles of feet in the palms of both soiled hands” (III, 14-15). Her energetic bodily movement in touching the soil starkly contrasts with the poem’s male speaker’s tightly-stretched soul, fixated upon the sky: “His soul stretched tight across the skies / That fade behind a city block / Or trampled by insistent feet” (IV, 1-3). Unlike the woman’s active embracing attitude towards dirt and soil, the male speaker passively envisions that his soul will be stamped into the soil by pressing feet. The image of soil can be traced to the dirt beneath the woman’s fingernails and on her shoes, paralleling the age-old act of gathering fuel. This imagery is poignantly captured in the poem’s concluding lines: “The worlds revolve like ancient women / Gathering fuel in vacant lots” (15-16). Unlike the exhausted male persona, who fixates his eyes upward into the smoky sky, the women in the poem directly embrace and engage with the energy waste in the lot.

The poem cyclically chronicles a day, starting and concluding at six o’clock in the afternoon, hinting at a perpetual cycle of energy. In this context, the text can be viewed as representing an internal combustion engine. In “Preludes”, the working-class women emerge as juxtapositions of vulnerability and resilience, embodying an engine that is both precarious and explosive. The women actively gather fuel from the dirt, a stark contrast to the male persona who takes a more passive role, contemplating the remnants of pollutant waste. The women’s resilience serves as both a gentle and explosive form

of resistance against the capitalistic system, as these women engage with dirt and energy waste directly, reinvigorating the waste.

Eliot's nuanced critique of capitalism is evident in his response to Vorticism. Eliot subtly suggests that Vorticism's dynamic "blast" metaphor, representing raw power and energy, may be insufficient to effectively challenge or transform the deep-rooted mechanisms of capitalism. He perceives this "blast" as a symbol of ineffectual effort within a capitalist system, reflecting its unending, repetitive nature, akin to a combustion engine. This metaphor critiques the glorification of brute force and masculine vigor, implying that such energies, despite their intensity, often end up sustaining the very systems they aim to disrupt. Eliot's work contrasts with the Vorticists' celebration of masculine energy, as he directs attention to the aftermath of industrialization — the overlooked byproducts and the exhaustion that follows relentless energy expenditure. Paige Reynolds' observations about *Blast's* energized style serving more promotional ends (246) further contextualize Eliot's shift from a fascination with explosive force to a contemplative examination of capitalism's overlooked consequences.

The line "The worlds revolve like ancient women / Gathering fuel in vacant lots" captures the process of mundane yet indispensable labor, spotlighting the laboring bodies crucial for the culmination of energy within an internal combustion engine. This imagery starkly contrasts with the avant-garde's masculine ideal, which exalts the explosive release of energy and power. Eliot's portrayal of women collecting fuel can be interpreted as a poignant commentary on the overlooked but vital roles that these

individuals play in sustaining the very system that seems to exploit them. This description moves away from glorifying the explosive masculine energy celebrated by the avant-garde and instead traces the journey of discarded pollutants and burnt-out bodies. Eliot's poetry directs attention to the aftermath of energy consumption and the toll it takes on both the environment and human bodies. By showcasing the women's deliberate and resilient gathering of fuel, he subtly critiques the unsustainable and exploitative nature of relentless energy consumption.

The poem celebrates the women's gesture of embracing waste and bestows renewed meaning upon them. The description of women's connection to the earth and soil, paired with their regenerative power to gather fuels in vacant lots, resonates with the theme of feminine fecundity, especially when juxtaposed with the evocative title "Preludes", suggesting the ushering in of something new. Thus, while the poem is meticulously structured around compressed time and images of burnout within a capitalist framework, its evocation of ancient times challenges the capitalistic notion of mechanistic time. Additionally, the poem serves as a reminder that it is the concept of femininity — so readily dismissed by the Blast ethos — that provides an alternative perspective and imaginative approach to understanding energy, the environment and the feminine body as an object of "otherness".

Libidinal Economy and Energy Extraction in *The Waste Land*

Like in "Preludes", the frequent juxtaposition of sexuality, energy, and economic references in *The Waste Land* evokes the cultural discourse of the libidinal economy. This section argues that feminine and masculine sexuality seem to be depicted in a

highly quantifiable form of the libidinal economy, echoing the human-machine conflation as depicted in the discussion of the analogy of the internal combustion engine in “Preludes”. Unlike the urge to transcend the masculine energetic body and embrace the vigor of the feminine body, Eliot in *The Waste Land* appears to reduce the feminine body to a channeling machine for masculine sexual aggression.

David Bennett (2016) delves into how economic understanding is invariably intertwined with sexual desires from the perspective of thermodynamics. His work challenges the notion of *homo economicus*, which presents human beings as solely rational and profit-driven entities. Bennett traces the influence of capitalistic discourse on the conceptualization of sexual energy, or libido. He posits that the principles of thermodynamics, particularly the conservation and transformation of energy, have informed perceptions of sexual desires as quantifiable energy forms (24-25). Hence, sexual desire is formulated as an abstract form of liquid energy force that can be conserved and transformed like currency: “Freudian libido exhibits the properties of money, being capable of investment, expenditure, profit-making or loss, saving or squandering” (23).

Bennett asserts that this Freudian perspective on libido — as a tangible bio-energy — mirrors economic behaviors of expenditure and conservation found in broader sexual discourses. He illustrates this with the prevailing view of masturbation between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, which was seen as the wasteful dissipation of productive energy. Bennett further contends that such economized perceptions of sexual energy influenced Freud’s notions of the id, ego, and superego. In this model, the

currency-like libido, suppressed within the id, is later regulated by the civilizing super-ego. Drawing on Georges Bataille's insights, Bennett suggests that this Freudian model of conserving libido for beneficial purposes mirrors the capitalistic ethos of *homo economicus*, who constantly strategizes for profit and wealth accumulation. Bataille, on the other hand, champions the wasteful expenditure of energy, viewing it as a natural inclination in both sexuality and economics. Through Bataille's lens, as interpreted by Bennett, the libidinal economy adheres to the thermodynamic principle of entropy, which emphasizes energy dispersal. Bennett summarizes the essence of the libidinal economy into a binary framework, setting "libido against capitalism", and mapping this tension onto the dichotomies of "spending versus saving, wasting versus accumulating, and nature versus culture" (142).

Bennett's analysis succinctly captures the inherent binary oppositions within the domain of libidinal economy. Bataille, in emphasizing nature's tendency towards entropy, places the idea of expenditure in central position in his understanding of libidinal economy. In the poem, Eliot delves into the aggressive expenditure of libidinal currency, drawing parallels between sexual aggression and economic consumption in ways that can be located within the contours of Bataille's theoretical framework. The narrative sheds light on a consumer-centric masculine desire, epitomized by a housing agent's clerk's overt sexual aggression. Eliot's portrayal of the clerk's impulses — both libidinal and fiscal — is encapsulated in the lines: "With one bold stare / One of the low on whom assurance sits / As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire" (ll. 232-234). In the wake of the post-war real estate boom, this reference underscores the hallmarks of a

debt-fueled, consumer-oriented economic landscape. The clerk's predatory advances are framed within the lexicon of strategic investment, as evidenced by: "The time is now propitious, as he guesses / The meal is ended, she is bored and tired / Endeavours to engage her in caresses / Which still are unreproved, if undesired" (ll. 235-238). The comparison of the clerk's libidinal endeavors with economic speculation highlights their quantifiable and inherently transactional nature. By channeling Bataille's notions on the irrepressible need to expend surplus energy, Eliot presents a society where libidinal and economic surpluses find expression in unchecked aggression and consumption. This fervent drive towards expenditure, as articulated by Bataille, is mirrored in Eliot's portrayal — where an insatiable desire, whether sexual or fiscal, pushes individuals towards inevitable overindulgence and even self-destruction. Just as Bataille posits that societies will invariably find ways to squander excess, Eliot portrays characters and scenes that are both a manifestation and a critique of this very cycle of accumulation and violent expenditure.

Eliot delves into the aspect of consumption through the male gaze. Throughout the poem, the commodification of female sexuality is rendered through a pronouncedly masculine lens. The poem's suggestion of the typist's seemingly passive "consent" to the sexual overture, interpreted through the traditional male gaze, implies a willing expenditure of her libidinal energy on seductive commodities such as "stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays". The typist is therefore reduced to a mechanistic vessel for libidinal transactions, without her agency or voice. Eliot's critique of a debt-driven, consumption-centric capitalism, while incisive, remains ensnared within a masculine

viewpoint, often overshadowing the systemic violence against female bodies.

To conclude this chapter: I have focused on gendered otherness by examining affects and bodies in Eliot's poetry. This chapter delves into the gendered dichotomy between masculine detachment and feminine sentimentality in Eliot's works. It critiques Eliot's potentially misogynistic portrayal of women. Simultaneously, it offers a reparative reading that underscores the role of shame in deconstructing traditional masculine norms. This interpretation advocates for a nuanced understanding of gender dynamics, aiding in dismantling entrenched gender distinctions and expectations. "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" further disrupts established gender norms, blurring gender-specific sensory experiences tied to urban environments. By positioning "Preludes" within the context of avant-garde movements, the chapter also underscores the poem's potential in criticizing capitalist productivity, reflecting on the mythology of masculine energy while engaging with subdued femininity. Yet in *The Waste Land*, Eliot seems to exhibit a thoroughly commodified view of sexuality, especially the agentless femininity in mechanical bodies. In a similar vein, the next chapter will extend the examination of otherness in Eliot's work, focusing on his embodied and affective portrayal of themes such as anti-Semitism, capitalism, and imperialism. This analysis will specifically cover the period of the 1918 pandemic and the First World War, providing a comprehensive exploration of how these themes intertwine with the gendered otherness discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Two: Eliot in the 1918 pandemic and the First World War: Abjection and Immunity

In the formative years of Eliot's literary career, his works were profoundly shaped by distinct cultural influences, including the elite social and intellectual circles of Boston, the avant-garde ideologies of contemporary artists and writers, and representations of Parisian working-class women. Yet, in the latter part of the 1910s, the literary canvas was dramatically altered by pivotal global events, notably World War I and the 1918 influenza pandemic. While the devastation of the war occupies substantial literary scholarship, the pandemic's implications, particularly its intersections with themes of gender, class, and empire, remain underexamined. In light of our recent confrontation with the Covid-19 pandemic, probing these historical intersections in literature and the arts holds amplified resonance for today's audience.

This chapter explores how these global crises deepened Eliot's engagement with themes of abjection, immunity, and racialized or gendered otherness. By integrating medical discourse from the era, this chapter contextualizes Eliot's literary output amid the broader disruptions of medical understanding and social upheavals of the period. It particularly focuses on how perceptions of race, class, and empire influenced cultural and historical responses to disease and how these responses resonate in Eliot's poetry and prose.

The chapter examines Eliot's pivotal essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" alongside his poems from this period, interpreting them through the prism of emerging medical knowledge. Here, concepts of immunity and bodily integrity are woven into

the metaphorical use of disease as a form of social and personal abjection, revealing Eliot's attempts to articulate his own literary voice in response to the times. His use of poetic forms — such as ballad rhyme schemes, fragmented structures, shifts in temporal perspective, and impersonal tone — illustrate the turmoil of maintaining bodily and imperial integrity against the backdrop of a masculine, anti-Semitic self.

Furthermore, this chapter situates Eliot's work within the debates between literary critique and post-critique, particularly focusing on his anti-Semitic discourses under the shadow of war and pandemic. It discusses the paranoia affect in the vein of Sedgwick and proposes its close link to a reductive and not entirely authentic immunological model of self/otherness. This analysis showcases that, under the paranoid discourses surrounding illness and the abjection of such cataclysmic times, a reparative space seems remote in Eliot's depiction of otherness, especially Jewish otherness.

Elizabeth Outka's *Viral Modernism* (2018) examines the underexplored relationship between the 1918 influenza pandemic and interwar literary modernism. Through her examination, the pandemic emerges not as a mere historical backdrop but as a transformative force that intricately shaped both the literary and broader cultural terrains of the era. Central to Outka's argument is the notion that the influenza's vast and indiscriminate onslaught engendered an overwhelming sense of vulnerability and societal disruption. This sentiment manifests vividly in the works of several modernist authors, including T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and Katherine Anne Porter, who, even if indirectly, echoed the pandemic's haunting aftermath. Furthermore, Outka elucidates some overarching modernist inclinations, notably the era's preoccupation with spectral

and ghostly motifs. These themes, she contends, are not mere artistic preoccupations but reflections of a society reckoning with unparalleled loss and the invisible threat of a viral epidemic.

Outka examines Eliot's representation of illness, offering an in-depth interpretation anchored in the embodied realities of the 1917-1919 pandemic. In the *Dial* (July 1921), Eliot characterized his lived experience of influenza as akin to enduring a "hot rainless spring" and a sensation of "extreme dryness" (213). Outka's discernment of illness motifs in Eliot's *The Waste Land* is further enriched by drawing parallels to Eliot's own afflictions, specifically symptoms like fever and thirst. This meticulous weaving serves to underscore the intimate and embodied interplay between the poet's experiences and the imprint of the 1918 influenza pandemic on modernist literature.

In a complementary vein, Peter Fifield (2020) elucidates how Eliot's practice of "writing through illness" has been dominantly perceived as a mirroring of the pervasive existential crisis emblematic of modernity (122). Yet, Fifield posits a more profound layer to this: in Eliot's compositions, illness transcends mere symbolism. Instead, it morphs into a tangible manifestation of various embodied forms of racialized or gendered otherness. As Fifield puts it, the portrayal is "reified rather than rhetorical" (121). This means that the portrayal of abjection and otherness in Eliot's poetry is tangible and concrete, rather than merely exaggerated or overstated for effect. This approach goes beyond simple hyperbole, grounding the portrayal in a more realistic and substantive context. Building upon these insights from both Outka and Fifield, an underexplored avenue of inquiry emerges: amid the global upheavals of the time, how

deeply does Eliot's body of work resonate with the immunological discourses associated with the pandemic, especially when viewed through the diverse lenses of embodied otherness, spanning domains like gender, race, and colonialism? Delving into key texts from Eliot's repertoire between 1918 and 1920 — including “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, “Sweeney among the Nightingales”, “Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar”, and “Gerontion”— the objective of this chapter is to investigate how Eliot interlaces these manifestations of otherness against the backdrop of the pandemic and World War I milieu.

In exploring Eliot's nuanced relationship between literary creation and illness, it is worth noting the poet's citation from A.E. Housman's *Name and Nature of Poetry* (1933): “I should call [poetry] a secretion; whether a natural secretion, like turpentine in the fir, or a morbid secretion, like the pearl in the oyster... I have seldom written poetry unless I was rather out of health” (693). This comparison draws upon immunological knowledge; the “morbid secretion” in pearls arises from an oyster's immune response to irritants, while firs use turpentine as a defensive shield against predators. Eliot and Housman's shared view reflects an acknowledgment of biological processes as inspirations for creative output, highlighting an underlying immunological framework intertwined with themes of “otherness” in their poetic philosophies.

Eliot's conscious linking of bodily health and poetic output gains further texture from Vivien Eliot's diaries, spanning from 1917 to 1920, which document the poet's personal battles with influenza. This interplay between embodied experience and literary creation not only speaks to the broader milieu of the 1918 pandemic but also

implicates a deeper understanding of immunological processes as an underpinning feature of his poetry. To frame the discussion of immunology within a distinct historical context, it is illuminating to examine how the influenza outbreaks between 1917 and 1919 served as catalysts for Eliot's creative inspiration. During this period, Eliot and his wife Vivien suffered from multiple bouts of the flu, as evidenced by diary entries: "I [Vivien] got a very severe attack of the influenza, from a germ" (October 22nd, 1917); "Tom did not get over that influenza for weeks" (March 8th, 1917). Just like Housman, Vivien's narrative draws upon the emerging knowledge of microbiology and immunology of the era—a time characterized by a deepening understanding of various scientific perspectives on diseases. This converging evidence suggests that Eliot's creative processes may indeed be influenced by an intricate interplay between his own embodied experiences and a broader, evolving immunological landscape. His reflections encourage a deeper exploration of the potential, yet underexplored, intersections between his ideas on literary creation and the immunological complexities associated with gendered and racialized otherness amidst the pandemic occurrences of the era.

Immunity, Abjection and Affects

Maebh Long's "Abject bodies" (2020) delves into the intricate relationship between immunology and the cultural study of abjection in the understanding of otherness. Long commences by elucidating the etymology of "immunity", which originally signifies an exemption from public service. She underscores that Elias

Metchnikoff's late nineteenth-century discovery of phagocytes — cells actively safeguarding the host by consuming harmful antigens — markedly shifted the cultural perception of a body actively defending itself.

Paul Ehrlich's seminal theory, the dictum of "horror autotoxicus", posited the provocative idea that the body might, mistakenly, mount a defense against itself. This arises when the immune system misrecognizes healthy tissue as foreign invaders (Silverstein 1). A salient difference between modern interpretations of autoimmunity and Ehrlich's perspective is Ehrlich's apparent belief in the body's inherent capacity to self-correct. He seemingly did not anticipate the immune system's potential to cause enduring self-harm by producing antibodies against its tissues.

This evolving understanding of autoimmunity signals a profound philosophical implication, suggesting an impaired discernment between self and other by the immune system. This conceptual ambiguity resonates with Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, a connection elaborated upon by Long. Kristeva's elucidation, where infants' revulsion to the skin on milk exemplifies their initial boundary-setting against the "other", is particularly resonant: "'I' expel what is not desired; but since the food is inseparable from my identity at this stage, I in essence expel a part of myself" (Kristeva 3). Kristeva's contemplations extend beyond food. The visceral reactions evoked by filth and corpses, reminiscent of our own mortality and physicality, challenge our constructed self-identity. She posits that such horrors originate from the unsettling confrontation with our own organic ephemerality: "I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border" (Kristeva

3). By interpreting Kristeva's theory of abjection through the lens of immunity, Long elucidates: "Discourses of immunity, inoculation and the auto-immune speak of anxieties about the loss of the subject from contaminating assault by the foreign to suicidal attack by the self" (218).

In a related vein, Warwick Anderson (2015) in *Intolerant Bodies* emphasizes that the immune system is not just a defensive mechanism but is also involved in exploring and understanding "otherness" (148). This mirrors societal interactions where there is a balance between self-preservation and being open to change, diversity, and external influences. This perspective underscores the idea that systems (biological or societal) thrive not just by protecting against external threats but also by engaging with and understanding them.

The nuanced concept of immunity is profoundly intertwined with the historical milieu shadowed by the Great War and ensuing pandemic. Between 1915 and 1920, pandemics and wars became inseparably intertwined in societal dialogues. Eliot's literary contributions from 1918 to 1920, notably "Sweeney Among the Nightingales", "Burbank", "Gerontion", and "Tradition and the Individual Talent", bear the imprints of this tumultuous era. Eliot's articulation of impersonality in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is subtly layered with the era's inherent anxieties towards otherness.

Building on this immunological foundation, I will probe into Eliot's portrayal of otherness amidst the pandemic in his poems. This exploration seeks to uncover Eliot's poetic mechanisms in addressing the anxieties of his time, especially evident in "Gerontion", where illness, capitalism, and Jewishness converge. Before delving into

Eliot's works, a comprehensive understanding of the historical context and its portrayal of otherness is necessary.

Historical Background

The symptoms of the 1918 pandemic, commonly known as the “Spanish flu”, presented diversely among individuals. Milder symptoms encompassed coughing, loss of taste or smell, fever, pain, fatigue, and lethargy. More severe cases saw this coughing escalate to respiratory challenges, potentially leading to cyanosis — a bluish skin hue due to insufficient oxygen. These manifestations are documented in works by John Barry and Laura Spinney on the pandemic's history (232; 45). Instances of post-infection depression and even suicides followed periods of delirium (Barry 238), and some patients reported prolonged fatigue after recovery (Barry 232). Vivien Eliot detailed Eliot's fever and lethargy symptoms in a December 15th, 1918 letter (6322), suggesting Eliot might have contracted the disease during the pandemic.

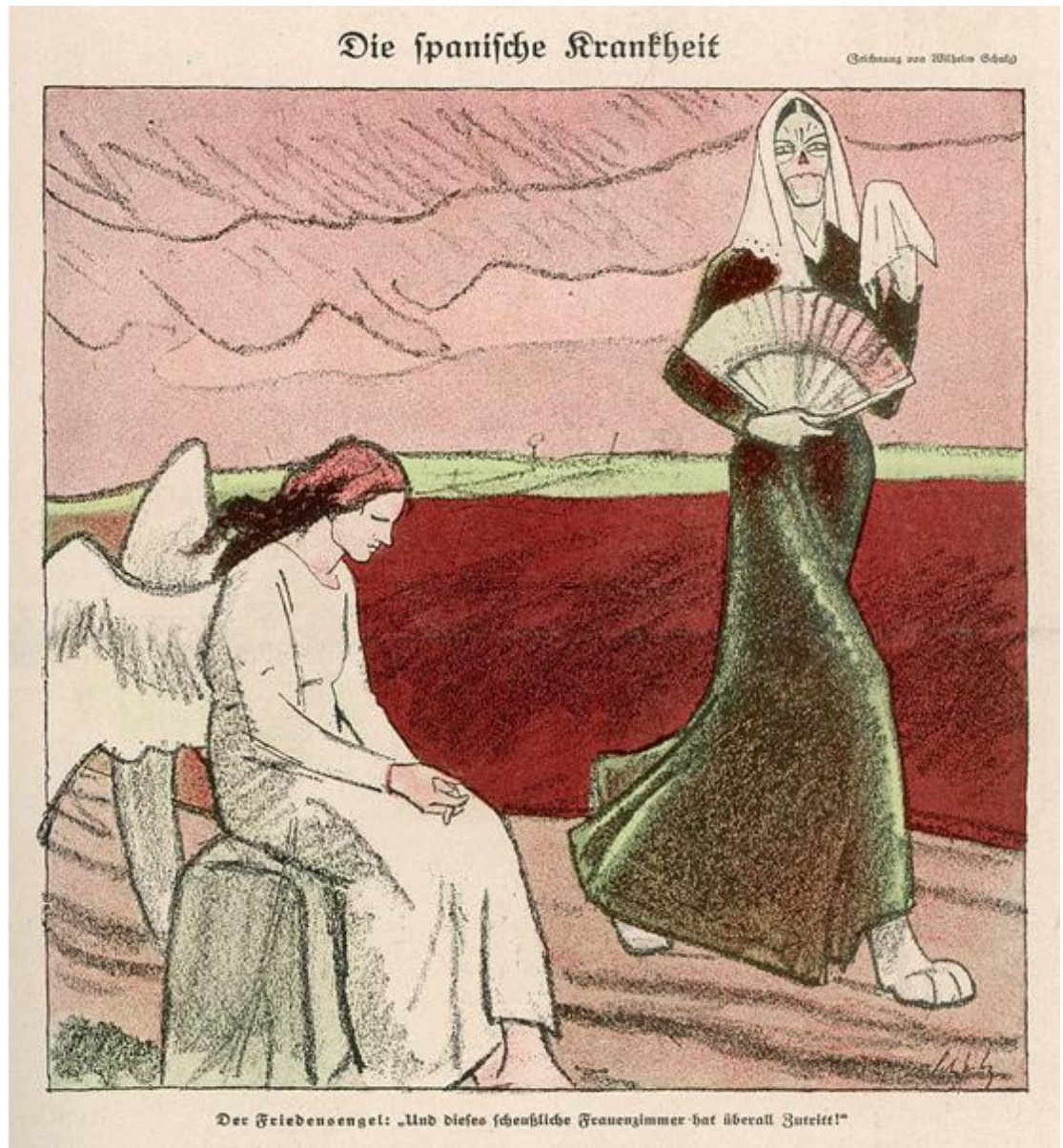
As to the pandemic's origin, initial diagnoses ranged from flu, typhoid, typhus (or lice-borne trench fever) to cholera or even bubonic plague (Barry 235, 266, 376). In the 1910s, medical professionals lacked the means to identify the H1N1 virus as the culprit. Predominantly, the cause was attributed to a bacterium (Van Epps 803), though some posited that a filterable virus was responsible (J.R. Bradford et al 127). Then, a virus was conceptualized as a toxin smaller than bacteria.

This notion of a toxin manifested in societal and literary representations like miasma or swamp gas (Barry 50). Miasma was perceived as illness-inducing air, while

swamp gas had connotations of filth. Many speculated that these “ill winds” were the byproducts of war, dubbing them “war-bred pestilence” (Barry 375). The pandemic's linkage to the Great War possibly stemmed from initial outbreaks in military camps across countries such as the United States, France, and the United Kingdom. Marine transportation exacerbated these outbreaks, facilitating global transmission. Another theory suggested that the disease had a zoonotic origin in farm animals, given the outbreaks reported on U.S. farms according to Catherine Arnold in *Pandemic 1918* (2018) (31). Such uncertainties fostered a climate of dread and suspicion regarding the enigmatic cause.

This climate, in turn, prompted societal scapegoating. Notably, sex workers became convenient targets, blamed for spreading both the pandemic and venereal diseases among wartime soldiers, as cautioned by H.G. Irving (1029-1036). The pandemic's gendered portrayal as the “Spanish Lady” reveals misogynistic undertones:

As the first wave of Spanish flu broke across Europe in June 1918, cartoons and illustrations appeared depicting the flu as the “Spanish Lady”. Spanish flu was personified as a death-headed, skeletal woman in a black flamenco dress, complete with mantilla and fan. Such a depiction implied that the Spanish lady was a prostitute, free with her favors and infecting everybody at the same time (Arnold 342).



(Fig. 2.1)

The image was created by Wilhelm Schulz and originally appeared in *Simplicissimus*, a German satirical and political weekly, on 23 July 1918. It depicts this “Spanish lady” overshadowing an angel of peace, her feet eerily paw-like. Such a characterization reflects a male-centric worldview that projected pandemic anxieties onto women. This visual encapsulates the era’s gendered, alarmist perceptions. Consequently, notions of immunity became skewed in a patriarchal society, misattributing female sexuality as a pandemic catalyst. Though the scientific understanding of immunity may seem neutral,

its societal interpretations often echo prevailing ideologies.

The imperial perspective sought to identify the origins of the disease in the context of wartime and its colonies. The stigmatization of soldiers can be traced back to navy hospital outbreaks in both the U.S. and Europe. Notably, an outbreak of influenza was recorded at a navy hospital in Étaple (Arnold 18). British troops in France also grappled with this enigmatic ailment (Arnold 53). Intriguingly, conspiracy theories emerged, suggesting German U-boats were disseminating the disease (Arnold 14). The nexus between the disease and maritime travel not only exposed the war's horrors but also incited skepticism regarding trade and imperial interests. Arnold notes the First Sea Lord Admiral's statement about the flu's proliferation within the British Navy by January 1918, which crippled the navy's ability to safeguard merchant ships (Arnold 58). This led to significant disruptions in Britain's trade with its colonies.

The pandemic in India dismantled an imperialist fantasy vision of a "tropical paradise", often imagined with "banana trees and coconut palms" (Arnold 91). This idyllic image was offset by the reality of the pandemic in India. As postcolonial scholars, such as Said, have articulated, the empire often perceived colonies either as resource-rich territories or as chaotic regions in need of "advanced" colonial oversight. Said, in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978), remarks: "Orientals were always and only the human material governed in British colonies" (48). From the colonizers' standpoint, the pandemic rendered these colonies as unpredictable terrains, with resources slipping out of imperial grasp. This anxiety, stemming from the chaos and diseases of the colonies, became ingrained in imperialistic ideologies.

H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1897) had earlier encapsulated this mode of imperial anxiety. In the narrative, Martians invade Britain, only to be defeated by a novel disease to which they lack immunity. Wells drew inspiration from the tragedy of the Tasmanian people, who faced extermination after exposure to diseases introduced by British colonizers (162). The Martians' downfall resonates with the British Empire's vulnerabilities in confronting unfamiliar diseases. The narrative underscores imperial apprehensions about managing emerging diseases under the empire's dominion.

Prior to the 1918 outbreak, India had been grappling with the bubonic plague since the 1890s, a crisis that imperiled both the health of its indigenous populace and the stability of colonial rule (L. Spinney 90). In response to the pandemic, India's preventive measures were stringently applied. Gandhi, post his convalescence from a severe bout of flu, voiced his dissent against these draconian laws. Both Spinney and Arnold argue that the 1918 pandemic, though often overlooked, indirectly contributed to anti-colonial sentiments and movements (14, 198).

Immigrants and minority groups frequently became scapegoats for various maladies. As detailed in the *Encyclopedia of Pestilence, Pandemic, and Plagues*, "By the late nineteenth century, immigrant Jews, Italians, and Asians were perceived as vectors for diseases such as typhus, cholera, and plague" (589). In April 1918, Germany, citing potential epidemics like typhus, halted the entry of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe until the war's end (8). Whether attributed to typhus or the "Spanish flu", the disease served as an amorphous emblem of fear toward specific demographics. Amidst the prevailing confusion surrounding the pandemic, the late 1910s emerged as

a dark era when modern science and technology failed to rationalize the overwhelming mortality wrought by disease and warfare alike. Society grappled to interpret this affliction, often resorting to deep-seated prejudices born of fear and paranoia. Concurrently, writers like Eliot endeavored to depict themes of disease, abjection, and immunity in their literature.

The events and reactions surrounding the 1918 pandemic serve as a profound reminder of the complexities inherent to global crises. It was not merely a health calamity; it also mirrored the societal and imperial anxieties of the period, casting light on the prejudices and preconceptions of the era. Delving into this history offers more than just an understanding of past events — it provides perspective on the socio-cultural fabric of the time.

This examination aims to interweave medical history with aspects of postcolonial, gender, and literary studies. By considering the pandemic from these diverse perspectives, I hope to offer a richer understanding of its broader implications. Eliot's literature, along with others from that period, demonstrates how deeply such events can impact artistic expression.

Poetics of Impersonality and the Immunological Framework

The 1918 pandemic represents a critical juncture in the evolution of immunological comprehension. Anderson chronicles the progression of immunology, emphasizing the juxtaposition of selfhood and otherness in disease conceptualization. Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, immunological perspectives bifurcated into

two dominant paradigms: reductionism and integrative thinking. Historically, physicians predominantly construed diseases as perturbations in bodily equilibrium, arising from incongruences between the body and its environment. However, with the advent of germ theories, this holistic model largely dissolved. Diseases were increasingly perceived as consequences of external microbes which could be cultivated in the lab. This discovery pivoted the medical perspective towards a reductionist lens, prioritizing the identification of pathogens at the expense of broader disease contexts, such as an individual's holistic health, environmental influences, or genetic predispositions. Diseases were no longer considered imbalances of bodily humors or products of miasmas but were now attributed to specific pathogens. Nevertheless, numerous conditions defied these microbial paradigms, necessitating an integrative understanding that considered both infectious agents and the body's intrinsic dynamics. Even amidst the advance of germ theory, many medical experts championed a more holistic disease understanding, underscoring the intricate human physiological responses (Anderson 35). The body's immune defenses might occasionally become self-destructive, resulting in autoimmune conditions or heightened allergic responses (Anderson 37). The dawn of the twentieth century marked a growing curiosity regarding unique metabolic reactions, giving rise to concepts such as "chemical individuality" (Anderson 37).

Anderson insightfully remarks that World War I seemingly subdued the enthusiasm of many medical theorists who focused on individual reactivity and sensibility: "The visceral devastation of bodies in the trenches and the profound traumas inflicted both

physically and mentally might have rendered the valorization of individuality and human uniqueness challenging for a time” (37-38). In the case of 1918 pandemic, the medical discourse mirrored the two previously mentioned theories of immunological thought. On the one hand, a reductionist perspective dominated: tireless endeavors were made to pinpoint the causative agent behind the pandemic. However, this mission proved elusive for scientists in the late 1910s, with the H1N1 virus only being definitively identified in the subsequent decades. This challenge was highlighted by the fact that various experimental vaccines, some composed of mixtures like pneumococci, streptococci, and Pfeiffer bacillus (*Haemophilus influenzae*), were largely unsuccessful (Trilla et.al 671). This sparked skepticism among the populace, leading to doubt about whether the medical expertise genuinely grasped the pandemic’s complexities (671).

The lived experiences during this period offered a blend of reductionist and holistic understandings. Vivien Eliot’s correspondence, for instance, captures the zeitgeist of germ theory: “I [Vivien] was severely struck down by influenza, likely due to a germ” (October 22nd, 1917); “Tom’s bout with influenza persisted for weeks” (March 8th, 1917). In practice, however, therapeutic strategies still evoked the holistic approach, particularly the technique of bleeding: “For those afflicted with pneumonia, treatment options were scant ... Bleeding was a frequent recourse” (Trilla et.al 671).

The profound mortalities brought on by the war and pandemic may have temporarily curtailed the zeal for holistic therapies, but the flame of interest was never entirely extinguished. Conceptually, while reductionist theories often placed the body in opposition to microbial invaders, integrative thinking acknowledged the blurred

boundaries between the self and external pathogens. It posited that diseases can emanate from within the disintegrated self itself. Together, these reflections on immunology and pathology reflect the physical and philosophical rumination over the boundary of individuality and self-identity.

In 1933, T.S. Eliot elucidated the profound influence that embodied experiences of illness had on his literary oeuvre, suggesting that the field of immunology may subtly underpin his poetic vision. As previously discussed, Eliot aligns with Alfred Edward Housman's comparison of poetry to a "secretion", likening the poetic process to either a "natural" effusion, as with turpentine from a fir tree, or a "morbid" one, akin to a pearl forming within an oyster (Housman 693). This analogy delineates two distinct forms of immune response. Based on the quotation, the "morbid secretion" stands in contrast to the "natural secretion". The former implies the presence of a distinct "other", evident in the oyster's immune response to parasites or irritants. Conversely, the latter encapsulates a proactive autoimmune response, devoid of external contagion.

Eliot's reference to these physiological mechanisms underscores a notion of disease as an anomaly — distinctly set apart from the natural order and characterized by a disrupted bodily integrity due to the intrusion of the "other". This perspective aligns with the reductionist view of disease as an external pathogen. This theme, elucidating the dynamic tension between the self and an external "other", recurs throughout Eliot's oeuvre. A resonant example is his 1919 essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", composed against the backdrop of the influenza pandemic, a time also marked by pivotal discussions in immunology. Within this essay, Eliot navigates

the delicate equilibrium between a writer's distinct voice and the enduring literary canon, championing a poetics of impersonality. The prevalent discourse in immunology — focusing on the interplay between the individual and external entities — provides a distinctive lens through which Eliot's poetics can be interpreted, and further positions his poetic framework in an embodied and contextualized dialogue with gendered and racial otherness.

Eliot characterizes the ideal poet as one who transcends inherent personality to inhabit an impersonal realm, asserting, "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" and, "The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice ... It is in this depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of science" (108-109). This "condition of science" mirrors the depersonalization evident in immunological investigations. Eliot's nuanced evasion of personal identity in his poetics bears a resonance to the sidestepping of "the biographical process of the causation and expression of autoimmune diseases" and the individual variations in disease presentations, as expounded by Anderson in his historical account of immunology. As Fifield astutely observes, particularly during the 1920s, Eliot's "turning loose" of biographical, emotional, and personal dimensions is associated with pathology: "Eliot's poetry is characterized as emerging from a body defined by flows and pathological aspects" (121). Thus Eliot's methodical distancing from personal identity, especially as he navigated the landscape of illness in his writing, can be construed as encapsulating an immunological perspective that champions a "scientific" modality of expression.

This is contextualized within an immunological paradigm that emphasizes an impersonal interaction with various microbes, contrasting with a more individualistic perspective.

Eliot substantiates his ideal of aligning poetry with science through an analogy of platinum as a catalyst, inviting readers to contemplate: “the action which takes place when a bit of finely filiated platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide ... When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid” (108-109). He conceptualizes the catalyst — platinum — as a transformative medium that, while essential for the occurrence of the reaction, remains “inert, neutral and unchanged” after the formation of new materials. Although Eliot’s understanding is not entirely accurate — catalysts, while typically unchanged at the conclusion of reactions, do participate in and alter the speed of reactions — his employment of platinum merits further examination. Via this reference, Eliot forges a link between modernist literature and platinum’s material history, subtly interweaving its concealed significance in the history of scientific advancement with nuances of racialized otherness. Utilized extensively in laboratory experiments as containers due to its inert and malleable characteristics, platinum, whilst deeply embedded in various experiments, remains seemingly untouched by the organic world of corrosion or change. Eliot’s impersonal poetics can thus be interpreted as adopting the vantage point of a platinum apparatus, exploring the outcomes of scientific experiments aiming for an impartial discovery and elucidation of chemical, physical, or biological phenomena. One might infer that Eliot’s poetics,

advocating for an impersonal stance, invites readers to adopt the vantage point of such an unyielding substance, assessing the outcomes of scientific endeavors with dispassion. This detached gaze seeks not only the objective truth of scientific findings but also delves into the nuances of personal meaning within seemingly impersonal experiments: “But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things” (108-109).

When placed in the context of a pandemic, Eliot’s platinum-infused poetics accrues further depth, particularly in navigating the interplay between personal and emotional meaning. John M. Barry, in his book *The Great Influenza* (2004), delineates the tension in maneuvering a “thin loop of platinum” between the pursuit of an impersonal explanation for the influenza via identifying the causative microbe and the palpable personal anxiety amidst the escalating death toll during the pandemic: “The steps began with washing: placing each small lump of balled mucus in a bottle of sterile water, removing it and repeating the process five times, then breaking up the mucus, washing it more, passing a platinum loop ... Each step took time, time while people died, but they had no choice. They needed each step ... Then they took more time, more steps, isolating each of these growths. Everything mattered, and yet no one knew who would report to work each day, who would not ... The failure to find the ‘influenza bacillus’ maddened [everyone]” (277-278). Eliot’s poetics, bridging the chasm between objective science and personal sentiment, resonate profoundly within this narrative. As humanity grappled with the pandemic, an impersonal force of death, the urgency to pinpoint an impersonal causative agent became paramount. Yet, failure loomed large,

and the clinical lens of the laboratory often magnified the poignancy of hope, despair, and collective grief.

Platinum was utilized in the construction of scientific equipment — serving as a mediator in line with Eliot’s poetic ideal of impersonality and thus materializing such his notion of meditational impersonality, as previously established — but it was also employed, by virtue of being an inert and inorganic metal, to eradicate disease. This is based on the notion that such a stable and unreactive chemical entity possesses the capacity to kill any organism: “[During the 1918 pandemic], for persons who developed pneumonia, the therapeutic options were even fewer and included intramuscular or intravenous treatment with silver or platinum colloid solutions” (Trilla et al., 671). According to James Wesley Alexander in his article “History of the Medical Use of Silver” (2004), silver, having been the predominant antimicrobial agent available prior to the advent of antibiotics and utilized to treat an array of diseases caused by various microbes in Europe, could exterminate microbes but also instigate argyria due to its toxic nature. Silver was perceived as a universally applicable medicine, embodying an impersonal approach to disease treatment. Platinum, deriving its name from the Spanish “plata” for silver during the colonization of the American continent, was similarly utilized as an impersonal treatment for pneumonia during the 1918 pandemic. Consequently, Eliot’s poetics of impersonal platinum represent an endeavor to identify a universal immunological remedy in the form of a stable and inert element capable of obliterating disease-inducing microbes and resisting the organic realm of biological changes. This kind of generalized therapeutic efficacy ascribed to silver or platinum,

regardless of the diverse forms that diseases might take, adopts a quasi-religious aura of universal healing. Writing from the impersonal vantage point of platinum application enables Eliot's poetics to forge connections with the social and cultural discourses attached to this malleable and inert material medium. However, the neutrality and impersonality attributed to platinum becomes discursively questionable when contextualized within the sphere of colonialism.

The deployment of platinum as a metaphorical medium, where authors experience transformative self-alienation, resonates with the historical complexities linked to platinum acquisition, particularly its connections to colonial exploitation. However, the neutralized act of self-alienation, as evoked by Eliot's scientific discourse, subtly obfuscates the tangible alienation experienced by laborers, compelled by the insatiable colonial quest for precious metals. The mining and procurement of platinum have, historically and contemporarily, been linked to the exploitation of regions such as South America and South Africa. Lane astutely observes that the early history of platinum is often cursorily addressed by historians of science, with little consideration given to its profound associations with slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. Lane notes, "The 'discovery' of platinum is frequently assimilated into the narrative of Lavoisian chemistry's emergence from the vestiges of alchemy... In this discourse, platinum appears as a mere conundrum of nature... awaiting resolution by European scientists equipped with advanced laboratories... It is crucial to recognize that the post-1700 prominence of platinum was closely tied to ... the relentless quest for gold" (62). Implicit in Eliot's neutral, impersonal scientific portrayal of platinum is a potential

erasure of the colonial histories and subaltern narratives intertwined with the metal's provenance in modernist literature.

A deeper examination into the presumed impersonality ascribed to such metallic entities reveals intricate connections within the social fabric that bind various demographic experiences. Eliot's conceptualization of art's scientific condition, especially from the vantage of a stable catalyst like platinum, suggests a pursuit for a consistent and unyielding element, bypassing the ever-changing immunological realm. This aspiration for stability and uniform applicability can be perceived as an impersonal, all-encompassing narrative. Such a perspective risks perpetuating erasures, potentially "platinumizing" colonized voices that become subsumed under an overarching, impersonalized narrative of scientific history. Consequently, a critical analysis of Eliot's poetic ethos through the prism of immunology affords a holistic comprehension of his impersonal poetic approach and its potential overlap with racialized discourses.

In his essay, Eliot articulates a conception of tradition that resonates with a Eurocentric perspective, intertwined with a nationalistic undertone. He accentuates the primacy of the "mind of Europe" and "the mind of his own country," positioning them as preeminent and opposed to an individual's private experience: "Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past...He must be aware that the mind of Europe — the mind of his own country — a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind — is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which

abandons nothing enroute, which does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer” (106-107). This paragraph accentuates Eliot’s emphasis on delineating a European or nationalistic identity. Concurrently, Eliot’s perception of literary tradition also parallels a living entity: “I have tried to point out the importance of the relation of the poem to other poems by other authors, and suggested the conception of poetry as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written” (108). Eliot appears to envisage literary tradition as a living organism that possesses a distinct, nationalistic or European demarcation of impersonal identity. The literary tradition is visualized as a living organism that perpetually transforms yet does not render past canonical authors obsolete. Therefore, this kind of ambivalent conception of identity boundaries and their evolution within an organism warrants exploration through an immunological perspective.

While immunological paradigms emphasize reciprocity and openness, as illustrated by Anderson’s view that “immune system appears to be exploring otherness as much as defending self... involved in a ‘creative attempt to engage difference’, not eliminate it” (148-149), Eliot’s stance appears somewhat contradictory. Although he acknowledges that traditions evolve over time due to the contributions of individuals who achieve an impersonal stance, his emphasis on a predominantly European literary tradition seems to overshadow the transformative power of individual personalities. Furthermore, Eliot’s definition of a Eurocentric or nationalistic literary tradition marginalizes non-European and non-native authors, a delineation that resonates with the autoimmune reflex of creating a strict self-other distinction. Eliot’s preoccupation

with impersonal order in literary works evokes an autoimmune apprehension against the idea of abjection, as expanded upon by Long in his adaptation of Kristeva's framework.

Eliot's fixation on form and structure suggests an endeavor to forge a cohesive European literary identity. To elucidate, consider Eliot's own words, which manifest his anxiety over an undefined, borderless identity, or what may be termed "abjection": "To proceed to a more intelligible exposition of the relation of the poet to the past: he can neither take the past as a lump, an indiscriminate bolus, nor can he form himself wholly on one or two private admirations, nor can he form himself wholly upon one preferred period"(107). Given that abjection pertains to the blurring of a clear, distinct identity, Eliot's resistance to a fluid literary tradition underscores his unease with such indistinctness. He seems to posit that by anchoring literary tradition to a fixed form, authors can evade abjection, thereby achieving a form of literary immortality. Eliot's writings exhibit a tension between impersonality and personal emotions, between the European literary canon and the "other". He remains ambiguous about how contemporary and personal influences can be discerned and integrated into the overarching literary tradition. Analyzing his poetics against the backdrop of the pandemic era enhances our understanding of Eliot's use of literary tradition in his works and its potential implications related to anti-Semitism, misogyny, and imperialism. It also draws attention to an underlying autoimmune paranoia against narratives characterized by gender and racial difference.

Paranoia, Empire, and the Pandemic in “Sweeney Among the Nightingales”

In “Sweeney Among the Nightingales”, Eliot crafts a narrative that weaves themes of abjection, immunity, and empire within the backdrop of the 1918 pandemic. Composed during the height of the pandemic and published in September, 1918, the poem likely embodies the pervasive ambience of the global health crisis. The poem envelops its readers in a gloomy ambience of paranoia, evidenced by phrases like “Death and the raven drift above” (ll.7). The veil imagery evokes the ubiquitous facemasks of the pandemic era: “Gloomy Orion and the Dog / Are veiled” (l. 9-10). While public concerns regarding obscured identities persisted, the pandemic’s severity necessitated mask adoption.

Guy Beiner’s *Pandemic Re-Awakenings* (2021) elucidates the misrepresentation of the flu as “Spanish”. In Eliot’s poem, there is a distinct emphasis on a woman’s Spanish identity as the “person in the Spanish cape” (l. 11). Her overtly feminine sexuality is foregrounded: “The person in the Spanish cape / tries to sit on Sweeney’s knees”; “She yawns and draws a stocking up” (ll. 11-12, 16). Eliot recurrently ties the character Sweeney to brothels and feminine sexuality. This portrayal echoes the male-driven, paranoid imagery of the “Spanish lady”, evoking anxiety over the contagious flu in a male-dominated paradigm. The poem’s two women characters, embodying threatening sexuality, seem to be plotting murder in the male persona’s eyes, reminiscent of Agamemnon’s assassination by his spouse, Clytemnestra: “And sang within the bloody wood / When Agamemnon cried aloud” (ll. 37-38). This theme underpins the poem’s portrayal of deep-seated male paranoia regarding women’s

sexuality, compounded by the fear of the virulent flu.

The social representation of women during the pandemic era — particularly in the poem — seems to vilify them, reducing them to predatory beasts. Beiner highlights the cultural anthropomorphism of the pandemic: “In popular culture, it was anthropomorphised in female form, as the ominous image of ‘the Spanish Lady’ (in Slavic languages ‘Ispanka’), an exoticised harbinger of lethal contamination that featured in caricatures throughout the world” (13). While it remains speculative whether Eliot was directly influenced by Wilhelm Schulz’s rendition of the “Spanish lady”, such images were widely disseminated across European publications during the pandemic, suggesting a probable influence on Eliot’s portrayal.

In Eliot’s “Sweeney Among the Nightingales”, sex workers are constructed as a menacing entity to the military figure, Sweeney. The imagery of “zebra stripes swelling along Sweeney’s jaw” conveys a visualization of a confined, vigilant body, safeguarding itself against external threats. Vincent Sherry proposes that Sweeney, epitomized with “zebra stripes along his jaw, swelling to maculate giraffe” and as one who “guards the horned gate” (ll. 3-4, 8), could be interpreted as a soldier, tightly ensconced in his uniform (Sherry 257). Furthermore, the metaphorical comparison of zebra and giraffe suggests an upward swelling of Sweeney’s attire toward his face, potentially indicative of a self-masking attempt. Sweeney’s interaction with sex workers reflects the contemporaneous public stigmatization of venereal disease and its alleged moral corrosiveness during the war. Consequently, female sexuality is scapegoated as the abject origin for widespread disease throughout the war and

pandemic, posing a challenge to the preservation of male bodily health. The military depiction of Sweeney further anchors the healthy male body within the constructs of the military empire.

Eliot's "Sweeney" exhibits a sophisticated interplay of symbols that invoke both the Spanish and British empires. The poem, rich in its historical and cultural allusions, offers fertile ground for postcolonial analysis. Central to the poem's colonial discourse is the direct mention of the River Plate — located in Argentina and Uruguay, regions historically shaped by the Spanish empire. The line, "The circles of the stormy moon, slide westward toward the River Plate" (ll. 5-6), is not merely geographical; it is imbued with the weight of colonial history. This implication will be pursued later in terms of the shift in medical knowledge. The poem's reference to Catholicism, highlighted by the line "The nightingales are singing near, the Convent of the Sacred Heart" (l. 35-36), serves as a reminder of the religious influence that Spain disseminated across South America. This religious reference can be read as a remnant of colonial dissemination, further anchoring the poem in its colonial background.

But the poem's imperial motifs are not confined to the Spanish realm; they also gesture towards British colonial endeavors. The term "The River Plate" is an Anglicized rendition of the Spanish Rio de la Plata, reflecting British colonial interests and their past attempts to gain power and influence in the region. The soldierly figure, Sweeney, presumably hailing from Anglophone territories, together with references to "Bananas, figs, and hothouse grapes" (l. 20) — fruits designated as "colonial" in an 1888 bulletin from the Royal Botanic Gardens — navigates the reader toward a postcolonial

interpretative stance. The intersecting elements of the Spanish and British empires provide a fertile ground for analyzing Eliot's disease narrative through a postcolonial lens.

Eliot's poem foregrounds a conspiracy involving two central female figures: one in a Spanish cape, and the other named Rachel née Rabinovitch. The Jewish name of the latter evokes anti-Semitic undertones, particularly evident in the dehumanizing portrayal: "Rachel née Rabinovitch, tears at the grapes with murderous paws" (ll. 23-24). This bestial imagery, reminiscent of the derogatory portrayal of the "Spanish lady", brings to the fore the stereotype of a Jewish conspiracy. Anthony Julius critically observes Eliot's insinuation of an "International Jewish conspiracy" in his analysis of the poem (83-85). By interlinking Jewish, Spanish, and feminine identities, the poem seems to converge with the prevalent misogynistic and anti-Semitic discourses of the time that attributed the pandemic's spread to the femme fatale and Jewish communities. The description of Rachel née Rabinovitch's "murderous paws" becomes emblematic of the abject, posing a perceived threat to Sweeney's very existence. Such abject representations, during the pandemic era, were often conflated with women's sexuality and marginalized groups, including the Jewish community.

Eliot's poem delineates a vertebrate, perceptibly on the defensive as it senses imminent danger from women symbolizing pandemic traits. This portrayal can be interpreted as an emblematic stance on immunological boundaries: "The silent vertebrate in brown, contracts and concentrates, withdraws"; "She [Rachel] and the lady in the cape / Are suspect, thought to be in league / Therefore the man with heavy eyes,

declines the gambit, shows fatigue” (ll. 21-22, 25-28). The retracting vertebrate, seemingly synonymous with the man declining the gambit, fortifies himself against perceived threats via muscular contraction and concentration. The stanza resonates with embodied language emphasizing physical vitality. The described muscular actions of contraction and concentration denote corporeal fortification. Such descriptions can be viewed as an allusion to the robustness of an immune system. Eliot seemingly extols the physicality and immunity of vertebrates, framing these attributes against the lurking dangers of disease, implicitly linked to women’s sexuality or conspiracies with anti-Semitic undertones. The vertebrate’s adept defense represents the idealized robustness of an immune system that upholds the self’s physiological integrity while proficiently distinguishing and mitigating external threats.

Eliot’s poem culminates in a depiction of an ambiguous scene, suggesting an impending murder plot: “The host with someone indistinct / Converses at the door apart” (ll. 33-34). The imagery of an ajar door and an undefined interlocutor symbolizes the eroding boundary between internal and external realms, posing a threat to the integrity of one’s physical identity. This veiled narrative resonates with an intertextual nod to Agamemnon’s tragic fate: “The nightingales are singing near / The Convent of the Sacred Heart / And sang within the bloody wood / When Agamemnon cried aloud” (ll. 35-38). Upon his return from the siege of Troy, Agamemnon met his untimely end at the hands of his wife, Clytemnestra. Eliot juxtaposes Sweeney’s predicament with Agamemnon’s tragic denouement, anchoring the narrative within the tapestry of ancient Greek mythology. As Agamemnon’s triumphant return from Troy culminated in

betrayal and murder, Sweeney's journey to the River Plate confronts the peril of feminine allure. The poem weaves colonial undertones with the age-old Greek tragedy of Agamemnon.

This amalgamation is evident not just in the narrative framework, but also through celestial allusions in the poem's opening stanzas: "The circles of the stormy moon / Slide westward toward the River Plate, Death and the Raven drift above / And Sweeney guards the hornèd gate / Gloomy Orion and the Dog Are veiled / and hushed the shrunken seas" (ll. 5-10). Historically, ancient Greek narratives frequently invoked celestial motifs to foreshadow characters' destinies. For instance, Agamemnon's reference to the Pleiades underscores impending tempests and wartime desolation (Pfundstein J.M. 400). Eliot assimilates this astral framework in his composition; however, his interpretation and signification deviate from the traditional Hellenic paradigm.

The poem's celestial imagery bears potential associations with notions of illness. During the nineteenth century, prevalent beliefs within the British navy's colonial outposts posited that lunar phases might exert influence over human health (Harrison 25). Harrison delves into the nexus between solar and lunar patterns and disease in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He relates these early conceptions of disease to Newton's gravitational theory, which drew parallels between "the action of the Sun and Moon over the waters of the Earth and their presumed action upon the fluids of the human body" (29). Lacking empirical evidence, conclusions often diverged, particularly concerning whether the waxing or waning moon amplified fever risks. A

prevailing perspective, echoing the holistic immunological understanding, depicted human bodies as extensions of the atmosphere or air, entities shaped by sol-lunar dynamics. By the early nineteenth century, this hypothesis found favor among British military medical practitioners, who postulated a higher propensity for tropical ailments like fever during full or new moons (Harrison 35-37).

Within the poem, the “shrunk seas” are depicted in a tranquil state beneath a full moon, aligning with the theoretical postulation of sol-lunar forces modulating atmospheric conditions, which, in turn, influence sea levels. Turbulent lunar cycles were frequently linked with fever and related maladies. The Dog Star, prior to the late nineteenth century’s close, was reputed to precipitate fever outbreaks (Harrison 31). The poem’s allusion to a concealed Dog Star mirrors contemporaneous preventive measures, notably the adoption of masks. Further, the poem’s portrayal of tranquil seas under a tempestuous moon resonates with the sol-lunar effects on atmospheric dynamics over marine expanses. The intricate interplay between atmosphere and disease is epitomized by the miasma theory. During the devastating 1918 pandemic, many still subscribed to the miasmatic perspective, attributing illnesses to atmospheric factors.

The poem intertwines discourses on disease and immunity, weaving past and present narratives — from the scientific descriptions of vertebrates and muscle tension to the socio-cultural representations of the “Spanish flu”, and folk beliefs about astrological significances. Central to these intricate layers is an envisioned immune and robust empire. David Killingray’s article “A New ‘Imperial Disease’: The Influenza

Pandemic of 1918-9 and its Impact on the British Empire” (2003) provides an important backdrop. In the era captured by the poem, the world of science was brimming with newfound hope in combating disease, particularly in the freshly annexed imperial territories that were marked by endemic illnesses. These epidemics presented a dual challenge: they were medical enigmas and also potent threats to the economic and political fabric of imperial ventures. As Killingray elucidates, these “imperial diseases”, defined as diseases that had a “markedly deleterious effect on the resources of the Empire” (30), were a central concern.

The “Spanish lady” of the poem is not a mere character; she becomes the embodiment of these “imperial diseases”. In the poem, the empire emerges as characterized by nebulous boundaries, suggesting an inherent difficulty in clearly demarcating itself from its colonial extensions. This theme of border ambiguity culminates in the potential endangerment of the empire’s emblematic figure, Sweeney, who appears susceptible to the enticements of femininity. The narrative implies a metaphorical blurring of the empire’s frontiers, paralleled by the pervasive spread of a pandemic, jeopardizing all within the imperial terrain, including its guardians like Sweeney. Such unease, particularly in confronting the femme fatale portrayal of the pandemic, underscores the profound anxieties historically entrenched within the empire’s dominant Christian ideological paradigm, further accentuated by the poem’s evocation of the Eve motif, consuming the fruit, emblematic of the femme fatale archetype. Kristeva’s insights illuminate this nexus between feminine temptation and abjection:

The other places it [feminine temptation] within the femininity-desire-food-abjection series. The story of the fall sets up a diabolical otherness in relation to the divine... Adam is no longer endowed with the composed nature of paradisiac man, he is torn by covetous desire: desire for woman — sexual covetousness since the serpent is its master, consuming desire for food since the apple is its object. He must protect himself from that sinful food that consumes him and that he craves. (126-127).

The poem situates itself perfectly within this femininity-desire-food-abjection series, uncovering the “Spanish lady’s” conspiracies that could potentially upend male-centric identity. The fear of this overturning is made manifest in the poem’s vivid descriptions of tropical foods: coffee, bananas, figs, and grapes. The action of a woman “tearing at grapes with murderous paws” mirrors the biblical Fall and symbolizes the consuming desires that could dismantle the masculine identity, represented by both Adam and Sweeney.

Killingray’s remarks about influenza being an apt “imperial” disease further contextualize the poem. The “Spanish lady”, with her various actions, serves as an emblem of the pandemic’s vast threat. In the poem’s period, the disease was a concern not merely from a health perspective, but also had deep-rooted sociopolitical implications, endangering both individual lives and the very structural integrity of empires. Through her actions and the imagery associated with her, the “Spanish lady” can be seen as the feminization of this looming epidemic. The poetic voice transfers the

fears of “feminine abjection” onto tropical produce — emblematic of the colonial resources of the time. This fear, therefore, is not singular but dual-faceted: it is an apprehension of feminine allure and simultaneously a dread of imperial fragility. In the poem, the women’s fervent engagement with tropical fruits evolves into a potent allegory of peril. This imagery bears notable parallels with Killingray’s elucidation of the “imperial disease” and the pronounced adverse implications it held for the Empire’s resources, as perceived by imperialist perspectives. Drawing parallels with Eve’s act during the biblical Fall, this action underscores fears rooted in both gender dynamics and the politics of colonialism.

In the poem, Sweeney’s interpretation of the women’s engagement with tropical fruits carries connotations of violence, mirroring colonial anxieties surrounding dietary habits: “One of the most salient reasons diet became intertwined with colonial trepidations was its perceived correlation with the inordinately high mortality and morbidity rates experienced by Europeans in tropical climes” (Bewell 150). Veterans returning from these tropical zones were often perceived as having narrowly evaded tropical diseases, bearing compromised health (Bewell 278). This intricate linkage between colonial produce and mortality within the poem echoes the colonizers’ dread of being metaphorically “consumed” by the colonies. Aiming to fortify the empire’s masculinized self-image, the poem establishes an inherent immune response, identifying women, the Jewish community, and colonial territories as pathogenic “others”. Yet, as the poem concludes, there emerges a state of abjection, marked by transgressive acts and a dissolution of the clear demarcations that once separated the

empire from its colonies.

At the end of the poem, the representation of the abject is vividly articulated through the evocative imagery of blood and excrement: “The nightingales are singing near / The Convent of the Sacred Heart / And sang within the bloody wood / When Agamemnon cried aloud / And let their liquid siftings fall / To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud” (ll. 35-40). Blood and excrement are epitomized as abject elements, given their intrinsic capability to confront and destabilize one’s coherent sense of self and living existence. Eliot delineates the “bloody wood” in an antecedent stanza: “Leaning in / Branches of wisteria / Circumscribe a golden grin” (ll. 30-32). Here, the bloody branches of wisteria breach the sanctity of the “indoor space”, perpetrating a murder under the moon. The abject, in this context, materializes as an invasive wisteria limb, a symbolic transgressor that unsettles one’s fundamental identity. Contrary to Kristeva’s assertion regarding literature’s typical cathartic engagement with the abject, Eliot appears willing to immerse himself in the abject, seeking its integration into the poetic structure of his composition and his venerated conception of tradition.

Kristeva’s scholarly discourse expands on the nexus between abjection and catharsis across the tapestry of Western philosophical thought. In her elucidation, Platonic catharsis endeavors to purge the contaminants of abjection, transitioning toward an idyllic realm. In stark contrast, the Aristotelian interpretation of catharsis seeks a symbiosis between poetic constructs, like rhythmic patterns and melodies, and the abject—specifically in the guise of sexuality. Kristeva contends that these dual paradigms dominated the discourse on catharsis and abjection until the advent of

Freud's psychoanalytic paradigm:

The wholly mimetic identification (entailing both transference and counter- transference) that an analyst holds in relation to analysands... facilitates a regression to the undercurrents perceptible in discursive discontinuities, enabling them to be rhythmically sequenced — possibly a semblance of attaining consciousness — bridging the chasms of a discourse which, having eschewed its abject essence, is rendered melancholic (30-31).

For Kristeva, the artistic articulation of the abject finds its voice through the psychoanalytic interplay—a dialogic dance between individuals striving for mutual empathetic resonance. However, within the confines of Eliot's "Sweeney" composition, the poet's rendition of the abject aligns more closely with the Aristotelian model, which endeavors to forcibly "harmonize" the abject within a poetic framework. This integrative endeavor becomes palpable in the emblematic representation of the nightingales.

Nightingales, historically entrenched in literary traditions, emblemize rhythmic sound. While Eliot admits his unfamiliarity with the auditory experience of nightingales, he is acutely attuned to their emblematic resonance within the literary canon (Ricks and McCue 545). This nightingale symbol recurrently punctuates literary narratives, often serving as an emblem of catharsis. Notably, the tragic demise of Agamemnon is underscored by the lilting melodies of nightingales. Agamemnon's ill-fated end provides the foundational narrative framework for this poem. Eliot, in a direct allusion,

evokes the presence of these songbirds at the locus of Agamemnon's demise. He astutely juxtaposes this with an incongruity, noting the improbability of nightingales' presence during the season marking Agamemnon's end (545). Thus, the evocation of nightingales in the poem appears as a conscious effort to infuse the terminal act of violence with a semblance of cathartic harmony. Furthermore, the poem's auditory architecture, characterized by its iambic tetrameter and the ballad rhyme scheme (abcb), suggests Eliot's intention to subsume themes of disease, sexuality, and colonialism within the traditional edifice of Greek myth and a cathartic poetic rhythm. Such a literary stratagem underscores an intrinsic aspiration to regulate the masculine/Eurocentric yearning for colonial bounty, while simultaneously casting them as a potential medium of contagion and decay.

Yet, the poem's rendition of the nightingale's song does not achieve the cathartic transcendence observed within Greek mythology. Contrarily, the scatological imagery— "their liquid siftings fall / To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud"— unveils a discord and abjection emblematic of the dynamics between empires and their colonies. Historically, the nightingale's cathartic symbol was co-opted by Europeans as an aural bridge to "harmonize" with unfamiliar territories. A notable instance can be traced to Christopher Columbus, who mistakenly attributed the calls of indigenous birds in the American continent to nightingales, noting, "And the nightingale was singing and other birds of a thousand kinds in the month of November there where I went" (Norton Anthology 60). Contrary to Columbus's auditory perceptions, the American continent was devoid of nightingales. This inadvertent superimposition of the nightingale's call

upon an alien soundscape can be perceived as Columbus's intuitive mechanism to ground himself within the colonial landscape. The nightingale's song thus morphs into an aural medium bridging Europe and its colonies, assuaging Columbus's latent trepidations of alienation within uncharted territories. This imaginative sound, at its core, mirrors a Eurocentric drive to assimilate the unfamiliar within the ambit of established cultural paradigms.

Given Eliot's satirical verses on "Colombo" penned between 1909 and 1922, wherein he critically portrayed Columbus through lenses of sexuality, race, and colonialism, it is likely that he had substantive familiarity with the Columbus narrative. Such satirical undertones are resonant in the ending of the poem concerning Sweeney, where the nightingales' "liquid siftings" tarnish the "stiff dishonoured shroud" (ll. 39-40), disassembling the conventional literary association of the nightingale with catharsis. John Barry (2004) explains that during the transition from the Victorian era to the early twentieth century, "swamp gas" was a colloquialism denoting excrement and was widely understood to be implicated in the spread of numerous infectious ailments. The nightingale's excrement, viewed through this lens, takes on abject qualities, not merely as a potential carrier of diseases but as a symbolic challenge to imperial hegemony. This excretory motif finds relevance in the context of the British colonial guano trade. Furthermore, a geographical connection is discernible with the British archipelago, the Nightingale Islands, recognized as a guano reservoir for the empire. Within the poem's framework, the symbolic shroud of an imperial soldier is blemished by the nightingales' excrement, epitomizing the fracturing of imperial honor

when confronted with abjection. Therefore, the scatological motifs underscore the discord between the aspirational cathartic and the confronting abject. Contrary to the representations in Columbus's writings, the nightingales in "Sweeney" accentuate the Empire's abjection without providing any cathartic relief.

Eliot — while revealing colonial anxieties relating to abjection and satirically criticizing the downfall of the imperial soldier, Sweeney — fails to provide a dialogic space between the poetic interlocutor and the abject in his poem. The poetic voice appears perpetually entangled in combatting the abject within its symbolic immune system. The nebulous demarcation between the self and the other is reminiscent of the autoimmunity concepts prevalent at the time. Eliot's poetic craft accentuates an immune resilience embedded within European literary traditions, striving to contest and integrate the metaphorical "pathogens", here associated with femininity, Jewish identity, and imperial colonies.

Gabrielle Macintyre pivots on the comedic undertones and the ironic representation of colonizers' corporeal indulgences in Eliot's Colombo poem: "The poem suggests the foundational motives of colonial expansion lay in sexual dominion, and an authentic recollection of colonial inception necessitates a humorous reflection on its bodily excesses" (286). While the Bolo and Colombo verses deploy humor to challenge colonialism, "Sweeney" veers towards evoking the uncanny abjection of femininity and colonial dynamics. Given the contextual backdrop of the pandemic, Eliot delineates the palpable apprehension surrounding the abject, subsequently manifesting patriarchal and Eurocentric anxieties anchored in femininity, colonialism, and a perceived

“Jewishness”.

According to Sianne Ngai, paranoia hinges upon the blurred demarcation between the objective and subjective realms (15). Drawing upon Freudian insights, she posits that a distinctly masculine form of paranoia emerges in the endeavor to encapsulate every detail within a comprehensive system (299-301). In “Sweeney”, Eliot crafts his narrative around a profound paranoia directed towards a perceived feminine conspiracy aimed at the obliteration of masculinity. This anxiety is intertwined with the motifs of women’s sexuality and the amalgamation of femininity with colonial and racial otherness. The persona endeavors to navigate his paranoia by anchoring himself in the Grecian mythos of Agamemnon. Against the backdrop of recurrent epidemics, such paranoia is amplified, stemming from the perception that contagious diseases fluidly traverse the boundaries between subjects and objects. Consequently, the poetic persona in “Sweeney” grapples with apprehensions concerning defenses against potential abjection. The poem’s culminating scene of violent bloodshed manifests as the persona’s internalized projection of his paranoias, superimposed upon the narrative of Agamemnon. This intricate dance between subjective apprehensions and objective dangers underscores the essence of paranoia.

Anthony Julius accentuates that the dominant emotional response elicited by Eliot’s poems, including “Sweeney” and “Burbank”, is predominantly one of disgust, particularly regarding excrement and blood (122). While the poetic persona establishes barriers, striving to distance himself from the visceral scenes of violence and decay, such imagery could evoke profound disgust — an emotion intrinsically linked to

abjection, as posited by Kristeva: “Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting protect me” (2). The subsequent discussion will delve into the interplay of paranoia, particularly surrounding anti-Semitic conspiracies, and disgust, contextualized against the backdrop of the pandemic. While the confluence of femininity and abjection recurs in “Burbank” and “Gerontion”, here anti-Semitic undertones predominate over colonial themes.

Anti-Semitism and the Pandemic in “Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar” and “Gerontion”

In Eliot’s “Burbank with a Baedeker”, the setting is Venice, and the poem chronicles the interactions among its central figures: Volupine, Burbank, and Bleistein. These characters are not endowed with psychological depth; instead, they serve as embodiments or signifiers of their femininity or Jewishness. The enigmatic Princess Volupine notably exhibits symptoms reminiscent of the 1918 pandemic. Her “meager, blue-nailed, phthisic hand” (l. 26) suggests cyanosis, a condition common among pandemic patients, marked by a bluish discoloration due to a lack of oxygen. The descriptor “phthisic” further indicates a pulmonary disease, bringing to mind symptoms such as coughing and wheezing. These vivid portrayals firmly position Volupine in a context of contagion. Her hands, symbolizing touch and connection, become hazardous, especially when considering the biblical trope of the femme fatale as analyzed before, as evidenced by Burbank’s “fall” in her presence: “Princess Volupine arrived / They were together and he fell” (ll. 3-4).

The character Burbank, around whom much of the poem's action revolves, becomes entangled in a web of relationships, with Volupine's allure being central to his "fall". Eliot further complicates this narrative by intertwining themes of feminine allure with racial undertones. Just as "Sweeney" features the character of "Rachel nee Rabinovitch" to interlink femininity and Jewish identity, "Burbank" performs a similar amalgamation. Volupine's liaisons extend to Sir Ferdinand Klein, a figure seemingly of Jewish heritage. This connection underlines certain Jewish stereotypes of the era, particularly when the poem touches on themes of monetary influence: "The Jew is underneath the slot / Money in furs" (ll. 23-24). Anthony Julius sheds light on these recurring themes in Eliot's works, identifying the poet's portrayal of Jewish individuals as profiteering capitalists. In aligning Volupine with such motifs, the poem implies a nexus between her seductive powers and a supposed Jewish financial conspiracy. Thus, abjection in "Burbank" is framed not just through the lens of disease, but also via intersections of feminine allure and racial and ethnic undertones.

Eliot's poem addresses the issue of anti-Semitism through evocative imagery, most notably, the abjection evident in Bleistein's submerged corpse: "A lusterless protrusive eye / Stares from the protozoic slime / At a perspective of Canaletto / The smoky candle end of time" (ll. 13-16). This depiction finds a more detailed counterpart in Eliot's "Dirge", where he delineates the scene: "Full fathom five your Bleistein lies / Under the flatfish and the squids / Graves' disease in a dead jew's eyes" (ll. 1-3). This representation, particularly the lowercased 'j' in "jew," offers a disconcerting and derogatory portrayal of Jewish identity. The "lusterless protrusive eye" in "Burbank"

resonates with the manifestations of Graves' disease mentioned in "Dirge". Anthony Julius provides an incisive analysis of "Dirge", noting the poem's almost gleeful depiction of marine life consuming a Jewish corpse, a grim carnival of death (124). This image of the corpse, particularly abject in its potential to contaminate and confront the living with their mortality, becomes a platform on which Eliot juxtaposes Jewish identity with a decayed materialism. Julius, leveraging Kristeva's notions of horror, elaborates on the poem's attempt at "purifying" the deceased, not through a natural process, but through the relentless predation by marine creatures (Julius 124). Extending Julius's insights, I seek to explore Eliot's anti-Semitism through the lenses of affect and immunity, contrasting "Dirge" and the relevant stanza in "Burbank".

Eliot's "Dirge" provides an intimate, almost voyeuristic, examination of Bleistein's decomposition, detailing the marine scavengers that partake in this macabre feast. Compared to "Dirge", Eliot's "Burbank" conveys a different form of anti-Semitic sentiment. In "Dirge", the poetic speaker seems to identify himself with the marine predators observing Bleistein's dissolution: "Lobsters hourly keep close watch / Hark! Now I hear them scratch scratch scratch" (ll. 16-17). However, in "Burbank", the tone shifts. Eliot described "Burbank" as an "intensely serious poem" in a letter to his brother Henry Eliot on February 15, 1920. Here, the emphasis is not so much on the gleeful degradation of a body by sea creatures, but rather on the pervasive, insidious spread of disease associated with the Jewish persona.

The poem articulates fear of the "Jewish abject" from the perspective of Venetian history. Such a sentiment is intertwined with the spread of infectious disease propagated

by Venice's waterways. The "protozoic slime" that potentially transmits Bleistein's disease can flow towards the rats: "On the Rialto once / The rats are underneath the piles / The Jew is underneath the lot / Money in furs / The boatman smiles" (ll. 21-24). The hideously racist parallel between rats and Jewish people replicates the stigmatization of Jewish people during the bubonic plague (Black Death) in the fourteenth century in Venice. According to Samuel K. Cohn in "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews" (2007), outbreaks of bubonic plague were often believed to be transmitted by rats, and in that period, the Jewish community was vilified as the disease's source. This stanza also contains references to Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* (Ricks and McCue 494). Shylock mentions, "There be land rats and water rats, water thieves and land thieves — I mean pirates — and then there is the peril of waters, winds, and rocks" (42). Here, Shylock's portrayal of danger is attributed to both rats and thieves. Water contaminated by corpses facilitated the spread of disease in both the bubonic plague and the 1918 pandemic. Thus, the poem intimates a deeply prejudiced and unsettling message: the poet fears that Bleistein's remains, transformed into rats amidst the "protozoic slime", could thereby contaminate Venice. Both rats and Jewish figures are relegated to submerged and marginalized positions, linking them to the abjection of disease spread through water.

In this poem, imagery related to water is intricately tied to abjection, as exemplified by the barge: "Her [Volupine's] shuttered barge / Burned on the water all the day" (ll. 11-12). Volupine's departure from the barge is described in these terms: "Princess Volupine extends / A meager, blue-nailed, phthisic hand / To climb the water stair.

Lights, lights / She entertains Sir Ferdinand” (ll. 25-28). Such imagery evokes the sensation of suffocation — a struggle between being consumed by fire and being submerged in water. This duality can be perceived as an embodied representation of patients’ experiences during the 1918 pandemic: the fire represents feverish heat, while water suggests the sensation of drowning in pulmonary fluids, as also described in *The Waste Land* (Outka 76). The body’s suffocation, a victim to its fluids, manifests as a symbol of abjection and autoimmunity. The fiery barge upon the water thus further resonates with the imagery of Bleistein drowning with a cigar. Thus, the portrayal of Bleistein, whose life dwindles, akin to a “smoky candle”, while immersed in the slime, offers a cold-hearted and grim depiction of his afflictions. The cold-hearted depiction of his remains in the slime and the evanescent smoke of the candle suggest an ultimate obliteration of Bleistein’s physical presence. The scene of burning also echoes Cohn’s account of the incineration of Jewish bodies during the era of the bubonic plague. Such a portrayal aligns with the pervasive anxiety surrounding infectious disease. This very anxiety is further highlighted through Volupine’s phthisic departure from the barge.

In the poem, Volupine is implicated in Burbank’s downfall. Her subsequent escape from the barge and her interactions with Jewish individuals, such as Sir Ferdinand Klein, appear to underscore an inexorable spread of disease, depicted in a manner that intertwines both misogyny and anti-Semitism. Furthermore, her ascent of the water stair links her to the motif of water-related abjection associated with disease. It is noteworthy that the poem chronicles Volupine’s actions in both past tense (relating to Burbank) and present tense (pertaining to Sir Ferdinand Klein). While Burbank is confined to the past

tense, Bleistein, previously alive and dynamic, is now portrayed in the present, submerged in protozoic slime. This stylistic choice seems to intimate that following his encounter with Volupine, Burbank ceases to exist, while contemporary Venice is ostensibly overrun by the purported maladies linked to women and Jews.

Historical context sheds light on the poem's anti-Semitic underpinnings, especially when one considers the pandemic milieu of the late 1910s. Anti-Semitism was on the rise in Europe in 1918. Fears of disease transmission, such as typhus — a condition whose symptoms were often mistakenly equated with influenza — led Germany to seal its borders against Jewish immigrants (Bergmann and Wyrwa 8). Notably, Jews in Vienna were singled out as conspirators (12). By emphasizing Bleistein's Jewish and Viennese roots ("Chicago Semite Viennese") and his subsequent demise and affliction (l. 16), the poem seems to paint him as both a purveyor of disease and a conspirator. This analysis underscores the poem's anti-Semitic stance, which is rooted in the abhorrent association between Jews and unbridled disease propagation. The poem's insinuation of disease is further tied to fiscal motifs and the alleged Jewish conspiracy, as epitomized by the imagery of "money in furs".

Eliot's conflation of an alleged Jewish monetary conspiracy with infectious diseases parallels the anti-Semitic propaganda prevalent during World War I. Werner Bergmann and Ulrich Wyrwa (2017) describe how Jews faced vilification as war profiteers across Britain, Germany, and Austria. In "Dirge", Bleistein's corporeal form is distilled into lavish commodities: "Though he suffers a sea-change / Still expensive rich and strange"; "That is lace that was his nose"; "From the teeth, gold in gold" (ll. 6-

7, 8, 15). As established before, the poetic persona's absorption is evident as he fixates on the grotesque remains of a Jewish individual, examining its details with a perverse pleasure. This engrossment, symbolized through immersion in the sea, extends to the poet's identification with marine creatures that mockingly consume Bleistein's remains. The abjection's catharsis in "Dirge" resonates with Aristotelian notions as mentioned before — there is a harmony between the sea's rhythm and the contented feasting song of marine life.

Contrastingly, in "Burbank", the cathartic emotion is not satisfaction but rather an anxiety concerning disease contamination emanating from the submerged corpse. The tone in "Dirge" confidently and gleefully derides the luxury items decomposing with Bleistein in the marine depths. However, in "Burbank", the fiscal imagery transmutes, presenting Bleistein as a reincarnated entity in the guise of disease-spreading rats — a manifestation of money. This transformation aligns with prevalent anti-Semitic sentiments during the late stages of World War I, when many European nations perceived Jews as both war profiteers and shadowy puppet masters behind the conflict. This wartime context surfaces in the poem's mention of Istria: "The horses, under the axletree / Beat up the dawn from Istria / With even feet" (ll. 9-11). Here, the dawn heralding over Venice epitomizes Italy's triumphant spirit and the annexation of Istria post the Austro-Hungarian Empire's 1918 dissolution.

The poem juxtaposes luminosity with the abject obscurity of the submerged realm. The Jewish and feminine figures in the poem are depicted as gravitating towards light, yet they are relegated to profound darkness. This yearning for illumination is

discernible in Bleistein's "lusterless protrusive eye" set amidst the mud and in Volupine's desperate cries for "lights, lights" during her frantic barge escape. The poem casts both Jews and women as entities requiring isolation, positing them as threats to Venice's well-being and equilibrium.

The poetic persona in "Burbank" adopts a seemingly objective third-person view but conveys a misogynistic and anti-Semitic perspective on Venetian history. Eliot's Venice emerges as a city permeated by abject scenes, marked by the blurred boundaries between above and below, air and water, light and darkness, and Burbank and Bleistein. The portrayal of Venice contends with "serious" threats from a supposed Jewish conspiracy eroding the city's foundations: "Who clipped the lion's wings and flea'd his rump and pared his fingers / Thought Burbank, meditating on / Time's ruins, and the seven laws" (ll. 29-32). From an orthodox European-Christian perspective, the poem insinuates a correlation between Judaism and Venice's decline. Coupled with the anti-Semitic associations of Jewishness and disease, the final stanza intimates that the spread of Judaism — akin to the dissemination of currency and contagion — heralds Venice's fall. The usage of the past tense for Burbank raises speculation about his possible demise, contrasting starkly with the present tense reserved for figures like Bleistein, Volupine, and Ferdinand Klein, suggesting an undercurrent of anti-Semitic suspicion of a Jewish plot.

In a vein akin to "Sweeney", "Burbank" reveals an attempt to uphold a masculine Euro-centric rendition of Venetian history, safeguarding it from the perceived contamination of diseases attributed to Jewish people and women. Yet the poetic

persona in “Burbank” falters in this endeavor. The poem’s metrical structure aligns with the ballad form observed in “Sweeney”, adhering to an iambic tetrameter and an “abcb” rhyme scheme. As posited earlier, poetic forms are regarded as a type of catharsis in the writing of abjection. However, in “Burbank”, the “defunctive music under sea” plunging alongside Bleistein’s body indicates an effort to suppress rather than reconcile with the abject, unlike the approach in “Dirge”. The ballad form appears as an attempt by the poetic persona to encapsulate and “purify” the perceived contamination of the Jewish identity: “Princess Volupine extends / A meager, blue-nailed, phthisic hand / To climb the waterstair. Lights, lights / She entertains Sir Ferdinand / Klein” (ll. 25-29). In her 2009 work, *The F-Word: Pound, Eliot, Lewis, and the Far Right*, Katrin Frisch delves into the debate concerning the character Klein’s Jewish identity. Julius interprets Klein as the Jewish counterpart to Bleistein, and Frisch suggests that the poem’s nuanced avoidance of directly labeling Klein as a “Jew” is itself indicative of his Jewishness (148); this nuanced presentation, that is, plays into an anti-Semitic discourse about Jewish assimilation and Jews’ perceived invisibility within host societies (149).

The deliberate enjambment between Ferdinand and Klein, intended to maintain the ballad’s “abcb” rhyme scheme, reveals a structural tension: an extended breath set against the rhythm’s predictable beat. Enjambment represents an inherent discord — a sentiment or thought that resists confinement within the prescribed structure. In “Burbank” this tension could be interpreted as mirroring the labored breathing associated with an influenza infection, analogous to the challenge of confining “Klein” — a marker of Jewish identity — within the poem’s structure. This strain also manifests

the poetic self's paranoid immunological disintegration — a self typically characterized by a regulated breath — in the face of the uncontainable Jewish other. In “Gerontion”, Eliot abandons the ballad structure evident in both “Sweeney” and “Burbank”, choosing instead to depict abjection and anti-Semitism without adhering to a consistent poetic form.

In “Gerontion”, the intertwining themes of disease, finance, and anti-Semitism underscore the poem's exploration of abjection. Eliot's personal encounters with the 1918 influenza pandemic seem to permeate the poem. In the *Dial* (July 1921), he characterized his lived experience of influenza as akin to enduring a “hot rainless spring” and a sensation of “extreme dryness” (213). A similar ambience is evoked in the opening lines of “Gerontion”: “Here I am, an old man in a dry month / Being read to by a boy waiting for rain” (ll. 1-2). The subsequent lines draw an evident linkage between disease and Jewish identity: “And the Jew squats on the window sill, the owner / Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp / Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London” (ll. 8-10). This linkage perpetuates a narrative that connects sexuality, disease, and an alleged Jewish conspiracy. The specific mention of Belgium carries historical significance. In a study of World War I's impact on Belgian women, Gubin, Flour, and Kypers (2016) note that during the German occupation, a significant number of these women, having lost their employment, resorted to prostitution. As a result, they were stigmatized as carriers of venereal disease among the military forces on both sides (4). In the poem, there is a troubling conflation of misogynistic and anti-Semitic undertones. The Jewish landlord is depicted in a manner that alludes to both sexual propagation and

the spread of disease. This portrayal is reminiscent of historical stereotypes and prejudices, which equated certain groups with contagion and societal decay. The poem's use of the word "spawning", a term often associated with the breeding of rats or fish, only further underscores this dehumanizing depiction. This choice of language and imagery insinuates a harmful connection between the Jewish landlord and the spread of disease, as hinted by the coughing goat and sneezing woman (ll. 11, 14). In his analysis of "Gerontion", Anthony Julius underscores the anti-Semitic sentiments the poem provoked. He cites responses such as "the Jew is international, the scum of Europe and its landlord" and "the modern world is now owned and enslaved by the only proliferating element in it, the international money power" (54). This highlights the imperative to engage critically with themes of economic anti-Semitism, especially in relation to narratives of finance and conspiracy.

As delineated earlier in the analysis of "Burbank", the pervasive power of money is depicted as a disease, perceived to be disseminated by Jewish conspirators. As illustrated by the deeply anti-Semitic sentiment referenced by Julius, within "Gerontion" Jewish landlords are portrayed as wielding formidable financial power, appearing to dominate and claim spaces and consequently pushing individuals into a state of distressing displacement: "My house is a decayed house / and the Jew squats on the window sill, the owner" (ll. 7-8). The poem's speaker persistently alludes to his state of homelessness, using wind as an emblem: "I an old man / A dull head among windy spaces"; "Vacant shutters / weave the wind. I have no ghosts/ An old man in a draughty house / Under a windy knob"; "Tenants of the house / Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry

season” (ll. 15-16, 29-32, 74-75). These lines underscore an abjection where the space of the speaker’s home appears utterly permeated by the relentless wind. Such imagery not only connotes the speaker’s vulnerability as a tenant, but also draws parallels between the invasive nature of wind and the encroaching power of the Jewish landlord’s finances. To provide context, as discussed earlier in this chapter, during the era of the 1918 pandemic, there was a prevailing belief that winds played a role in disseminating disease. Through this lens, Eliot seems to insinuate a conspiracy wherein money collaborates with disease propagation, exacerbated by the cramped living conditions of the impoverished. While this might be viewed as a scathing indictment of capitalism’s heartless exploitation amid a health crisis, the critique takes on a more freighted and sinister tone when a specific ethnic community is unilaterally blamed for the ills of capitalism.

In the poem, Eliot addresses the ills of capitalism, centering particularly on the pervasive issue of debt. This problem is illustrated both on a micro-scale — the plight of tenancy in a deteriorating household — and on a macro-scale, as it mirrors the broader disillusionment with national wartime debt. Regrettably, Eliot frames these pressing concerns within a context that employs misogynistic and anti-Semitic representations.

Eliot employs a misogynistic portrayal of history as a deceptive, alluring woman to articulate the rising disenchantment with capitalist operations during the war. In the poem, history emerges not as a passive recorder but as an active, calculating entity — akin to a financial strategist during wartime: “History has many cunning passages,

contrived corridors / And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions / Guides us by vanities. Think now / She gives when our attention is distracted / And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions / That the giving famishes the craving” (ll. 35-39). The poem suggests that “History”, like a shrewd financial strategist, engages in a give-and-take dynamic, offering and withholding information in a way that influences beliefs and decisions. “History” attempts to market her narratives, capitalizing on the audience’s vanities and aspirations with deceptive cunning. From the use of words like “ambitions”, “passion”, “heroism”, and “courage”, we can deduce that the poem touches on the subject of war propaganda (ll. 41, 45-46). Given the poem’s financial subtext, Eliot draws a subtle link between misguided beliefs in war propaganda and the undependable financial promises of future returns. The post-WWI debt crisis in European nations shattered the hopeful mirage of a bright future. The phrase “famishes the craving” evokes the devastating financial credit collapse and its associated European famines. “History” the strategist, exploiting circumstances to “her” advantage, makes choices leading to collective suffering. History, in its portrayal, seems to navigate the world of credits, debts, and promises akin to post-WWI Europe’s precarious financial situation.

In a letter (December 18th, 1919) to his mother, Eliot voiced his concerns about the famine in Austria and mentioned the delay of the peace treaty in America, which was primarily due to disagreements over the calculation and allocation of debts. The lines of the poem resonate with the tension of calculated risks taken during financial crises: “Gives too late / What’s not believed in, or is still believed / In memory only,

reconsidered passion. Gives too soon / Into weak hands / what's thought can be dispensed with / Till the refusal propagates a fear" (ll. 39-43). The poem captures the essence of capitalist maneuvering, particularly the dilemma of optimal investment timing amidst economic destitution. These lines delve into the complexities of timing and belief, touching upon the repercussions of both hasty and procrastinated actions. The nuanced undertones hint at the calculated risks synonymous with national financial decisions during crises. This poetic portrayal mirrors the real-world complexities of 1919, when nations, principally Britain, France, and the U.S., were carefully calibrating their financial decisions based on self-interest. Patricia Clavin's discussions of these financial calculations draw attention to how nations assessed the situation from a self-interested viewpoint, leading to a lack of cooperation and Austria's further economic destitution to the point of famine (270-274).

In "Gerontion", Eliot presents a personified "History" addressed as "she" laden with misogynistic undertones, wherein seduction and deception are interwoven with the attributes of feminine temptation. The poem seems to suggest an inherent distrust of this feminized version of history. This portrayal can be linked to World War I-era rhetoric which often leaned on the imagery of the motherland and the patriotic allegiance to nationalist narratives. Instead of reinforcing the trusted image of the motherland, Eliot seems to subvert it, painting it as deceptive and unreliable. The motherland, often presented as a figure of loyalty and trustworthiness during wartime, was a staple of British propaganda. Evan M. Caris describes how this gendered representation targeted a predominantly masculine audience, urging them to defend

their homeland (56). An example is the famous recruitment poster, “Daddy, what did you do in the Great War?” (Fig. 2.2), where the silent father figure is juxtaposed against implied questions of duty and masculinity, with an unspoken backdrop of the feminized homeland or Britannia.



(Figure 2.2)

Eliot, however, seems disillusioned with these ideals. While he does not directly challenge the masculine archetype in war propaganda, his portrayal of femininity is rife

with seduction, deception, and a kind of derogatory animalistic sexuality, as suggested by the term “spawning”. The line “Unnatural vices / are fathered by our heroism” (ll. 44-45) perhaps best encapsulates this sentiment. The juxtaposition of “father” and “heroism” against “unnatural vices” seems to underline a disenchantment with the narrative of heroic masculinity. Eliot’s portrayal not only conveys disillusionment with gender roles, but also hints at a dissatisfaction with the broader nationalist narrative, especially in the face of pervasive capitalist influence in an increasingly globalized world. The absence of women’s voices in the poem reduces the representation of femininity to merely an empty signifier, filled only with Eliot’s misogynistic imagination, to convey his disillusionment.

Eliot’s “Gerontion” presents a dramatic re-envisioning of history. Instead of the passive recorder often portrayed in literature, history emerges as an active, calculating deceiver, likened to an underlying financier. This active portrayal starkly contrasts the poem’s protagonist, Gerontion, who is depicted in a state of profound passivity, “driven by the trades” to inhabit a decaying house: “an old man driven by the Trades, To a sleepy corner” (ll. 72-73). The poem’s universe is filled with cosmopolitan characters sharing the same living space with the titular old man: “Among whispers by Mr. Silvero / With caressing hands, at Limoges Who walked all night in the next room / By Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians / By Madame de Tornquist, in the dark room” (ll. 23-27). Their presence conjures an image of a world where national boundaries appear to blur. However, the poem addresses the cosmopolitan identities with a single Christian undertone, especially in its juxtaposition of Christ and Judas Iscariot: “In the juvenescence

of the year, Came Christ the tiger / In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering judas / To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk” (ll. 19-22). This imagery invites a comparison of the ritualistic consumption of Jesus’s body and blood during the Holy Communion with the symbolic devouring of Judas Iscariot. Eliot paints a vivid scene of the “decayed house” with a “peevisish gutter” (ll. 7,14), suggesting that its rootless, cosmopolitan tenants are led astray by worshipping the “wrong God” — the money-driven Judas instead of Christ. However, there is a more sinister, anti-Semitic undercurrent. Historically, Judas has been portrayed as the archetype of the “greedy Jewish person”, a perspective detailed by Anthony Julius in *Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England* (264). In “Gerontion”, Eliot crafts a layered tapestry of imagery that, when unpacked, reveals concerning associations. By juxtaposing the Jewish landlord’s “blistering” skin with elements such as a coughing goat and a sneezing woman, he seems to imply a space permeated with disease. These linked images appear to draw on harmful stereotypes, portraying Jewish individuals as harbingers of contamination and deterioration. Such characterizations repeat the problematic representations in “Burbank”, where Jewish monetary influence is similarly depicted as an international corrupting force. These depictions perpetuate longstanding biases and prejudices, adding to a troubling narrative that has historically marginalized Jewish communities.

In “Gerontion”, the nexus between capitalism and influenza transcends metaphor, elucidating not only the invasive presence of both monetary power and disease but also the embodied experiences of self-alienation and dispossession. The poetic persona’s

post-influenza symptoms depict an unsettling scenario where the affliction claims the tenant's bodies, analogous to the exploitative grasp of an inequitable financial system: "I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it / Since what is kept must be adulterated / I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch / How should I use them for your closer contact"; "These with a thousand deliberations / Protract the profit of their chilled delirium / Excite the membrane, when the sense has cooled / With pungent sauces, multiply variety / In a wilderness of mirrors" (ll. 57-60, 61-65). The selected verses intimate a disconcerting loss of sensory faculties for the speaker, culminating in a disconnection from his own physical body. This dispossession is accentuated through the gendered undertones evoked by the notion of "adulteration". Embedded within this narrative is a discernible misogynistic undertone, reminiscent of the poem's characterization of a feminized and deceptive "History" as a financial manipulator. This sense of being dispossessed and detached is emblematic of the pervasive alienation inherent within capitalist structures.

The poem captures the moment the speaker's self-boundaries melt in the face of the external forces, paralleling the invasive essence of capitalism encroaching upon the sanctity of his rented house. The reference to cellular membranes, emblematic of the frontline defense in immunological contexts (Barry 104), further underscores this vulnerability. The allusions to "chilled delirium" and a diminishing sensory response presage an impending demise: "Gull against the wind, in the windy straits / Of Belle Isle, or running on the Horn / White feathers in the snow, the Gulf claims / An old man driven by the Trades To a sleepy corner" (ll. 69-73). The representation of the

environment shifts from Gerontion's introspective murmurs to the portrayal of a stark, wintry landscape. This blurring of the line between interior and exterior spaces is illustrative of the speaker's dissipating consciousness. The eerie suggestion of post-mortem existence is further evoked through the chilling imagery of a lifeless state, as seen in the line: "when I stiffen in a rented house" (l. 50). The term "wilderness of mirrors" captures the dissolution of boundaries between the familiar and the alien, emphasizing the mirror's relentless reflection of Gerontion's solitary image and accentuating his profound sense of isolation. This imagery seems to paint a somber portrait of the suffering or even dying experiences of a quarantined individual amidst a pandemic. The invasion of wild creatures, such as spiders and weevils, accentuates the breakdown of the protective barriers of the dwelling (ll. 65-67). The invocation of "fractured atoms" signifies the end of life and the collapse of both the home and the individual as living beings (l. 69).

The previously cited verses demonstrate a notable shift in the poem's narrative. As the poetic persona concludes his monologue, the poem transitions, lending voice to a gulf landscape: "White feathers in the snow, the Gulf claims" (l. 71). The poem remains ambiguous about the specific identity of the gulf to which Eliot refers. This intentional vagueness may be construed as a symbolic gesture, allowing for broader interpretations. The voice emanating from the gulf can be perceived as a testament to the landscape's memory and its capacity to bear witness. While the sheer whiteness of feathers may blend seamlessly into snowy terrain, the gulf nonetheless recognizes these feathers as the singular vestige of an individual's existence. The poetic persona's existence, marked

by abjection and turbulence within a decayed dwelling, mirrors the plight of a gull against fierce winds. In the face of a sweeping pandemic, his life, evocative of the nearly invisible white feathers in snow, seems precariously transient and easily effaced.

The depiction of the gulf “claiming” the white feather in this context can also be interpreted as a reminder that, despite the anthropocentric tendencies of capitalist possession and domination over space, Gerontion’s existence ultimately rests within the domain of nature and the environment. This perspective underscores the transient nature of human life and the ephemeral nature of man-made constructs when juxtaposed against the eternal and encompassing embrace of the natural world.

The poem’s concluding lines further elucidate the fragile, ephemeral lives of the tenants amidst the pandemic: “Tenants of the house / Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season” (ll. 74-75). Positioned at the right margins of the page, these lines bear a resemblance to an authorial signature, suggesting that the poem represents a collective expression of the hardships endured by tenants during the pandemic. Drawing from Wendy Wilson’s briefing on the historical trajectory of rent control in the U.K., sporadic rental strikes punctuated the First World War era (4). In 1915, rent control was instituted in the U.K. as a mitigative measure against wartime exploitation (4). “Gerontion” resonates with this socio-historical context, manifesting a sympathetic portrayal of tenants and the concurrent financial housing crisis. Nonetheless, Eliot’s depiction problematically entangles Jewish identity with notions of avarice and capitalist illness, evident in the derogatory characterization of the Jewish landlord. The poem’s recurrent emphasis on exploited tenants amplifies anti-Semitic sentiments, constructing a prejudiced

portrayal of “the Jewish landlord”. Eliot’s critique of capitalism, regrettably, is channeled towards women and the Jewish community. The concluding “collective signature” of the poem thus appears exclusive, seemingly disregarding women and the Jewish community, despite both being significant constituents of the working-class tenants. The underlying misogynistic and anti-Semitic implications of such a collective narrative warrant critical examination.

The poem manifests a distinctive appeal to a collective identity, discernible not only in its signature allusion to “tenants” but also through its oscillation between the pronouns “I” and “we”: “History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors / And issues ... Guides us by vanities” and “Think at last / We have not reached conclusion, when I / Stiffen in a rented house” (ll. 34-36, 48-50). This interplay of first person singular and plural pronouns engenders an intimate relationship with the reader, seeking to transpose the emotions of the poetic persona onto them. In the lines “Think at last / We have not reached conclusion, when I / Stiffen in a rented house” (ll. 48-50), the poem transitions from the singular “I” to the collective “we”. This oscillation between the singular and plural form seeks to draw the reader into a shared experience with the poet, urging them to “think now” or “think at last” alongside him.

While immunological thinking can potentially promote engagement with otherness through mutual responses, “Gerontion” presents this interaction differently. Here, the notion of immunological defense takes the form of an erasure of bodily senses, as depicted in the line, “I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch / How should I use them for your closer contact”. The poem leans towards a collective “we”,

characterized by passivity and a haunting detachment from the material world: “These with a thousand small deliberations”; “What will the spider do, Suspend its operations, will the weevil / Delay” (ll. 49-50, 61, 65-67). The poetic persona, devoid of a bodily existence, resonates like a spectral voice echoing with paranoia: “I have no ghosts / An old man in a draughty house / Under a windy knob”. The transition from first-person singular to plural in the poem reveals an attempt to totalize, to encapsulate a collective experience or sentiment. By moving from the personal “I” to the encompassing “we”, the poem suggests a merging of individual experiences into a unified voice or perspective.

As discussed above, paranoia is associated with the need to explain and philosophize everything in a totalizing system. The overarching theme of paranoia in “Gerontion” can be attributed to an incessant desire to categorize and rationalize. This incessant need for reason becomes palpable as the poem repeatedly invites readers to perform acts of introspection alongside the speaker. The poetic persona’s skepticism towards physical existence, encapsulated in “what is kept must be adulterated / how should I use them for your closer contact”, underscores his inability to form embodied connections. He traverses a mirrored labyrinth of self-reflective musings, always originating from his own consciousness. The “wilderness of mirrors” evokes a vision of ceaselessly replicated self-images, reminiscent of a pervasive virus.

This monolithic conception of “we”, devoid of the “other”, culminates in an autoimmune self-inflicted assault on the constructed caricatures of disease carriers, framing them with gendered and racial biases. The dangers of such hollow, paranoid

narratives, articulated by spectral voices in isolation, can lead to tangible tragedies in the real world.

Warwick Anderson elucidates Donna Haraway's assertion that immunology frequently provided a naturalistic foundation to specific societal structures and cultural notions, especially through the dominant metaphor of the body perpetually in conflict with external adversaries (Anderson 147). In Eliot's time and ours, mainstream narratives often portray the body as a bastion shielding against external threats, drawing an unequivocal line between the self and the external world (Anderson 147). Anderson suggests that these representations made the continuous, violent act of defense seem like a quotidian phenomenon (147). Contrary to this view, immunologists began to envision the body as an "integrated, self-contained system", emphasizing its "homeostatic, self-regulatory" nature (Anderson 147). Eliot's literary works, particularly his essays and poems, exemplify how the cultural psyche was profoundly influenced by this dichotomous, and often antagonistic, understanding of self and other.

Eliot's poetic compositions during the 1918 pandemic act as reflective surfaces, capturing the societal anxieties, biases, and paranoia of his time. The language of immunology, underlined in the essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and the poems "Sweeney", "Burbank", and "Gerontion", emerges as a potent embodied metaphor for themes such as imperialism, gender dynamics, and anti-Semitism. The portrayal of Sweeney, the soldier, as vulnerable to both misogynistic and anti-Semitic influences, underscores the imperialist anxieties concerning the potential contamination of colonial assets, mirroring the imperial tensions of the era. Additionally, gender

relations as portrayed in Eliot's three poems expose the prevailing misogynistic apprehensions of the pandemic era. The depiction of women as potential carriers of disease accentuates the dominant patriarchal perspectives of the time, casting them as menaces to masculinity. Moreover, Eliot's poetic expressions from this period manifest an entrenched prejudice, aligning Jewish identity not only with infectious diseases but also with capitalist avarice. Such representations by Eliot contribute to a broader literary tradition that has historically perpetuated damaging stereotypes. After analyzing the gendered, anti-Semitic, and imperialistic representations steeped in paranoia, it becomes evident that adopting an immunological perspective underscores the importance of critically evaluating and confronting entrenched prejudices in the construction of marginalized otherness. Such an examination reveals how literature, often complicit in perpetuating damaging stereotypes, can also be a powerful tool for change. Building upon this understanding, the following chapter will pivot to a more reparative lens, focusing on *The Waste Land*. By juxtaposing the ecological and financial underpinnings of colonialism with the portrayal of otherness, the next chapter will examine how Eliot's work can offer insights into a reparative perspective. This shift is particularly poignant in understanding *The Waste Land* not just as a reflection of fragmentation and despair, but also as a canvas for envisioning healing and sustainability in the face of global economic and environmental challenges.

Chapter Three: Financial Colonialism and Ecological Echoes in *The Waste Land*:

Eliot's Interplay of Gender, Economy, and Environment

This chapter goes beyond the previous immunological discourse to examine financial colonialism in *The Waste Land* — here defined as the economic exploitation of colonies — and the environmental impacts of the Anthropocene era. It sheds light on Eliot's views on capitalism and colonialism's role in intensifying otherness. This chapter delves into Eliot's intricate portrayal of financial colonialism and its interplay with ecological concerns in *The Waste Land*. It investigates how Eliot's professional experiences as a banker and his keen observations of the global financial landscape — particularly concerning commodities such as crops, land, and various energy sources — influenced his fragmented expressions in the poem. These observations mirror the mechanisms of a banking empire that not only monitors but also manipulates colonial agricultural and energy landscapes within a fractured empire driven by debt.

The chapter aims to explore how these specific commodities are woven into the economic and ecological landscapes of colonial peripheries. It seeks to move beyond the fragmented financial data typical of a financial empire, examining the exploitation of colonial resources and the associated environmental degradation in specific locales depicted in *The Waste Land*.

The analysis challenges Ezra Pound's implied poetics that advocates for a unifying currency or debt system. Instead, it proposes that a reparative reading lies in reorienting the poem's various commodities back to their specific colonial and ecological contexts, thereby transcending the restrictive regimes of a financial empire. By focusing on the

agency of environmental landscapes in the poem, the chapter suggests that *The Waste Land* can be reinterpreted and enriched through a postcolonial and environmental lens, offering a pathway to repair and reinterpret Eliot's critique of modernity.

Economic Themes in Eliot's Work: Banking Influence and Capitalist Critique

Investigations into Eliot's profession as a banker have disclosed his intricate incorporation of economic themes into his literary works. In particular, he presents a critique of capitalism from the standpoint of credit and debt (Carver, 2020; Hankins, 2019). Eliot's economic consciousness was considerably enriched through his role in Lloyds Bank's Intelligence Department, which began in 1917. Here, his input to the *Lloyds Bank Monthly* entailed exhaustive scrutiny of the global political and economic environment, forecasting market oscillations across a range of sectors such as "foreign budgets, movement of crops, agricultural banks, and oil developments" (Crawford, 12). While Eliot started contributing to the "Foreign Exchange" columns in 1923, Matthew Seybold points out that Eliot authored essays with similar content even before his engagement with the *Monthly* (154).

In the *Lloyds Bank Monthly* in 1923 and 1924, an intriguing facet of Eliot's economic engagement is his admiration for Rudolf Hilferding's socialist policy, specifically the launch of the Rentenmark, aimed at stabilizing post-war Germany's economy (Carver 2-3). Carver (2020) underscores this as evidence of a "leftist Eliot" (Carver, 2-3), drawing a parallel between the Rentenmark and the private banknotes issued by Fox Fowler & Co., defying the Bank Restriction Act. Fox Fowler & Co., a historic financier of loans to small presses through debentures, was ultimately absorbed

by Lloyds Bank in 1921.

Carver argues that Lloyds Bank's takeover of Fox Fowler & Co., coupled with its insistence on the repayment of a £10,000 debt, epitomizes the impersonal nature of debt within capitalism and its detrimental impact on communal trust or social credit (Carver, 12). The apparent inconsistencies in Fox Fowler & Co.'s books concerning a debenture's value may have mirrored the bank's compassionate approach to addressing the economic needs of Mendip Press, the debenture's recipient. This financial system, grounded in communal trust and economic needs, stands in stark contrast to Lloyds Bank's approach, emblematic of its wider financial imperialism, marked by its relentless pursuit of precise debt amounts and territorial growth.

This tension is vividly illustrated in *The Waste Land*. Carver interprets the character of Lil as a symbol for Fox Fowler & Co., criticized for her debts, while her husband Albert symbolizes the debenture (13). The poem's portrayal of a hot gammon represents this debenture, suggesting an object of desire and greed, paralleling Lloyds Bank's consumption of Fox Fowler & Co (13). As per Carver, the overarching narrative of Eliot's critique revolves around the disparity between the personalized, socially conscious banking approach of entities like Fox Fowler & Co. and the impersonal, aggressive capitalism represented by Lloyds Bank. Further, the narrative uncovers the capitalist financial system's stringent enforcement of debt repayment, neglecting individual economic circumstances. Carver proposes that Eliot supports a socialist credit system, akin to Hilferding's approach, which prioritizes human economic needs over abstract economic rules (Carver, 10). This tension is further amplified in Eliot's

“Death by Water” section of *The Waste Land*. Carver perceives a symbolic liberation of Lil from her debts. Eliot, through the subtlety of his poetic devices — particularly indentations (alluding to the Latin term “dentare,” implying “furnish with teeth”) — seems to extricate Lil from the grip of debt within financial capitalism (Carver, 16). According to Carver’s interpretation, the poem emerges as a platform to advocate for a socialist credit system akin to Hilferding’s Rentenmark.

The intricate relationship between financial capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism forms an essential nexus in comprehending Eliot’s economic perspectives. Carver touches on this theme, emphasizing its relevance to institutions like Fox Fowler & Co. For example, Carver cites Fox Fowler & Co.’s early nineteenth-century cotton exports, shipped via the same vessels as those of the East India Company (10). She references Fox’s characterization of his cotton trade as “peaceful and fair” juxtaposed with the arms transported by the East India Company. This comparison invites a thorough exploration of the colonial economic structure to fully grasp Eliot’s economic perspectives.

Simultaneously, it is crucial to consider the insights of economists like John Maynard Keynes and Rudolf Hilferding, who apparently influenced Eliot’s views on financial colonialism, as suggested by Carver and Hankins. Keynes expressed concerns over ballooning sovereign debts arising from imperialist expansion, implying an unsustainable economic system with direct implications for colonized nations. In *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919), Keynes criticized colonial trade for burdening colonized countries with increasing debts and establishing a monopolistic

agricultural market for the empires: “Before the middle of the nineteenth century no nation owed payments to a foreign nation on any considerable scale, except such tributes as were exacted under the compulsion of actual occupation in force” (109). Keynes further expressed concerns over colonial trade subjecting the colonized countries to increasing amount debts and a single agricultural market for the empires: “The need for European capitalism to find an outlet in the New World has led during the past fifty years... to such countries as Argentina owing an annual sum to such countries as England” (109). Keynes had realized that the prosperity of the empire was built upon its cheap access to resources from other continents (9). However, as Zachary D. Carter observes, Keynes’s analysis often neglected the colonized nations’ viewpoint, focusing more on his own experiences within the leisure class (100).

This analysis of colonialism should also encompass the role of banking institutions. Consider Lloyds Bank and its historical acquisition of the Bank of London and Río de la Plata (Banco de Londres y Río de la Plata) in 1918. This transaction exemplifies the interconnectedness of the colonial economy and the banking sector. The Bank of London and Río de la Plata, a British financial institution established in Argentina in 1862, was deeply implicated in Britain’s colonial history and fostered an import-export economy intrinsically linked to the cruel realities of slavery and indentured labor in South America. Peter Winn asserts that this bank, with its conservative credit policies, primarily served the established import-export economy, rather providing capital for diversified economic growth (119). This economic model was fundamentally tied to agricultural or energy commodities, often associated with slavery and indentured labor.

Such commodity markets were financially underpinned by the dominant currency, namely the British sterling, established through imperialism, adversely impacting the agriculture and economics of the colonies in a framework known as the Plantationocene.

Hilferding's critique of financial imperialism offers a valuable perspective from which to examine these themes. In *Finance Capital* (1910), Hilferding warned of the potential for banks to control social production, advocating for a credit system defined by personal relationships and tangible transactions (108). His critique aligns with Eliot's brief support for the Rentenmark, a currency not based on gold but on land mortgages: "The new Rentenmark...was formally to have the same relationship to the paper mark as the gold mark (i.e., the dollar), but would not be internationally tradable...with its mortgage-based reserve" (N. Ferguson 398). Eliot's fleeting endorsement of the Rentenmark in 1923 can be interpreted as his support for a social credit system that does not base currency on a single transactional form. This perspective also highlights the tension between imperial sovereignty and the gold standard in the post-WWI era, a theme Eliot grappled with extensively.

David Hawkes further refines this analysis by emphasizing Eliot's countervailing economic conservatism, which especially manifested itself in a certain nostalgia for the international gold standard. The suspension of the gold standard during the war led to the fluctuating value of the British currency (Hawkes 330-331). Hawkes argues that Eliot's conservatism and his attachment to the gold standard are linked to both his philosophical training and his desire for a steadily deflating economy, which would reassert the competence of the British currency. In the "Foreign Exchange" column for

“Lloyds Bank Monthly” in January 1924, Eliot made explicit the connection between a currency’s value and sovereign power, noting that the tendency in Germany and Central Europe is to adopt the American dollar as the standard of value. Hence, in contrast to Carver’s portrayal of Eliot as leaning towards “leftist” economics, Hawkes unveils a more conservative aspect of Eliot’s economic thinking. Eliot’s economic conservatism, coupled with his critique of financial capitalism and imperialism, reveals a complex, multi-layered approach to economics within his work.

Contrastingly, Hawkes juxtaposes Eliot’s conservative stance with Pound’s radical opposition to the gold standard. Hawkes uncovers Pound’s view of usury as an “unnatural breeding” process that is self-referential and self-replicating. This view aligns with Jean Baudrillard’s concept of the “simulacrum” — a copy without an original, as discussed in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981). Within capitalism, money as a representation of value morphs into this simulacrum, disconnected from the tangible resources it initially signified. Within capitalism, money as a representation of value morphs into this simulacrum, disconnected from the tangible resources it initially signified. In “In Pound we Trust” (1987), Richard Sieburth posits that Pound’s understanding of poetry mirrors the process of minting coins, creating a language that acts like a form of currency. Sieburth thinks that this viewpoint presents an intriguing contradiction given Pound’s distaste for the essentialized gold standard associated with usury. In his exploration of Pound’s poetics in relation to coinage, Sieburth sheds light on the process of metal melting and molding, drawing parallels between this malleable material and language. Pound’s poetics strive to create an essentialized form of currency

representation. Sieburth posits that Pound trims away what he perceives as excessive, sentimental, or soft elements — attributes often labeled as feminine — to transmute poetry into gold. Wayne Koestenbaum’s analysis parallels Sieburth’s interpretation of Pound’s poetics of coinage. According to Koestenbaum, in a manner akin to Freud’s treatment of hysteria, Pound (in his famous role as Eliot’s editor) understood himself to be appropriating and transforming the “feminine” hysteria within *The Waste Land* manuscript (115): Pound’s masculine intervention in *The Waste Land*, that is, refined the raw, hysterical discourse into a “refined” form, analogous to gold standard in its control and purity.

Sieburth further argues that Pound’s approach to poetics is rooted in a financial logic that overlooks the production process. From Pound’s viewpoint, the raw materials for poetry — language, experiences, emotions — are gifts from nature, primed for the poet to receive. This poetic process, which involves distribution, digestion, and coining, mirrors the circulation of currency in an economy. However, this perspective disturbingly resonates with colonial thought, which often overlooks the production processes associated with raw materials, imposing value through a language that functions akin to currency. This approach consumes and digests products with little regard for their origins or process of creation.

Sieburth suggests that Pound was aware of the inherent risk in his poetry’s creation of a currency-like language that is self-referential and self-generating. Pound’s poetry, in its voracious assimilation of allusions from various languages and cultures, risks leading to a form of poetic starvation represented by toxic milkweed. Addressing the

self-referentiality in Pound's poetry necessitates a thoughtful shift towards the tangible attributes of objects, particularly those associated with specific colonial settings. This not only decolonizes the single-form, currency-like language but also clears a path for the narrative's reconstruction through an interaction with indigenous knowledge.

Sieburth's illustration of Pound's self-referential language's bankruptcy — depicted through starvation and the toxic milkweed in the final Canto — positions milkweed as an ideal exemplar for my approach to Eliot. The indigenous appreciation of milkweed in North America, where it is recognized for its value in weaving and insulation in many indigenous practices, introduces a substantial and tangible element that can liberate the poem's self-referential nature. This engagement with indigenous knowledge could offer an alternative conclusion to Pound's poetry, particularly the last Canto CXVII, which concludes with a Euro-centric, self-referential, language-induced bankruptcy. By introducing such elements, we can do more than simply counter the poetic persona's downfall — we might suggest a hopeful finale that is deeply ingrained in the object's materiality and socio-cultural relevance.

As a natural progression, this chapter underscores the urgency of decolonizing Eliot's economic writings and poetry in a related manner. It emphasizes recognizing "otherness" within specific agricultural commodities or energy resources, and it addresses the issues faced by colonies entrapped within the globalized neo-colonial banking system. There is an impersonal, homogenizing force in *The Waste Land*, shaped in part by Pound's commitment to a masculine "coinage" of currency-like poetry. Scholars like Carver, Hankins, and Hawkes have also, as we've seen, drawn upon the

global imposition of a single currency or debt system embodied by Eliot's banking career in their analyses of his work.

This chapter aims to critique the impersonal nature of capital, directing focus towards the ecological destruction and gendered and sexual violence perpetrated in indebted colonies under the colonial banking system. A deeper analysis of these themes within *The Waste Land* helps in furthering understanding of the intersection of modernist poetry, economics, and post-colonial and ecological discourses.

Colonial Finance and Gendered Landscapes

Hankins presents T.S. Eliot's work as a bank clerk, where he navigated balance sheets of foreign banks, as a unique vantage point to observe semi-colonial indemnification (87-88). Eliot's experiences allowed him to witness firsthand the banality of financial semi-imperialism, exemplified through processes such as property expropriation. This intricate work, Hankins argues, exposed the mechanisms of rule in the colonial era in Algeria (88). This analysis also highlights the process by which populations are created through the assignment of debt, further perpetuating the structures of colonialism. I want to supplement this research by delving into the gendered and colonial imagination of the Algerian environment and the ecological harm perpetrated upon agricultural land within the colonial capitalist framework.

Jennifer E. Sessions examines the history of Algerian colonization, revealing how financial colonizers exploited the indigenous land and pressured farmers to sell their properties (242). A letter by T.S. Eliot to his father dated April 18, 1917, points to the

phenomenon of land speculation during the colonization of Algeria, where he discusses the activities of the *Crédit Foncier d'Algiers*, particularly its role in lending money to farmers on real estate and acquiring property through “expropriation” (vol. 1, 195). According to Sessions, Algeria was romanticized by French colonists in the nineteenth century as a land of fecundity, a perception tinged with Orientalist imagination and evident in highly sexualized descriptions of the land: “Inherent in the fertility myth was the presumption, highly gendered and sexualized, that the marriage between European agriculture and the Algerian soil would produce magnificent harvests” (214-215). However, when the anticipated wealth did not materialize, the French colonists faulted the indigenous inhabitants for their supposedly inadequate agricultural skills (210). Sessions also notes that the colonists’ speculation in Algerian land for quick profits, coupled with their disdain for agricultural labor, led to an increase in barren land that had originally been used for agriculture (243).

The gendered and sexualized description of landscape permeates Eliot’s poem, evident in lines like “April is the cruelest month / breeding lilacs out of the dead land” and references to the “lady of rocks” (ll. 1-2, 43). Rocks are metaphorically linked with droughts and barren lands, as illustrated in “What branches grow/out of this stony rubbish” (ll. 19-20). Eliot’s obsession with land infertility in the poem is intricately tied to feminine sexuality, portraying the sterility of land through imagery that evokes sexual violence against women. He invokes the tale of Philomel, who metamorphosed into a nightingale, her voice “filling the desert”, symbolizing desertification and land destitution — an impression reinforced by the lines “other withered stumps of time /

were told upon the walls” (ll. 104-105). These walls bear luxuriant decorations that hint at colonial violence, rendered in sexualized language. Eliot intricately describes the wall’s opulent decorations, enumerating elements such as ivory, perfume, colored stones, glittering jewelry, and “huge sea-wood fed with copper” (l. 94). These details serve as more than mere signifiers of commercial desire and wealth within the ancient Roman setting. They can also be interpreted as complex allusions to the colonial era’s ivory trade, the pursuit of spice islands, the aggressive exploitation of gold mining, and maritime exploration for precious metals. Such layered symbolism weaves a rich tapestry that connects historical and mythical practices of commerce and acquisition with contemporary concerns of colonial exploitation.

The poem contrasts the accumulation of such luxuries with the concurrent desertification of land. The “lacquearia” (l. 92), or decorated ceiling, directly refers to Carthaginian Queen Dido’s bedroom in Roman mythology, a scene in which she falls in love with the Roman hero Aeneas. Eliot appears to appropriate this Roman mythology to parallel contemporary colonial journeys by sea, aligning the Carthaginian territory with North African countries, including present-day Algeria and Tunisia, that endured French colonization. This aligns with the account of the damaging predatory banking in relation to colonial Algerian agriculture. The sexualized description of the lavish decorations from Carthage reflects an Orientalist conquest of colonial otherness. Considering that Roman soldiers infamously salted Carthaginian land to sterilize it, Eliot again ties land sterilization to imperial expansion, using highly sexualized language. The opulent luxuries on the wall serve as silent witnesses to the violence of

imperialism, paralleling the heavy debts incurred by the colonized lands.

Richard Grove (1997) delineates how the desiccation and desertification of colonies emerged as profound concerns for the British and French empires between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (33). These anxieties can be traced back to the Spanish and Portuguese empires, which became aware of the harmful effects of capitalist plantation agriculture (6). The fear of desertification was further intensified in colonial Algeria, where farms failed to produce the expected harvests for French colonizers. Kohei Saito explores this theme, discussing how the misuse of synthetic fertilizer to maximize agricultural output in the nineteenth century led to soil erosion and drought (141). Despite initial optimism about the potential of chemical fertilizer to enhance output without limits, Saito reveals that by 1862, Justus von Liebig had recognized the finite nature of soil nutrients and absorption capacity (156). Moreover, Saito warns that an over-reliance on inorganic chemical nutrients can lead to poor biological conditions in soil, resulting in erosion and drought (293). Saito's research complements Grove's exploration of colonial anxieties over soil erosion and drought that prevailed from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. To further illustrate these concerns, Grove refers to a popular book from that era, *The Rape of The Earth: A World Survey of Soil Erosion* by R.V. Jacks and R.O. Whyte (Grove 36). Set against a post-WWI backdrop of drought and erosion, the book's provocative title bears a striking resemblance to the violent, gendered portrayal of land desertification in Eliot's poem. The fears and realities of desertification and fertilizer abuse under capitalism and colonialism find expression in Eliot's work, particularly in the sections

“What the Thunder Said” and the passage on Lil’s abortion.

The portrayal of Lil in Eliot’s work can be seen in the same vein as the gendered description of fertility and landscape, akin to the depiction of Philomel. Lil has had five children, but after almost dying during the birth of her sixth, she chooses abortion. Unfortunately, the chemical pills she takes seem to ruin both her health and appearance. This situation draws a parallel to the misuse of chemical fertilizer, gratifying capitalist desires for accumulation but leading to land sterilization in the end. Lil’s near-death experience due to over-fertility resembles how land can be “killed” by the abuse of chemical products. As previously discussed, the misuse of fertilizers can be perceived as a material embodiment of capitalist cravings for agricultural output. While many critics have noted Eliot’s obsession with fertility, there has been a lack of analysis regarding the poem’s historically contextualized understanding of actual fertilizer usage and its connection to capitalist colonialism.

Eliot’s lavish description of opulent decoration, mirroring the violence against Philomel, also emphasizes the money Lil receives from her husband. The conversation between Lil and her friend begins with the inquiry, “what you done with that money he gave you” (l. 143). Lil’s friend believes Lil should spend the money on new teeth because her husband, having served in the army for four years, “wants a good time” (l. 148). The reference to the army alludes to masculine militarism. This conversation encapsulates the malignant capitalist commodification of women’s bodies to satisfy masculine sexual desires. As established before, Carver’s analysis compares the relationship between Lil and her friend to that of Fox, Fowler & Co., and Lloyds Bank.

The debenture, likened to gammon in the poem, symbolizes acquisition and consumption, mirroring Lloyds Bank's financial imperialist pursuits (Carver 13).

Carver's analysis can be expanded into a gendered and post-colonial perspective to analyze the Lil section. Both Lil and her friend are victimized by sexualized feminine appearances and reproductive expectations under a patriarchal gaze. Their competition over feminine sexuality reflects a colonialist attitude towards frontiers, mirroring a sexualized, orientalist view of fertile "exotic" land. Once this land loses its original appeal in the colonizer's eyes, other fungible territories emerge. This dynamic is reflected in the anxiety over Lil's appearance and her friend's internalized belief that feminine bodies are fungible commodities: "And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said / Oh is there, she said. Something o' that, I said/ Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a straight look" (ll. 149-151). As the mapping between the feminine body and land has been established, Lil's body, damaged and infertile because of chemical abuse, parallels the abuse of chemical fertilizers to satisfy colonial and capitalist desires, leading to sterility and trauma.

Lil's teeth, derided as a shortfall in her sexual allure, become a symbol of her indebtedness for new dentures. This imagery encapsulates colonial extractivism, illustrating that once extracted from their roots, teeth will not regenerate. The connection is not only metaphorical but also grounded in historical reality. The materials for a set of new teeth — mainly ivory and occasionally gold or silver — were expensive and intricately tied to colonialism. As the British Dental Museum explains, the 1840s vulcanization process replaced ivory with rubber in denture fabrication,

linking the image of dentures to colonial plantations in locations like Sri Lanka and Malaysia under the British Empire. Consequently, the depiction of dentures serves as both an analogous and direct reference to extractive activities and the colonial economy. According to Groves, the late-nineteenth-century monoculture rubber plantations led to soil erosion, drought, and deforestation in the African colonies of the French and British empires (156), manifesting the capitalistic desire for overproduction that undermined the soil's sustainability.

Carver's observation that the reference to dentures in the poem resonates with the indented form in the fourth section opens a pathway to an additional analysis. I propose examining the concept of indenture, sharing an etymological origin with "denture", to unveil a thematic connection. Lil's predicament, as depicted in the poem, extends beyond personal conflict to echo broader social and economic tensions. Her failure to spend her husband's money on dentures, in line with his expectations, appears to be a form of unmet obligation, one that could jeopardize her relationship. Here, feminine sexuality is cast in a light similar to indentured labor within the confines of a patriarchal household. This personal tragedy becomes emblematic of the labor exploitation occurring on colonial rubber plantations or gold mines, where materials for denture fabrication were sourced. Indentured labor, a hallmark of plantation economics, adds depth to Lil's suffering, allowing it to mirror the collective suffering of those ensnared in the colonial trade machine. Her abused appearance further symbolizes the ecological devastation caused by colonial violence and extractive practices. This thematic thread is reinforced by the recurrent imagery of carious teeth, particularly in the fifth section's

portrayal of arid mountains, coupled with references to droughts in India (l. 339). Through the lens of Lil's experience, Eliot's poem illustrates not just the ecological harm inflicted on colonial landscapes, but also the insidious economic damage that arose in line with these environmental disasters.

The depiction of desiccated landscapes in the colonies goes beyond mere imagery, revealing profound anxieties over the ecological degradation imposed by imperialists, a theme that resonates with the historical realities of famine and social unrest in British territories such as India (Grove 30). Early in the poem, Eliot confronts us with images of land sterility, famine, and drought: "April is the cruelest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land"; "Feeding / A little life with dried tubers" (ll. 1-2, 6-7). These lines frame a haunting scene of barren lands plagued by hunger and water scarcity. By the end, in "What the Thunder Said", this fixation evolves into an obsession with drought, as the section is permeated by a longing for rain in India.

This narrative serves to underscore the damaging effects of colonial capitalism on the land's natural fertility, leading not just to ecological ruin but also to a more insidious form of deprivation. By fostering a class of indebted others, whose existence hung on a plantation-centric economy, the colonial system exacerbated the suffering caused by famine, social unrest, and drought. This is further illustrated by Anand Chandavarka's examination (1989) of Keynes's insights during his visits to India in the 1910s. According to Chandavarka, Keynes recognized that Indian famines were symptomatic of "a famine of purchasing power and a general erosion of people's capabilities to acquire food and of their exchange entitlements" (53). Moreover, Chandavarka points

out that inflation in India under British rule during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led to the erosion of “the purchasing power and market access of the most vulnerable classes, such as landless laborers, rural artisans, and craftsmen” (182).

Eliot’s invocation of Coriolanus in his work serves as an allegorical reflection of famine and social unrest in India, offering a pointed critique of the colonial economy. In the closing portion of “What the Thunder Said”, reference is made to “the broken Coriolanus”, drawing a thematic link with Shakespeare’s tragedy (l. 416). The latter narrative centers around famine and societal turmoil, depicting rioters in the streets of Rome protesting the Roman Senate over exorbitant corn prices and unreasonable grain hoarding. The nobles were indicted by the common people, accused of both hoarding and usury: “They ne’er cared for us yet. Suffer us to famish, and their Store-houses crammed with grain: Make Edicts for Usury, to support Usurers” (Shakespeare 194). Coriolanus, who was singled out by the hungry populace for his refusal to distribute the stored food, becomes a representative of the imperialist guardianship in Eliot’s poem.

The image of a broken Coriolanus is coupled with the Hindu chanting of “Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata”, which act as the sonorous embodiment of thunder, giving structure to the poem’s concluding stanzas. This broken figure is depicted under the judgment of thunder, symbolizing an Indian landscape that exhorts characters like Coriolanus to be more giving and more sympathetic.

The figure of the broken Coriolanus not only resonates within the text but also seems to reflect aspects of Eliot’s own life, particularly his role as a banker in the colonial and foreign department of a major financial institution, where he was involved

in tracing colonial debts and overseeing crop movements. Coriolanus's tragic ending seems to suggest an acknowledgment of the futility and bankruptcy to uphold the financial interests of both Lloyds Bank and the larger British Empire.

Meanwhile, Eliot's poem offers a vivid portrayal of the ecological power of the desiccated Indian landscape: "Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves / Waited for rain, while the black clouds / Gathered far distant, over Himavant / The jungle crouched, humped in silence / Then spoke the thunder" (ll. 395-398). Far from merely describing a scene of drought, these lines imbue the colonial environment with agency, transcending the unilateral imposition of debt and colonial control of plantations. Instead of merely delineating exploitation, Eliot ascribes both justice and authority to the Indian landscape through the emblem of thunder. In this allegorical reading, the character of Coriolanus, who guards the hoarded crops, is equated with the British ruling class in India, all subjected to the judgment of thunder. This attribution of environmental agency opens new pathways for engagement with the non-human, presenting alternatives to the colonialist characteristic of the Anthropocene era.

Having explored the agricultural facets that shape Eliot's financial analysis of markets, along with the associated colonial and ecological contexts, the subsequent section will delve into another significant dimension: the role of energy and fuel in the operations of Lloyds Bank and other financial institutions within the commodities markets. Building upon the gendered portrayal of agricultural ecology identified within colonialist paradigms, an examination of energy and fuel can further enrich the dialogue surrounding sexuality within both the poem and broader modernist narratives. The

concept of the libidinal economy emerges as the point where economics and sexuality intersect. A focus on energy serves to unveil the obscured colonial layer that informs modernist discourses on both sexuality and economics, providing a deeper understanding of these interrelated themes.

Coal, Oil, and Financial Imperialism

Eliot's awareness of energy manifests not only in bank reports but also in his literary works, most prominently in his portrayal of various energy forms in *The Waste Land*. For example, the poem describes a winter evening scene behind the gashouse where Sweeney drives to the sound of horns and motors, and a poetic speaker on the River Thames hearing trams and observing that "The river sweats, oil and tar" (ll. 190,197-198, 266-267, 295). These lines directly allude to the two principal forms of energy materials, coal and oil, the latter of which was significantly imported from overseas in the early twentieth century.

Eliot's preoccupation with energy sources also permeates his writings for *Lloyds Bank Monthly*, highlighting the intricate connection between financial accumulation and the extraction of energy and labor value. In the column "Business Conditions in January" (1924), a starkly capitalist stance is taken against coal miners' strikes in Cardiff, described as "particularly unfortunate" due to recent trends in the Welsh steam coal trade (95). The same column observes that exporters "are indisposed to buy" Cardiff's coal (95). Though this column was published in 1924, Crawford and Seybold have previously noted that Eliot had been analyzing the fluctuation of energy fuels in

foreign exchange value assessments since the 1910s. Consequently, the 1924 column may exemplify a prevailing attitude of indifference toward coal workers, who are effaced into abstract quantitative representations in foreign exchange fluctuations. This unsympathetic perspective focuses more on trade expansion and potential capital accumulation rather than the individual laborers, aligning with a broader trend of prioritizing capital over human's labor and living conditions.

In tandem with the bank's conservative viewpoint, Adam Trexler interprets the gold references in the river as Eliot's somber reflection on the diminishing gold reserves and the British abandonment of the gold standard: "This loss of symbolic value is dramatized in *The Waste Land* by the woes of the Thames and Rhine daughters, assigned the task of safeguarding the gold securing Britain and Germany" (Trexler 278). I posit that these verses depicting rivers of gold and oil can be aligned with Carver's leftist angle, suggesting Eliot's hints at the fluid, evolving essence of currency. By juxtaposing the Elizabethan era with his contemporary times, he subtly challenges an unwavering reverence for the gold standard.

The boat's stern, decorated in red and gold, combined with the dazzling white and gold walls, paints a vivid picture of the City of London's affluence: "O City city ... Where fishmen lounge at noon: where the walls Of Magnus Martyr hold Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold"; "The stern was formed / A gilded shell/ Red and gold" (ll. 259, 263-265, 281-283). Queen Elizabeth's portrayal aboard a golden boat evokes memories of the metal extraction initiated during Columbus's colonization of the Americas, a pursuit that later ignited Europe's imperialistic battles for dominion

over colonial gold and silver reserves. The Elizabethan epoch marked England's naval triumph over Spain, thereby establishing its control over the colonial gold and silver trade. Britain's adoption of the gold standard in 1717 — a standard upheld throughout much of the British Empire's tenure — reinforced the monetization of gold and silver (Graeber 341). This British monopoly over precious metal definitions and supplies drove the imperial economy's boom, placing the City of London at the colonial trade's center, while relegating colonies to the peripheries — exploited and marginalized within the colonial hierarchy. In Eliot's era, the City of London's prosperity continued, bolstered by financial colonialism: "The success of the City of London and a rentier class earned vast incomes accruing from the interest payments from foreign assets" (Roger Lloyd-Jones and M. J. Lewis. 128). It is worth reiterating that the gold standard was inextricably linked to the British empire's affluence, and its suspension during WWI ushered in an era marked by financial uncertainty and inflation.

The poem transitions from the River Thames, evoking images of Queen Elizabeth I and Leicester in a gold-gilded boat and the opulence of the City of London, to the mingling of "oil and gold" in the river, hinting at an interplay between the two commodities. Oil, emerging as a significant energy source in the early twentieth century, finds its way into Eliot's verses. He juxtaposes the materiality of oil with that of gold, evident in the lines: "The river sweats / oil and tar"; "The stern was formed /A gilded shell / Red and gold" (ll. 266-267, 281-283). As combustion engines gained popularity, a paradigmatic energy shift towards oil ensued: "In 1900 the internal combustion engine was about to start its conquest of the world's highways, and worldwide oil consumption

was poised to begin a period of rapid growth” (More vii). More further observes that as WWI approached, British capital gravitated towards oil investments (15). The poem’s structure seems influenced by the porousness of oil; its poetic persona evokes an omnipresent energy, threading through diverse segments of the narrative. This fluid movement further mirrors the work of a bank clerk in the colonial and foreign department, tracking the conversion of energy to currency, and following the fluid dynamics of foreign exchange.

The porous and fluid nature of oil, both as a commodity and a symbol, permeates the poem in references that at first glance appear disparate. Eliot’s mention of the cities “Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria / Vienna, London” (ll. 374-375) gestures towards the geopolitical chess game of the era: the Allies’ and Central Powers’ race for dominance over the oilfields of Mesopotamia. As detailed in *The First World Oil War* by Timothy C. Winegard, the epicenter of this struggle was Jerusalem, a pivotal battleground during the Great War (40-46). Furthermore, references to Athens and Alexandria, strategic ports for access to and passage via the Suez Canal, coincide with Britain’s imperial control over its oil transport pipelines. Within this geopolitical background, Eliot’s portrayal of a fragmented landscape gains added weight: “What is the city over the mountains / Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air ... Unreal” (ll. 371-372, 376). The imagery, evocative of the tumultuous processes of oil extraction and combustion, becomes emblematic of the precariousness and volatility of modern civilization.

Moving from oil to gold, the poem appears to challenge established financial

paradigms. By juxtaposing the Elizabethan era's affluence with his own period, Eliot critiques the gold standard's intrinsic rigidity. The poem, in essence, challenges the financial imperialism of banks that dictate debt value based on control over specific metals or other natural resources. The river's ceaseless flow underscores the ephemeral nature of any material used as a fixed point for currency, questioning the long-term viability of such a practice. Contrary to a celebration of unchecked wealth that flows towards the empire as implied by Trexler and Hawkes, Eliot seems to caution against the unreliability of such a system, highlighting the fragility of the "unreal City".

The poem also underscores a pivotal historical shift in energy sources — the transition from wood to coal — and poignantly captures the struggles of laborers after presenting Queen Elizabeth I: "The broken fingernails of dirty hands / My people humble people who expect / Nothing" (ll. 303-305). The Elizabethan era marked a significant shift in England's fuel history, transitioning primarily from wood to coal: "During the 1550s to 1570s, as the government's emphasis on wood supplies waned, London pivoted to coal as its main fuel source" (Cavert 22). Cavert (2016) notes a prevailing indifference towards the hardships of miners and workers involved in coal transport: "Londoners...seem to have spared very few thoughts for miners ... Such work was largely overlooked and unspoken of" (18). Through the depiction of "dirty fingernails" belonging to "humble people", Eliot seems to memorialize the manual labor intrinsic to coal extraction.

The poem's movement and imagery also evoke the burning of coal, as evidenced by: "On a winter evening round behind the gashouse"; "Trams and dusty trees.

Highbury bore me”; “Burning burning burning burning/ O Lord Thou pluckest me out/ O Lord Thou pluckest / Burning” (ll. 190, 292-293, 308-311). This evocative passage, with its allusions to extraction in “pluckest me out”, can be interpreted from the perspective of the coal itself. Yet the reverent tone also suggests that it mirrors the sentiments of the aforementioned “humble people”, thereby blurring lines between miners and the coal they extract. This anthropomorphic interplay underscores the notion that labor is often subsumed and rendered invisible within the products of its exertion. Through this lens, Eliot gives a voice not just to the mined coal but also to those marginalized by the extraction process. This section culminates in a powerful symbol: an all-consuming fire that epitomizes the driving energy behind the advance of industrialization, capitalism, and imperialism. Within this engulfing blaze, the voices of the humble people and the cries of the ravaged land are subsumed but still heard. The ecological degradation linked with coal mining further enriches our understanding of land sterilization within the larger narrative of imperialism. Eliot paints a grim picture of a land left barren by capitalist and colonialist enterprises, incapable of supporting a sustainable future.

The figure of Tiresias also emerges as a potent embodiment of energy extraction, intricately linked to the trauma of sexual violence. Eliot captures Tiresias’s history of pain and anticipation of further suffering, suggesting a representation of the aggressive libidinal dynamics inherent in extracting energy from the earth. In Eliot’s portrayal of Tiresias, there is a palpable evocation of anthropomorphized subterranean energy, coursing from the underground to the pulsations of machinery: “when the human engine

waits / Like a taxi throbbing waiting / I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives / I have ... walked among the lowest of the dead" (ll. 216-219). Through Tiresias, Eliot amplifies voices of suppressed energies. The character is emblematic of an energy residing among "the lowest of the dead", shifting between the "lives" of two taxis, their rhythmic "throbbing" synonymous with engine operations. Tiresias symbolizes energy sources, like oil found deep within the earth and composed of expired organic matter, which seem to morph into human or machine bodies, expressing the libidinal energy of the scene's sexual violence. In Eliot's portrayal, Tiresias, with his androgynous physique described as an "old man with wrinkled dugs", encapsulates the monstrous nature of aggressive masculine libidinal expression and the embodied trauma of sexual violence. As a prophetic figure bridging the past, present, and future, Tiresias underscores a recurring motif: the nexus between the subterranean realm, sexuality, and violence. Within the poem, this theme evolves into a modern representation of extraction and mechanical libidinal impulses. Through the lens of Tiresias, Eliot intertwines mythic cultural memory and modern energy extractivism.

Reinterpreting the Golden Bough: Masculinity, Extraction, and Ecology

The extractive act and libidinal economy are not only presented in the figure of Tiresias, but also in the myth of *The Golden Bough* by James Frazer, which Eliot acknowledged to be an inspiration for *The Waste Land*. Like the summoning of Tiresias from underground, the golden bough in the myth of Aeneas is also the key to access the underground. The title *The Golden Bough* refers to a theme in Virgil's *Aeneid* where the hero Aeneas seeks entry to Hades and is instructed to pick a golden bough from a sacred

tree as a gift to Proserpine. The passage also inspired Turner's painting depicting the scene and led James Frazer to explore the connection between the myth and a macabre ritual that took place at Lake Nemi. The ritual involved a priest who could only gain his title by murdering his predecessor and holding the priesthood until he himself was slain. This ritual was linked to the worship of Diana, the fertility goddess, and part of it involved picking a Golden Bough from a sacred tree. In *The Golden Bough*, Frazer studies the similarities between various religions, focusing on themes of death, rebirth, and fertility.

The framework of the myth reflects a symbolic understanding that connects the golden bough with masculine generative power and the fertility of the land. In this view, the Golden Bough, possibly seen as a phallic symbol, represents the myth of an enduring force and vitality of masculine nature. The rituals involving the fight for the entitlement to the golden bough could be seen as a struggle for dominance and control over this generative force. Diana, the goddess of fertility, further reinforces the gendered theme. The constant struggle for the golden bough, with its fatal conclusion, also represents an underlying anxiety about maintaining masculine power and dominance.

Besides, the myth of the golden bough, a symbol of enduring masculine power, is often conceived within the essentialist belief that gold represents a timeless and valuable form of masculinity. This association between the golden bough and masculinity also reveals an underlying anxiety and recurring pattern of violence and war within the myth, transforming the golden bough into an empty signifier of

masculinity. The connection between the golden bough and generative masculine power signifies a deeply ingrained belief in gold as a timeless symbol of masculine power. However, the poem reveals that this symbolism is not fixed and can be reconstructed to align with contemporary concerns.

In the poem, this symbolism of the golden bough is further developed to portray the financial imperialist wars alongside the sterility of the land. Eliot's poem offers a different mode of writing the myth of the Golden Bough, suggesting that the pursuit of gold, with its attendant violence and death, leads to ecological devastation, rather than agricultural rebirths. The haunting image of the sprouting corpse encapsulates this theme: "That corpse you planted last year, has it begun to sprout? / Will it bloom this year?" (ll. 71-72). This grotesque depiction hints at rebirth but does so with a dark twist, alluding to the theme of renewal following death in the myth of the golden bough. The poem's rejection of rebirth is amplified by the imagery of death in the City of London: "A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many / I had not thought death had undone so many" (ll. 62-63).

Within the poem, the golden bough is reimagined as the City of London, a place historically tied to the accumulation of gold and the financial epicenter of the British empire. Eliot's repeated reference to the "unreal city" (ll. 60, 207, 366) serves as a critique of the futile quest for the golden bough, allegorically represented in the pursuit of financial prosperity rooted in colonial violence. The City of London thus becomes a hollow symbol of unreal pursuits. The poem also shows that this relentless search for the "golden bough" has its victims. Sexual violence against women and the land's

sterility emerge as casualties of masculine aggression and desire. The masculine orientation towards financial success, coupled with vanity in asserting masculinity, leads to destruction, as revealed in the section concerning Tiresias. The golden bough thus symbolizes not the enduring power but a vacuous signifier of a toxic masculinity that ravages both human relationships and the environment.

Contrarily, while the golden bough myth traditionally emphasizes violence and death as necessary sacrifices to ensure fertility and cyclical rebirth, *The Waste Land* empathizes with the sacrificed. Particularly in the Great War context, the sacrificed figures give voice to lost soldiers, mourning their deaths. In the poem, the theme of mourning takes on a profound resonance as the poet reflects on the loss and waste of human lives during the Great War. Eliot's lamentation is articulated through a focus on ordinary lives and objects, seemingly meaninglessly dispersed in various fragments. These fragments are bound together by the backdrop of war-time economics, which emphasized the salvaging and recycling of materials for the war effort. The economic propaganda, which I elaborate on in the following paragraph, creates a haunting reality of massive debts incurred for military purposes. The imagery of dead bodies in the trenches is a stark reminder of the futility and wastage of human life: "I think we are in rats' alley / Where the dead men lost their bones" (ll. 115-116).

This imagery of dead men's bones recurs in the poem and appears along the riverside of the Thames, where the human remains are mingled with waste: "Empty bottles, sandwich papers/ Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends / Or other testimony of summer nights" (ll. 178-179). The juxtaposition of human remains with

waste not only highlights the industrial machinery of war but also the war-time economics that demanded the salvage and recycling of “animal bones, food scraps, metal, rags, and paper” (Thorsheim 20). In this grim landscape, human bodies are reduced to mere commodities, objectified and devalued in the capitalist war machine. Peter Thorsheim’s (2017) quotation from British wartime propaganda, “Only the dead remain where they fall. They alone are the unsalvaged” (17), offers a poignant counterpoint to Eliot’s poem. Eliot seems to be responding to the message of this kind of propaganda, which spoke of the salvaging and recycling of everything of value from the dead, except the bodies themselves. The reduction of human bodies to mere bones, lying alongside refuse, reveals a disturbing objectification of human value in the capitalist war machine. The rats, creeping and feasting on these bones, come to symbolize an insatiable and impersonal force representative of debt and the capitalist war machine itself. Carver’s observation that “bones” serves as American slang for money, coupled with the usage of this word between Pound and Eliot, further reinforces this allegorical connection (9). The juxtaposition of human bones with waste, and the haunting imagery of rats, reveal the economic reduction of human life, where the sacrifices of soldiers are equated with the financial measurement of the empire.

In the poem, the myth of the golden bough is leveraged not as a symbol of restoration but as a scathing critique of gendered and colonial violence, environmental destruction, and the ravages of modernity, war, and unchecked masculine ambition in the ruthless pursuit of resources symbolized by the “golden bough”. Instead of celebrating the bough’s regenerative “magic”, the poem, through its stark imagery of

death, waste, and commodification, condemns the capitalist war machine and environmental ruin committed in its name.

The Fisher-King and Ecological Repair in Eliot's Reimagined Mythology

The figure of the fisher-king, however, offers a counter-narrative, suggesting a reinterpretation of the golden bough's reparative potential. By viewing the bough as an emblem of ecological agency — a force that nurtures and sustains — the myth pivots towards an advocacy for ecological stewardship, diverging from the violent imagery of warring priests traditionally associated with the golden bough.

In the finale of “What the Thunder Said”, set against the backdrop of an Indian landscape of drought, the fisher-king emerges as a poignant figure. Historically indicative of the land's sterility and echoing James Frazer's theories in *The Golden Bough* concerning rulers' wellbeing influencing agricultural yields, the fisher-king in this colonial context encapsulates both ecological and economic trauma. While many critics see the fisher-king as a symbol of unifying attempts to piece together scattered fragments, the figure also resonates as a melancholic entity, grappling with ruin and the challenge of restoration. According to Robert McRuer, the fisher-king's line, “These fragments I have shored against my ruins”, subtly alludes to a complete and autonomous identity. This identity possesses the capacity to craft art that can transcend the tumult of chaos and history by unifying disparate fragments and traditions (196).

The previously analyzed myth of the golden bough and the character of Tiresias underscore that within a colonial capitalist framework, efforts toward unity risk

oversimplifying the complexity of the “golden bough” and homogenizing the disparate debts from various regions into a monolithic colonial financial system. Such a perspective aligns the poem with Pound’s interpretation of poetry as currency in its coined form. It also evokes the detached and stringent debt recovery methods of Lloyds Bank, as highlighted by Carver and Hankins. The figure of the fisher-king emphasizes healing and spotlights the necessity for therapeutic interventions. Eliot’s treatment of the golden bough myth notably underscores not just the absence of the unifying image of the bough, but also lingers upon scenes of ecological and gendered violence. Consequently, the fisher-king becomes emblematic of a call for reparation. He invites readers to focus on the unique histories and ongoing traumas of regions ensnared in the colonial and neo-colonial web. Significantly, the fisher-king, with his act of shoring fragments against ruins, represents a symbol of attachment and care, distinct from prevailing violent undertones in the original myth.

In her examination of *The Waste Land*, Sarah Kennedy (2023) underscores the notion of “solastalgia”, a term introduced by Glenn Albrecht to define the emotional turmoil stemming from environmental alterations in one’s native surroundings. Kennedy links this sentiment to the poem’s depictions of desolation, accentuating the deep-seated sense of loss experienced in altered landscapes. She views the poem as more than a critique of the ecological damage from industrialization. Beyond the despairing imagery, she interprets the wasteland as a symbol of potential renewal, and therefore reads *The Waste Land* as a hopeful call for reflection and transformation in the face of environmental crisis. The fisher-king’s musings over the fragments and ruins

of the land seem to correspond to the emotion of solastalgia. He opens up the reparative potential in fostering a new mode of engagement, which would entail the rewriting of the golden bough in terms of the agency of the environment and a call for careful attention to the voices of that environment, such as the rivers and the thunder.

Eliot's work envisions a renewed relationship between humanity and nature that moves beyond the capitalist and colonial perspectives of energy, placing emphasis on the agency inherent in the landscape. Eliot portrays the river as sweating "oil and tar", an evocative image that not only underscores the scorching nature of burning oil but also accentuates the ecological pressure on the river to metabolize such pollutants. This image also subtly alludes to the unseen laborious effort exerted in their extraction, akin to human sweat. In the poem's concluding section, thunder also emerges as a pivotal symbol, transcending the restrictive capitalist and colonialist interpretations of nature. As previously mentioned, the thunder's words resonate as the very voice of the landscape, judging and critiquing the imperial violence through the intertextual reference to Coriolanus. Representing an unpredictable, vast store of natural energy beyond human dominion or exploitation, thunder also has the potential to rejuvenate parched terrain with "a damp gust bringing rain" (ll. 393-394). Eliot brings out humanity's vulnerability and humility before the force of nature.

Steven Connor's examination (2008) of the twentieth-century transformation of myth from its primordial association with universal truths to its modern function as an instrument of individual and social self-making offers an insightful lens through which to consider the reinterpretation of age-old legends like the Grail. Eliot's modernist

adaptations evidence this shift, drawing on psychoanalytical principles to craft a Grail symbol that is neither static nor one-dimensional but instead a complex and shifting representation of the ambiguity in modernity's sacred symbols. In Eliot's work, the Grail becomes emblematic of the mutable and dynamic nature of myth itself. This chapter further contributes to modernist literary analysis through a nuanced examination of the myth of the golden bough, uncovering the gendered aspects of the libidinal economy and exploring how these dynamics interplay within the colonialist and capitalist frameworks. The contemporary resonance of myth opens avenues for the envisioning of a potential reconfiguration of such myths, aligning them with aspirations towards post-capitalist and post-colonial resonances, and creating an empathetic and reparative alignment with environmental concerns. This exploration seeks to offer insights into myth's role in literature and society, attempting to bridge the historical and contemporary, and to elucidate the nuanced interplay between myth, economy, and cultural transformation.

Madame Sosostris' Prophecy in a Neo-Colonial World

In concluding this chapter, I examine the enigmatic and "unifying" character of Madame Sosostris, drawing connections between *The Waste Land's* exploration of colonialism, capitalism, and the Anthropocene, and its reflection on the present challenges of the neo-colonial third world. A fortune-teller, Sosostris is instrumental in shaping a deterministic framework within the poem, unifying the narrative through her ambiguous tarot readings. Characters and situations introduced through her prophecy

seem bound within a predestined cycle, their destinies seemingly cast by her prediction.

Despite this, Eliot intricately sows seeds of unpredictability throughout the narrative, subtly undermining Sosostris' supposed certainty. He illustrates this through Sosostris' ironic inability to foresee her own illness, a reflection of the unpredicted 1918-1920 pandemic, as well as the surprising forewarning of death by drought rather than water. These elements underscore the inherent limitations of prophecy, disrupting the deterministic structure of the poem.

In exploring the symbolism of Sosostris in *The Waste Land*, Carver draws a parallel between the character and the early economic forecasters of the era. This metaphor gains depth considering Eliot's own work at Lloyds Bank, where he employed a card system for predicting banking trends (Carver 15). In this light, Sosostris' deterministic prophecy can be seen as a critique of financial speculation and the often misplaced trust in the predictability of economic patterns. This critique aligns with David Graeber's analysis of the fallacy of perpetual economic growth and the counterproductive cycle of debt it engenders. Graeber's work, emphasizing the inherent risks and uncertainties in investments, resonates with Eliot's challenge to the certainty attributed to prophecies.

Carver's examination of *The Waste Land* also examines the editorial choices of Eliot and Pound, particularly the inclusion of the Phlebas narrative in the poem's fourth section. Carver questions the purpose of depicting Phlebas' death in "Death by Water" if it merely serves to fulfill a prophecy (Carver, 17). This leads to the proposition that Phlebas' narrative is significant in illustrating that he transcends his fate as foretold by Sosostris in the second section. Eliot's decision to keep this section highlights a tension

that subverts the deterministic and cyclical nature of the narrative, urging readers to explore the specific contexts of the prophetic events. This exploration reveals elements of unpredictability that disrupt the seeming coherence of the prophecy, challenging the poem's confinement to a self-referential cycle of signs.

In this context, we could argue that while Pound conceives of a poem as akin to currency, its value circumscribed within itself, Eliot leaves room for readers to surpass the predestined meanings delineated by the self-referential cycle of prophecy. This openness encourages readers to search beyond the confines of the poem for its credit, to blur the boundaries between reality and literature, allowing them to empathize with the distinct sufferings of various characters portrayed in separate fragments, and foster exchanges with the unpredictable. It also encourages envisioning alternate or hopeful paths beyond the unifying proclamation of the prophecy, particularly within the context of colonial capitalism and ecological crises. As Matthew Seybold notes: "A monolithic bank like Lloyds not only moved markets but made them" (145). In the context of our analysis of colonial otherness and ecological disasters within a capitalist framework, transcending the prophecy implies a movement towards post-capitalist and post-colonial alternatives.

In conclusion, *The Waste Land* emerges as a composition rich in prophetic signs that seemingly cannot be disproved, confining its characters and narratives within a predestined, self-referential cycle. Yet Eliot introduces elements of tension that disrupt and transcend this cycle. Unpredictable natural phenomena such as thunderstorms, pandemics, and droughts are underscored, highlighting the anthropocentric risks that

extend beyond human control.

Eliot's reflection on his job as a financial analyst — a role he likens to tarot reading — illuminates the inherent unpredictability and risks in economic forecasting. This critique urges a shift in focus towards the nonhuman, reminding investors that economic progress is not constant. It is vital to acknowledge our precarity in the face of nature, focusing on the specific events within different locales and fostering communal credit, rather than assuming an ever-progressive trajectory of financial speculation.

The Waste Land, a seminal modernist work, mirrors the fragmented nature of the early twentieth-century colonial economic landscape, a reality intimately known to Eliot in his role as a banker at the heart of the British financial empire. This fragmentation extended beyond the metropolis, linking the core of the empire to its far-flung peripheries through the complex web of debts. The poem's depiction of the desolation wrought by imperialist ambitions and the exploitation of both human labour and natural resources bears striking relevance to the neo-colonial dynamics of today's globalized economy. Graeber's proposition for rethinking the notion of continuous economic growth and advocating the cancellation of oppressive debts in impoverished nations (390-391) provides a contemporary framework that complements the issues explored in this chapter. In this light, the traditionally conceived high-modernist poetic canon emerges as an artifact of the metropole, intricately interwoven with the textual darkness of colonial violence at the depths of the global economy. Its deliberately fragmented style not only encapsulates but also beckons a deep engagement, care, and a vision for reparation towards the marginalized "other" in both colonial and neo-

colonial contexts, then and now.

Chapter Four: Eliot's Religious Vision: Otherness, Orientalism and Cross-Cultural Echoes

The final chapter examines Eliot's transformation following his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927, emphasizing how this religious focus influenced his depiction of otherness in his works during the 1930s and 1940s. This section specifically explores Eliot's interactions with non-European cultures — particularly Chinese, Hindu, and Indigenous American traditions — and their impact on his religious and poetic expressions. The chapter starts by explaining that Eliot's conversion was partially motivated by his struggle with his American identity in English society, underscoring his complex engagement with cultural identity.

Eliot's representation of Chinese culture, as seen through his description of canine creatures, reflects a highly “othered”, paganistic, and savage portrayal, aligning with Yellow Peril discourses of the time. This chapter provides historical context for such Orientalist views, including the depiction of Chinese immigrant workers and the Second Opium War. In contrast, Eliot associates feline creatures with a superior spirituality more closely aligned with Christianity, portraying cats as symbols of mutually respectful, cultural, and reciprocal communication, rather than the savage Oriental “other”.

Furthermore, this chapter delves into Eliot's nuanced engagement with Hindu culture, which displays both colonial attitudes and a search for resonant and reparative potential through engagement with Hinduism and Buddhism. Drawing on theorists like Rita Felski and Eve Sedgwick, it argues that Buddhism and Hinduism provide pathways

for reparation by promoting meditation with the non-human, thus transcending the colonial and capitalist frameworks that extract meaning or value from non-human entities. This exploration seeks to uncover the complexities of Eliot's religious affiliations and their profound influence on his literary work, emphasizing the transformative power of cross-cultural dialogues.

Following his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927, Christianity became a central theme in T.S. Eliot's dramas and poems throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Robert Crawford elucidates the psychological impetus behind Eliot's religious pivot, noting: "Tom, afflicted by personal and societal despair, sought the ordering structure of religious belief that offered his individual talent communion with a greater spiritual tradition" (33). Furthermore, Crawford highlights that Eliot's turn to religion also signified a deeper embrace of his English and European identities. Eliot contended that individuals should gravitate towards the church as it encapsulated the shared cultural memory of European civilization. In this vein, Eliot remarked: "All European civilizations are equally dependent on Greece and Rome," just as "China and India had to be true to their own cultural forms" (*Complete Prose* vol.2, 469). However, Eliot's depiction of the church as an authentic and unified beacon of Europe's collective cultural heritage is liable to critique as a reductive take on the intricate mosaic of European religious history. Such a viewpoint risks sidelining non-European religious traditions, undermining their relevance and presence in European culture. This conservative, Eurocentric stance can also be discerned in the anti-Semitic themes analyzed in the second chapter of this thesis. In the present chapter, my emphasis is on

Eliot's exploration of non-European cultures, specifically Chinese, Hindu, and indigenous American traditions, in his works from the 1930s and 1940s.

Critics have focused on the religious themes in Eliot's later compositions as focusing on means of spiritual transcendence and salvation. However, the Orientalist representation of non-European otherness in his religious turn remains an underexplored subject. Helen Gardner interprets *Four Quartets* as an expression of orthodox Christianity. She regards the Hindu allusion as an oddity that "destroys the imaginative harmony of the poem" (173). Gardner's comment reveals the otherness of "heathen cultures" that seems to be embedded within her critique, a perspective perhaps influenced by Eliot's Eurocentric orthodox Christian view. On the other hand, some critics also point out Eliot's doubts over absolute orthodoxy: "it is hardly possible for any individual to be wholly orthodox" (Crawford 405). Other critics have highlighted Eliot's open attitude towards non-Christian cultures in his works, rather than the anxious othering of non-European cultures. Narsingh Srivastava (1977), for example, argues that the Christian-centric criticism neglects the influence of Hinduism on Eliot and fails to explain the extensive allusions to Hinduism in *Four Quartets* (98). Instead, Srivastava suggests that the poem tries to reconcile the two religions into a unity without centering on any of the two (108). In the following discussion, this chapter will reveal the Orientalist othering of non-European cultures in Eliot's religious vision in the 1930s and 1940s, which shows his Eurocentric anxieties based on imperialism. At the same time, though, Eliot's works exhibit what Rita Felski (2020) terms "resonance", a concept she introduces as an alternative to an extractive model of reading. Instead of

viewing texts solely as sources to mine, resonance focuses on relational connections (Felski, 3). This Felskian resonance offers an alternative mode of knowledge production in cultural encounters, steering away from the traditional Orientalist framework. Through this lens, Eliot's engagement with other cultures suggests a more complex, relational understanding rather than a mere Orientalist perspective. Secularism has contributed to the deconstruction of religious authority and the exposure of the systematic oppression and violence regarding gender, race, and class in the institution of Christianity. Unfortunately, Eliot's vision of Christianity reinforces various forms of othering. However, for Eliot, the Eurocentric tradition inherent to the church is important, but it does not mean his religious turn is solely based on the establishment of his European identity. Eliot, like many other religious believers, aims to seek refuge from despair out of therapeutic need. This therapeutic drive pushes Eliot to embrace and fuse different religions and cultures. After correcting the anxieties and biases towards other cultures, we can better discuss how Eliot's religious vision resonates with other cultural traditions on the theme of bereavement and mortality. Before delving into the therapeutic aspects in different religions, I want to examine firstly the institutionalized otherness of non-European cultures in Eliot's Christian vision.

Orientalist Tendencies, Anti-Asian Stereotypes, and the Representation of Animality in *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*

Eliot's portrayal of animality in his writings often carries an underlying imperialist tone, particularly concerning issues of racial and national purity. In the characterization

of Sweeney, a figure emblematic of the imperial soldier, Eliot presents a complex interplay of animality and imperial anxieties. As demonstrated in lines from his poem, “Apeneck Sweeney spread his knees / Letting his arms hang down to laugh” (ll. 1-2), Sweeney is depicted not just as a human but in an ape-like form, suggesting a regression to a primal state. This imagery reveals the fragility and constructed nature of imperial masculinity, undermining the idealized image of the disciplined white soldier with the suggestion of an uncontrollable, bestial nature lying beneath. As mentioned previously, the influence of the femme fatale on Sweeney introduces the threat of the exotic and erotic other, metaphorically representing the colonized territories as seductive, dangerous, and corrupting. This reflects broader imperialist anxieties about the loss of control and purity, where racial and cultural mixing were viewed as threats to the imperial order.

Saskia McCracken and Alex Good remark: “The figure of the animal was central to discourses of modernity regarding national purity, belonging, empire and colonisation.... binaries such as citizen–refugee, animal–human and élite–subaltern, pushing back against imperial understandings of the animal” (15). In contrast to the serious poetic undertakings of the Sweeney poems, Eliot’s *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats* light-heartedly explores themes of animality within the contexts of race and imperialism, using depictions of cats and dogs. This work also illustrates how certain animal representations align with the construction of a white, Christian-centered identity, distinguishing itself from what is portrayed as the uncivilized, paganistic, and oriental animal other.

The imperialistic othering of Asian culture underlies the composition of *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*. *Possum* is a collection of whimsical poems about cats categorized under children's literature. Eliot paints a vivid tapestry of various cat characters. Among them, the characterization of Growltiger most directly articulates a xenophobic anxiety, particularly targeting Asian cultures, that has been coded into the seemingly light-hearted children's literature: "Growltiger was a Bravo Cat, who travelled on a barge... But most to Cats of foreign race his hatred had been vowed; The Cats of foreign name and race no quarter was allowed" ("Growltiger's Last Stand" ll. 1, 17-18).

Growltiger is portrayed as a guardian in the Navy, defending against foreign threats and reinforcing the imperial rule of the British Empire. The poem centers on Growltiger's confrontations with what Eliot presents as "villainous animals" of varied origins. This includes specific breeds like the Siamese and Pekingese in the poem. The poem further describes these "villainous animals" as "creeping in their sampans and their junks", using the starkly racist term "Chinks" to depict animals of Asian breeds ("Growltiger" l. 32). Unlike the animal breeds, "Mongolian horde" does not refer to a breed but is an historically rooted term referencing the vast armies of the Mongol Empire, exposing the discourse of "Yellow peril" anxiety.

The act of "creeping" also suggests the xenophobic imagination of the "Yellow Peril", a notion prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This narrative was anchored in a racist and imperialistic fear of an East Asian and Southeast Asian conspiracy against white individuals. William F. Wu defines this as "the fear of

perceived competition to the white labor force from Asian workers ... and the potential genetic mixing of the Anglo-Saxons with Asians, who were considered a biologically inferior race by some intellectuals in the nineteenth century” (5). Groultiger’s animosity towards “cats of foreign race” mirrors the obsession with racial and genetic purity prevalent in the Yellow Peril narrative. Wu also discusses specific historical events connected to this narrative, such as the discrimination against Chinese immigrants in the U.S. in the late nineteenth century (5). The mention of sampans further emphasizes the poem’s othering of Asian cultures, as sampans were commonly associated with Asian, primarily Chinese, immigrants. “Sampan”, a Chinese term for a small boat, was frequently seen in South China, the region from which many Chinese immigrants to the U.S. hailed during the nineteenth century. As Wu quotes from Bret Harte, a stereotypical image of a Chinese immigrant was painted as: “See Yup is a launderer who looked like any other Chinaman, wore the ordinary blue cotton blouse and white drawer of the Sampan coolie” (25).

The poem represents different Asian cultures by villainizing the Siamese, Mongolian and Pekingese dogs as mobs that challenge the imperial order represented by Groultiger. The discriminatory narrative involves a stereotypical and confusing misrepresentation of different Asian cultures and stigmatizes them as a “yellow peril” mass, just like the portrayal of “Mongolian hordes”. Eliot’s poem also groups the Siamese cats with dogs of Chinese breeds and confusingly labels them as “Mongolian hordes”, indicating the reductive and stereotypical imagination of Asian cultures to be at war with the British empire.

Eliot describes another battle between Pekingese and Pollicle dogs in the poem “The Aweful Battle of the Pokes and the Pollicles”. This poem, also a part of *Possum*, tells the story of the intervention of Rumpus Cat to settle a fight among dogs. Once again, the poem depicts a battle based on the racial difference between the Chinese breed of Pekingese and that of Pollicle dogs: “Now the Peke, although people may say what they please / Is no British Dog, but a Heathen Chinese” (25-26). Eliot uses the phrase “heathen Chinese” to highlight the racial otherness of the Pekingese dogs and the religious otherness of Chinese culture. Sarah Cheung examines the cultural and historical contexts surrounding the introduction of the Pekingese dog to Britain, tracing its origins to the imperialist looting of the Summer Palace during the Second Opium War in 1860 (364). The Second Opium War, also known as the Arrow War, was a colonizing attempt by Britain and France in China. The war took place from 1856 to 1860 and was triggered by a dispute over trade and tariffs. Britain was heavily involved in the opium trade in China, which was illegal under Chinese law. The Chinese government made repeated attempts to ban the trade and seize opium shipments, but British traders and officials resisted these efforts. The British and French governments sought to expand their economic and political influence in China and used military force to achieve their objectives. Hence, the Pekingese dog became a symbol of British imperialism and power, and its popularity among British upper-class women reflected their desire to participate in this imperial project and assert their own dominance over the Chinese culture. The Pekingese dog was used as a symbol of the Orientalist romanticized image of China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Cheung suggests that the Pekingese dog became a popular pet among British women during this time because of its association with the Chinese imperial court, which was seen as exotic and glamorous. The Pekingese dog became a representative of British upper-class women to assert their aristocratic and elite status. Cheung exemplifies the establishment of PPDA (Pekin Palace Dog Association) by Lady Algernon Gordon-Lennox to “keep the breed in its original stolen-from-the-palace-form” (382). The emphasis of “pure breed” coincides with the obsession with blood in both aristocracy and colonialism. Cheung traces the history of Pekingese dogs in Britain and highlights the gendered and racial implications of the dogs within the context of British imperialism and Orientalist fantasies of a romanticized and exoticized “Old China”.

Eliot portrays the Pekingese dogs as if they are a group of rough fighters in the streets, aggressively confronting the British pollicle dogs in “huffery-snuffery heathen Chinese”: “There were surely a dozen, more like a score / And together they started to grumble and wheeze / In their huffery-snuffery Heathen Chinese” (29-31). Contrary to the popular view of Pekingese dogs as feminized and delicate creatures from the palace, Eliot’s depiction aligns more with the portrayal of “Mongolian hordes” under the framework of a Yellow Peril narrative against Asian immigrants. His emphasis on the dogs’ “heathenness” reflects the underlying anxieties of Christian imperialism towards Chinese cultures.

The term “heathen Chinese” was a prevalent stereotype and derogatory label for Chinese immigrants in the United States during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During the anti-Chinese movement in California in the 1870s, this sentiment

took on legal dimensions. Chinese immigrants were often targeted through restrictive policies and legal actions that painted them as threats to the moral and religious fabric of American society (Wu 18). One significant manifestation was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which not only sought to restrict Chinese labor immigration but was underpinned by fears of the “otherness” of Chinese traditions and religious practices. The act, along with other localized policies, sought to minimize the influence of Chinese culture, which was often framed as being at odds with Christian values. This fear was exacerbated by the fact that many Chinese immigrants maintained their religious and cultural practices, which were unfamiliar and, to many Americans, “heathen” in nature. Furthermore, Eliot’s derogatory description of the “huffery-snuffery” Chinese language resonates with the anti-Chinese sentiment targeting the first generation of Chinese immigrants. Many of these immigrants were in low-paying jobs and struggled with the English language. Eliot uses the Pekingese dogs as a vehicle to project these anti-Chinese sentiments, further cementing a xenophobic stereotype that persists even today.

Eliot’s emphasis on the Pekingese dogs’ racial otherness aligns with colonial and aristocratic obsessions surrounding the myth of blood purity. This is evident in the pet market’s catering to the consumer’s desire for “pure breeds”, which symbolize class and taste. Donna Haraway (2003) deconstructs such “blood myths” in her work, highlighting the arbitrary nature of these classifications: “One of us, product of a vast genetic mixture, is called ‘pure-bred’. One of us, equally a product of a vast genetic mixture, is called ‘white’” (2). Haraway argues for a shift in perception, seeing dogs

not merely as pets, but as “companion species” that co-evolve with humans, significantly impacting our social and emotional lives. She stresses the importance of acknowledging the agency and subjectivity of dogs, critiquing the conventional view of them as loyal, obedient, and emotionally dependent servants to humans. This perspective, Haraway contends, reinforces harmful power dynamics and overlooks the ways in which dogs actively influence human behavior and culture.

Eliot’s portrayal of dogs, as seen in his poem “The Addressing of Cats”, aligns with the traditional and stereotypical view criticized by Haraway: “The usual Dog around the town / is much inclined to play the clown / And far from showing too much pride / Is frequently undignified...He’s such an easy going lout / He’ll answer any hail or shout” (26-29, 34-35). Here, dogs are depicted as frivolous, eager to entertain, and lacking in dignity — embodying the submissive pet stereotype that is prone to human emotional manipulation. The quotation stereotypically despises dogs’ playful and clownish behavior and underscores their readiness to respond to human needs, showcasing their submissiveness and willingness to be manipulated for human amusement.

This portrayal strips away the complexity of the human-dog relationship, disregarding the mutual interdependence evident in various real-world scenarios, such as search and rescue missions or the use of guide dogs. By adhering to this one-dimensional view of dogs, Eliot’s work contributes to the commodification of pets, wherein their value and dignity are subjected to market forces, and their emotional labor for humans is undervalued. In this light, dogs’ affection and loyalty are seen as cheap labor, serving human needs without proper recognition of their contribution or agency.

Haraway's critique urges us to move beyond these stereotypes and recognize the mutual respect within the human-dog relationship, acknowledging dogs as companions with agency and subjectivity, rather than mere commodities.

Eliot's portrayal of cats suggests that their perceived dignity or value is tied to their aloofness, giving the impression that their affection is a scarce commodity highly sought after by humans. He implies that one should address a cat with respect, stating: "I say, you should address a Cat / But always keep in mind that he / Resents familiarity" and further noting, "A Cat's entitled to expect / These evidences of respect / And so in time you reach your aim / And finally call him by his NAME" ("The Addressing of Cats" 41-43, 64-66). To Eliot, cats appear more mystical, emotionally reserved, and, intriguingly, more "human" in nature: "The Cats are much like you and me / And other people whom we find / Possessed of various types of mind" ("The Addressing of Cats" 6-7). At first glance, the poems in *Poosum* seem to delve into the personalities and eccentricities of various fictional cats, painting them as unique individuals. Yet, while Eliot might hint at placing cats on a par with humans, his works do not strongly emphasize the agency and subjectivity of cats. His apparent preference for cats over dogs seems rooted in an anthropocentric viewpoint of animals, anchored in a commodification logic where animals' value is determined by human-centric perceptions of their characteristics.

The stereotype of cats' aloofness and mysteriousness can be traced to Eliot's Christian understanding of feline creatures. Other mysterious feline figures include "Macavity, the mystery cat" and "the magical Mistoffelees". Henry Hart suggests that

Eliot's parents linked cats with the Christian idea of redemption from a world tainted by sin and encouraged him to depict this through a series of cat portraits (386). The spiritual insights put forth by St. John of the Cross, a prominent figure revered by Eliot, shed light on the Christian mysticism surrounding the ineffability of God (Hart 386). In the opening poem, "The Naming of a Cat", Eliot illustrates cats in a meditative state, accentuating their mysticism: "When you notice a cat in profound meditation / The reason, I tell you, is always the same: His mind is engaged in a rapt contemplation / Of the thought, of the thought, of the thought of his name: His ineffable effable Effanineffable / Deep and inscrutable singular Name" (25-31). Eliot emphasizes the ethereal sanctity of cats, setting them apart from dogs, especially in juxtaposition with the emotional Pekingese dogs.

Transitioning to broader cultural contexts, Eliot's portrayal of animals, especially dogs, reflects larger societal and colonial narratives. His arguably disparaging attitude towards the "heatheness" of dogs, particularly Pekingese, and his devaluation of their emotional labor can be likened to societal devaluation of immigrant labor. This understanding is deepened when we consider broader conversations concerning Orientalism. Eric Hayot (1999) highlights the complexities of Orientalism, pointing out that while China was not fully colonized geographically by the West, Western knowledge production about the East, and the power dynamics inherent in this process, still played a crucial role in shaping perceptions and attitudes (529). This is evident in the arrival of Pekingese dogs in Britain, a direct result of colonial warfare by Britain and France in China. These dogs embody the contradictory Orientalist discourses of

romanticizing the “old China” while simultaneously excluding and demeaning “uncivilized heathen cheap laborers”, revealing a desire for dominance over the “other”.

While *Possum* may be considered a minor work in comparison to some of Eliot’s other texts, its cultural resonance cannot be overlooked, especially given its influence on popular culture through manifestations like Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical *Cats* and its inclusion in the Faber Children’s Classics series. However, a striking oversight in current academic discourse is the lack of systematic analysis of Eliot’s Orientalist tendencies, his engagement with anti-Asian stereotypes, and the intertwining of these themes with the representation of animality within the poem. This chapter directly addresses this oversight, aiming to provide a comprehensive examination of *Possum* in the light of these critical dimensions. By focusing on the market dynamics of “pet animals”, I aim to elucidate how they perpetuate colonialist, racist, and anthropocentric views, thereby facilitating bio-political control rooted in blood purity. The anthropocentrism inherent in these depictions needs to be interrogated, given the power imbalances it can accentuate across cultures and species. A re-conceptualization is in order, recognizing “pet animals” as companion species — entities integral to human history and cultural evolution. Eliot’s depiction of a theater cat stands as testament to the ways in which such companion species have shaped our shared cultural narratives. Through this work, I aim to make a significant contribution to discussions surrounding Eliot’s Orientalist tendencies, anti-Asian stereotypes, and the broader implications of animality representations in literature.

Although Eliot’s depiction of cats and dogs are largely stereotypical, his portrayal

of Gus, the theatre cat, reveals the important role of cats in theatre history. In the poem, “Gus: The Theatre Cat”, Gus reveals that humans rely on his voice to create a ghostly atmosphere on stage. The cat also plays a tiger chased by a British colonel in India in *The Empty House* by Conan Doyle. According to Ricks and McCue’s comments, the original play centers on the bravery of the British colonel in his pursuit down the drain of the “man-eating tiger” (71). Gus’ narrative of his acting as the tiger deconstructs the original message of colonialist masculinity in the play in the form of meta-theatre. Eliot also shows that Gus actively participates in the play and “knows seventy speeches by heart” and “how to act with my back and my tail” (22). The poem shows the cross-species active cooperation in the making of theatre. The physical expressiveness of Gus also highlights cats’ unique talent for participating in theater. Eliot’s portrayal of Gus seems to be a good example that shows the cross-species cooperation in human-cat relationships throughout history.

Eliot’s writing of the theatre cat reveals the new potential in understanding the seemingly anthropocentric cultures from the perspective of the non-human, which can enhance cross-cultural and cross-species understanding. For example, the poem describes Gus’s participation in a Shakespeare performance: “At a Shakespeare performance he once walked on pat / When some actor suggested the need for a cat” (37-38). In the comments, Ricks and McCue provide a suggestion as to the possible plays by Shakespeare that may include the role of cats. *King Lear* and *The Merchant of Venice* are suggested as possible sources referenced in the poem: “And pat he comes like the catastrophe of the old comedy”; “Why he, a harmless necessary cat” (71). It

seems that the former line, from *King Lear*, is closer to the poem's description of Gus entering the stage on pat. The line is from Act I Scene ii where Edmund complains that he was born out of wedlock, which in the society of the time was considered shameful and stigmatizing. Edmund also criticizes the idea of fate or destiny, which he sees as a way of justifying social hierarchies and privileging those who are born into privileged positions, such as his legitimate brother Edgar. At the heart of Edmund's hatred is a sense of jealousy and resentment towards Edgar's privileged position as the legitimate son of their father. Edgar appears on stage after Edmund criticizes the idea of predestination. In the original play, there is no direct reference to the presence of a cat. Edmund describes the sudden interruption of Edgar's appearance while he is railing against the unfair lot of fate. From his words we can see that Edgar's entrance, whether onto the earth or on the stage, is unwelcomed by Edmund. Edmund highlights the unwelcome sudden interruption through the gesture of "pat", as if Edgar's birth is the reason that makes Edmund's own life a clownish catastrophe in a clichéd comedy celebrating legitimacy. Although the play does not actually refer to cats, the poem suggests the possibility of including an actual cat entering on stage alongside Edgar. The participation of a cat here not only adds to a humorous effect based on the literal meaning of "pat", but also toys with the notion of blood myth and legitimacy. The cat embodies Edmund's disillusion with the blood myth. The relationship between Edgar and his legitimacy is parallel with that between a pet and his owner, suggesting that the natural justification of blood myth is actually man-made and socially constructed. Yet, as revealed before, the "purity" of breed was a prominent concern of pets' human

owners, and Eliot also emphasizes this point multiple times in *Possum*. Hence, by examining the active role of a cat in the scene of *King Lear*, we can arrive at a perspective that deconstructs the blood myth propagated by Eliot and the marketing of pets, as well as different forms of biopolitical otherness. The non-human perspective can therefore lead to a better understanding of a mutual symbiotic cross-species interaction in our cultural history.

Orientalism and the Sonic Landscape: From *Possum* to *Four Quartets*

Although *Possum* is written in a whimsical and playful tone, it contains serious issues of Orientalism and anthropocentrism. I have shown that Eliot's engagement with these issues is multi-faceted. The examination of such discourses in "Possum" contributes to the understanding of similar issues in Eliot's other, more somber poems, such as *Four Quartets* (1943). Among "Four Quartets", "Burnt Norton" was composed and published from 1935 to 1936. In "Burnt Norton", Eliot grafted into the poem a "Chinese jar" after his publication of Hugh Gordon Porteus's *Background to Chinese Art* from 1935 to 1936 (Crawford 244). Hence "Burnt Norton" can be related to Porteus's discussion of Chinese aesthetics. The understandings of Chinese cultures introduced by Porteus are partly the result of genuine cross-cultural resonance, and partly reflect the influence of Orientalist discourses. As briefly mentioned in the first chapter, Ezra Pound romanticized Chinese characters and overemphasized their ideogrammatic function. Pound apparently to simply ignored the usage of Chinese characters in verbal communication and turned them into a form of visual art. Porteus shares the same romanticized fantasy of Chinese visual arts and at the same time in the

pamphlet he directly denigrates Chinese spoken language and music as a backward form of art: “The open-air music of China ...evolved nothing but a few semi-imitative or symbolic ceremonious formulae; even Chinese singing is little more than a slight extension of the spoken language, already a six-toned plain-chant itself” (49). In contrast, Porteus argues for the universal superiority of European classical music, stating that “this development was possible only because we made music a common language, intelligible to all but the deaf” (49). Like the Orientalist romanticized obsession with ideograms, Porteus’s disparaging comments regarding Chinese music are also founded upon the Orientalist othering of an “uncivilized” form of art to establish the superiority of European classic music, with the assumption that such “advanced music” would be accepted universally.

It is important to note, firstly, that Chinese singing is not “little more than a slight extension of the six-toned plain-chant language”. For example, kunqiang requires skillful improvisation of multiple slurs between notes, sometimes just over the singing of one syllable. Second, Porteus’ belief in the superiority of Western music lies in his faith in the abstract form of this music and its consequent ability to transcend its language and cultural background. Although earlier in the pamphlet he mentions that the encounter with different kinds of music made him realize that there is nothing absolute about European classical tradition, he still thinks that this music tradition evolved in a way “that the musical systems of no other nation can parallel” (49). From the reasons he provided for his musical bias, we can see that, in Porteus’s view, the “backwardness” of Chinese music lies in its failure to transcend its spoken language.

For Porteus, the close tie between music and language is deemed to be a backward art form. Porteus's bias against the role of language in music performance can be seen in the notion of absolute music in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. According to Roger Lustig, the distinguishing characteristics of absolute music include: the belief that music is the preeminent form of art, the concept that language diminishes the impact of a musical composition, the conviction that listening to music can lead to a quasi-religious transcendent experience, and the formalist approach that perceives the subject matter of a musical composition as self-contained, distinct from other art forms such as painting, poetry, or novels, where the subject matter is external to the work (vii). Although Porteus realizes that music varies according to different cultural contexts, he believes that western art music can be somehow decontextualized into a universal music system superior to other forms of music.

According to Aakanksha Virkar-Yates, the idea of absolute music inspired Eliot's composition of *Four Quartets*. She reveals that Eliot's *Four Quartets* is influenced by Beethoven through the lenses of Schopenhauer and Wagner, and this influence can be connected to Wagner's view of absolute music as conveying a generalized emotion beyond desire. Eliot's quest for timeless will and universal essence through music can be seen as a byproduct of his religious turn. She also argues that Eliot's description of the ocean can be traced to Wagner's striking metaphor of Beethoven as a Columbus navigating the sea of absolute music. Virkar-Yates also cites Dahlaus's study of Wagner's understanding of absolute music: "What the sea expresses is 'absolute harmony', the essence of musical art" (91). I want to supplement their research by

pointing out the colonial implication in the metaphor of absolute music expressed by Wagner. The parallel drawn between Beethoven and Columbus affirms music with an expansionist quality, whose “absolute harmony” is founded on the exclusion and silencing of indigenous voices. Wagner’s view implies that the absolute music will “harmonize” the backward music as Columbus intended to “civilize the savages”. In the latter part of this chapter, I will offer an interpretation to the effect that Eliot’s musical landscape is based on cross-cultural resonance in *Four Quartets*, rather than the aggression and narrow universalism of Wagner and Porteus.

However, despite Eliot’s serious attempt in *Quartets* to engage in cross-cultural dialogue, the Orientalist view of music can still be found in the light-hearted *Possum*. Although Pound’s ideogrammatic Imagism was only prevalent in the 1910s, we can see that the prejudice continued into the 1930s in Porteus’s book. Porteus’s praise for Chinese visual art coincided with his arrogant dismissal of the “Chinese sound”, similar to the derogatory depiction of the Pekingese dogs barking “huffery-snuffery heathen Chinese” by Eliot in *Possum*.

Said’s model of Orientalism offers a lens to unpack the process by which the East is both idealized in certain aspects and deemed “uncivilized” by colonizers. Both Porteus and Pound perpetuate the Orientalist stereotype, linking the East to a more primal, earth-bound nature, which, from their perspective, fails to rise to the abstract and rational artistic forms emblematic of the West. In this context, Porteus posits that Western music symbolizes an abstract, universal form of art transcending language. In contrast, he suggests that music from the “othered” cultures remains tightly bound to

its linguistic roots. However, this perspective overlooks the fact that all musical forms are rooted in their specific cultural contexts, and none inherently possesses universal superiority. By dismissing the rich nuances of Eastern music, Chinese culture is rendered mute, akin to an artifact in a museum. This parallels the fate of the Pekingese dog, transported to Britain as a living relic from a vanishing palace, its voice reduced to mere “snuffery-huffery heathen Chinese”. Eliot’s depiction of the Pekingese dogs speaking in in this manner, and his belittlement of the dogs’ affective labor, exemplify the intersection of racism and capitalism at the auditory level, underscoring the exploitation of racialized and dehumanized others for the benefit of classed and raced hierarchies.

Yet, it is important to acknowledge that while soundscapes can be appropriated to enforce racial or class distinctions, they also have the potential to overcome such constraints and foster mutual understanding. Eliot’s portrayal of the Pekingese, with its Orientalist overtones, can be critiqued for revealing the limitations of his cosmopolitan imagination, as well as his inherent biases. Nonetheless, within his work, there lies an opportunity for reparative interpretations, leading to more inclusive and respectful dialogues. By recognizing the complexities within his work, we can appreciate that even amidst problematic content, there is capacity for openness and nuanced understanding.

Eliot’s Cross-Cultural Engagement and Therapeutic Resonance with Buddhism and Hinduism

Eliot's prejudice against the "sound of otherness" reveals the cultural anxieties of a Eurocentric Christian discourse. Yet, his religious perspective also offers moments of interaction with non-European cultures that move beyond feelings of anxiety, paranoia, or arrogance. In *Touching Feeling* (2003), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's resonance with Buddhism highlights an alternative therapeutic affective engagement with cultural otherness. Addressing the dichotomy between scholarly and popular approaches to Buddhism, she notes: "An 'American Buddhist' reader of the critical scholarship might well be chastened to learn how many ways their access to the Asian texts, practices, and understanding has been compromised in their transmission to the west.... What is the force of such very critical findings? Common sense suggests that their impact will fall on non-academic students of Buddhism more lightly than on scholars in the field" (155). Sedgwick points out that for many non-academic readers, the appeal of Buddhist texts may rest more on their pragmatic or therapeutic benefits rather than their academic accuracy. She observes a neglect, even a stigma, within academia towards the burgeoning market for "therapy-like self-help books" (155). Drawing from her personal experience following a cancer diagnosis, Sedgwick emphasizes the genuine therapeutic needs of non-academic readers. She argues for recognizing and respecting these needs instead of merely dissecting them from a detached scholarly standpoint.

While academic scholars of Buddhism seek a clearer understanding, one free from "ignorance, imperial presumption, and wishful thinking" (155), it is essential, Sedgwick suggests, to recognize that not all engagements with another culture are driven by imperialistic arrogance or paranoia. Highlighting the significant market for Buddhist

writings among non-academic readers, she underscores the need for academia to consider the therapeutic and reparative benefits these texts offer, grounded in rigorous scholarly studies. Building on this, while I have critiqued Eliot's Eurocentric interpretations and their orientalist perspectives, it is worth acknowledging the nuanced ways in which Eliot engages with other cultures. For instance, Eliot's reference to the "Chinese jar" in "Burnt Norton" hints at a spiritual alignment with Chinese artistic sensibilities. Within "Burnt Norton", this jar symbolizes his aesthetic of "conscious dying", reminiscent of meditative and contemplative practices found in Buddhism and Hinduism, as further exemplified by the lotus imagery in the poem.

While Eliot demonstrates a spiritual affinity with Hinduism and Buddhism akin to Sedgwick's, his portrayal of these religions still betrays a sense of imperialist arrogance and paranoia towards their religious otherness. I want to suspend temporarily my argument that Eliot's resonance with Hinduism and Buddhism is comparable to Sedgwick, and firstly turn to Eliot's imperialist representation of India in *The Cocktail Party* and his ambivalent attitude towards imperialism as revealed in Mulk Raj Anand's *Conversations in Bloomsbury*.

Mulk Raj Anand recalls his conversation with Eliot in Bloomsbury and reveals that in his view Eliot is complicit in the perpetuation of British imperial power relations. Anand expresses the ideological division over Indian independence between himself and some other Bloomsbury group members: "Though members of the Bloomsbury group were genuinely against capitalism and imperialistic wars, they were mostly non-committal on the question of Indian freedom" (14). Anand takes issue with Eliot's

endorsement of Rudyard Kipling's poetry, accusing him of complicity in imperialist sentiments. Anand specifically criticizes the stark racism and imperialism in Kipling's two poems that reveal his support of the idea of British superiority over other nations, "The White Man's Burden" and "Lesser Breeds Without the Law". In "The White Man's Burden", Kipling argues that it is the responsibility of the white man to civilize and educate the non-white people of the world, whom he refers to as "half-devil and half-child". In "Lesser Breeds Without the Law", Kipling similarly expresses his belief in the superiority of the British people and their right to rule over other nations: "The lesser breeds without the Law—they are but as ye are / They are neither brave nor true nor clean / They are only Poor Folk, bred to be slaves". Eliot includes "The White Man's Burden" in his compilation of *A Choice of Kipling's Verse* and he also praises Kipling's poetic genius, completely ignoring the offensive content of imperialism and racism in the poems.

Anand also recalls an unpleasant conversation with Eliot, who gave dismissive comments on Gandhi as an anarchist: "Despite his talk of non-violence, Indian people run riot"; "Gandhi seems to be an anarchist. Sometimes I feel the Indians should pursue their culture and leave government to the British empiricists" (34, 58). Eliot's remark about Indian people pursuing their culture and leaving the government to the British empiricists can be seen as an example of Orientalist discourse. It implies a romanticizing of the "otherness" of Indian culture and positions British empiricists as superior in their ability to govern. Additionally, Eliot's characterization of Gandhi as an anarchist and his implication that non-violent resistance leads to chaos can be seen as a

reinforcement of imperialist ideologies that position the British empire as a necessary force for maintaining order and stability in colonized territories.

Throughout the conversations, Anand does not change his opinion of Eliot regarding his siding with Kipling and his imperialism. Yet, we can also see that the two men are capable of engaging in meaningful dialogue across cultural and ideological divides. Through their conversations, it is shown that Eliot becomes increasingly open to learning from non-Western traditions and is interested in exploring the possibilities for cultural exchange and mutual understanding. Anand also acknowledges the potential for dialogue and exchange between different cultures and perspectives. When Anand expresses his feeling that Eliot's recent poems resemble Mantras, Eliot tells him that he is writing the "Quartets" and Anand's book *The Hindu View of Art* "sends him back to the Vedic hymns — also the Thirteen Principal Upanishads" (155). Anand also suggests that Eliot's poems are suitable for contemplation and could be popular sellers, even though this idea aligns more with Hindu practices than with those in the West (155). Something like Anand's suggestion seems to be carried out in Eliot's *Four Quartets*.

Four Quartets are not only inspired by Anand's writing on Hinduism, but also Nagendranath Gangulee's *The Testament of Immortality* (1940), a book aimed at the newly bereaved. Eliot admits, "I know that my poetry shows the influence of Indian thoughts and sensibility" (Murray 125). After reading Gangulee's anthology, Eliot thought that the book brilliantly "fused eastern and western culture" and that it would be useful for the newly bereaved and wrote the foreword to the Faber & Faber edition

(Crawford 603). Given the context of the Second World War, the demand for such a book seemed even more pressing. Eliot's attitude was therefore similar to that of Sedgwick in bridging the gap between the practical value of the market and the "seriousness" of Hinduism and Buddhism through the perspective of a non-academic reader. The book takes the form of an anthology of passages or poems on the theme of bereavement from both eastern and western authors. The selected pieces in the anthology mostly have a religious overtone of Christianity, Buddhism or Hinduism. For example, there are direct quotation from the Upanishads and the Bible. Eliot's engagement with Gangulee's anthology and other cross-religious texts highlights his intent to offer solace during the tumultuous period of the Second World War. His approach aligns with Sedgwick's in bridging the divide between practical applications for the general public and the inherent "seriousness" of Hinduism and Buddhism. Eliot seemed to understand the therapeutic potential of these texts, recognizing their capacity to provide comfort and understanding to a mass audience grappling with the uncertainties and grief of wartime. His emphasis was less on a critical or scholarly exploration of these texts and more on their functional value in addressing the immediate emotional needs of his readership. The successful application of Buddhist practices of mindfulness in the latter half of the twentieth century, especially in the United States, suggests that there are therapeutic values to such cross-cultural engagement, as Eliot speculated.

Jeff Wilson explores the reception of Buddhism in the United States in the twentieth century with a special focus on how the concept of "mindfulness" has been

appropriated and successfully marketed for therapeutic practices of meditation (76). Wilson points out that traditionally meditation was not a therapeutic practice in Buddhism (76). Instead, exorcism and chanting are the traditional practice to drive away the evil spirits dwelling in ill bodies (76). In a parallel to Eliot's incorporation and appreciation of Eastern philosophies in his work, the therapeutic effects of mindfulness, a practice rooted in Buddhism, have been increasingly acknowledged in the Western world, particularly within the field of medicine and psychotherapy. The secularized adaptation of mindfulness in clinical settings, known as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), has gained validation and acceptance, as evidenced by the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in the twenty-first century (Wilson 97). This transformation of a religious practice into a secular therapeutic tool reflects a broader trend of cross-cultural exchange and adaptation, a theme also present in Eliot's work, as he sought to provide solace and understanding during turbulent times through his engagement with Eastern philosophies.

This re-contextualization of Buddhism coincides with Sedgwick's idea of an effective form of cross-cultural resonance that has not been based on imperialist appropriation of Eastern otherness. Whilst Wilson concludes that the success of Buddhism in the U.S. market precisely lies in its attempt to become "enmeshed in medical, psychological and scientific frameworks, with correspondingly less stress on supernatural, transcendent or nirvanic elements", he also points out that the earthly/transcendental division cannot be drawn very clearly and that the medical or scientific practice is based on the image of the nirvanic awakening of the Buddha:

“Therapeutic presence involves being in contact with one’s integrated and healthy self, while being open and receptive to what is poignant in the moment and immersed in it, with a larger sense of spaciousness and expansion of awareness and perception” (99). Wilson notes that those who practice mindfulness meditation appear to attain a heightened awareness akin to “Buddha-like mindfulness”, allowing them to experience the present more fully and move toward a state of equanimity (99, 111-112).

While Wilson’s work primarily addresses the reception of Buddhism from the 1950s onward in the U.S., Robert Bluck’s study (2006) sheds light on its influence in Britain during the 1930s and 1940s. Bluck notes: “A Meditation Circle was formed in 1930 for members who sought further spiritual growth through intensive reflection in the realm of thought. It seems the shift toward emphasizing personal spiritual experience possibly emerged more prominently during the Second World War” (8). It is evident that during this turbulent period, Eliot and the editors at Faber & Faber recognized the therapeutic potential of Gangulee’s anthology for the wartime public, especially the bereaved. Contrasting with later U.S. approaches that aimed to secularize Buddhism, the selections in the Testament are intimately tied with various religious traditions. This is evident in excerpts such as the one from Ecclesiastes 12:7 in the Bible, and another from the Bhagavad Gita: “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (160); “The pure scent in earth am I, and the light in fire; the life in all born beings am I. I am the power of immortality and death. Know me, O son of Pritha, as the ancient Seed of all born beings” (44).

Similarly, Eliot’s *Four Quartets* not only draws upon the Bible, but also directly

mentions Krishna's teaching to Arjuna (son of Pritha) in the third section of "The Dry Salvages". In the preface to another religious anthology by Gangulee, *Thoughts for Meditation: A Way to Recovery from Within* (1951), Eliot notes that "frequently contemplatives of religions of civilizations remote from each other are saying the same thing" (*The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot, Volume 7*, 587). Although the anthology came out in the 1950s, Gangulee's influence on Eliot's cross-cultural religious resonance from the 1940s can be summarized in his own words in the preface: "it is salutary to learn that the Truth is not 'occult', and that it is not wholly confined to their own religious tradition, or on the other hand to an alien culture and religion which they regard with superstitious awe" (587). Eliot believed that the wisdom from different religious traditions could be mutually absorbed. For him, the insights of Buddhism and Hinduism could be integrated to enrich Christian tradition.

Paul Murray closely examines the allusions to Hinduism in *T.S. Eliot and Mysticism* and concludes that Eliot revises Christianity through Hinduism (152). He also points out that Eliot does not turn his back on non-Christian cultures despite his insistence on Christian incarnation (151). The book explores and delineates the numerous Hindu sources evident in *Four Quartets*. Murray then argues that, for Eliot, faith and incarnation are at the core of personal transcendence from time and redemption from sin. Eliot's own words in his essay "The Christian Conception of Education" further prove Murray's point that the poet does not reject wisdom from the east: "I believe, of course, that Christianity is right; but Christianity in its decayed forms could learn much from the East" (153). In the following I want to show that although

Eliot seems to be holding onto the core position of Christianity, the practices of Buddhism and Hinduism in *Four Quartets* do not seem to be unjustly appropriated for a Euro-centric view; instead, Eliot's view of Hinduism and Buddhism is on the level of spiritual resonance through meditation, polytheism and reincarnation. The latter two concepts stand in opposition to the Christian traditions of monotheism and salvation after death. Eliot's composition displays a cross-cultural religious conversation on a reciprocal level, in which one belief system is not necessarily superior to another.

Wilson not only discusses the secularized and practical version of Buddhist mindfulness, he also provides an account of the traditionally religious view regarding the benefits that arise from such practice, including the attainment of equanimity and better concentration: "supernatural powers of hearing and sight; recollection of past lives and many complete cycles of creation and destruction of the physical universe; mind reading ... all the way to the highest immaterial heavenly realms and purified mind" (107). In *Four Quartets*, I contend that Eliot's portrayal of Buddhism and Hinduism is rooted in these religions' conventional perspectives, and that he reconceptualizes the therapeutic potential of the Christian incarnation.

Eliot's Vision of Time and Mindfulness

Eliot's poem begins by presenting a cyclical view of time, challenging the traditional Christian understanding of linear progression from past to an anticipated future redemption. He writes: "Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future / And time future contained in time past" ("Burnt Norton" 1-3). Rather

than adhering to a strict linear delineation, Eliot disrupts this convention by emphasizing the continuity of the “present”. The repeated use of the term “present” blurs the typical distinction between past and future, suggesting that all temporal states might converge in the present moment. Whereas the terms “past” and “future” conventionally address distinct temporal phases, Eliot gives a spatial dimension to these terms by suggesting they are “contained”. According to the *OED*, the term “contain” traditionally describes something that is held or enclosed within a vessel or space. In this context, Eliot hints at the idea that the entirety of time might be encapsulated within a singular, encompassing present.

Building on this notion, Eliot postulates, “If all time is eternally present / All time is unredeemable” (“Burnt Norton” I, 4-5). The phrase “eternally present” indicates a perpetual state of the “now”, contradicting the Christian concept of future redemption and the Last Judgment. Instead of viewing time as a linear journey with a destination, Eliot portrays it as a continuous loop where every moment directs us back to the ever-present now: “What might have been and what has been / Point to one end, which is always present” (“Burnt Norton” I, 6-7).

The perception of one’s present experience alongside the past resembles the cyclical view of time in Buddhism and Hinduism. In “East Coker”, the cyclical temporality can be seen in the following words which are repeated twice: “In my beginning is my end” (I. 1, 14). *Samsāra* is the word for the reincarnated cycle of time based on repeated births and deaths. Harold Coward reveals that time is represented in Hinduism through the image of a turning water-wheel (23). His point can be further

illustrated by Krishna's words to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita: "The residents of all the worlds downwards are subject to the cycle of repeated birth and death" (7:16). As previously noted, the narrative involving Krishna and Arjuna is referenced in "The Dry Salvages". Before battle, Krishna reminds Arjuna to keep an equanimous mind towards past and future, for it will help transcend the repeated cycle of birth and death (2:51). Similar thoughts can also be found in Eliot's stanza on Krishna and Arjuna: "I sometimes wonder if that is what Krishna meant— / That the future is a faded song... / Of wistful regret for those who are not yet here to regret"; "While time is withdrawn, consider the future / And the past with an equal mind" ("The Dry Salvages" 1, 3-4, 30-31). Eliot's verses suggest that any anticipatory regret or apprehension about the future is a projection of our current state of mind, since we have not yet experienced what lies ahead. The emphasis on the present moment and the call to regard past and future with an "equal mind" aligns with the Buddhist principle of mindfulness, where one is deeply attuned to the present. The withdrawal of time contributes to an equanimous mind that realizes and focuses on present experiences, which further echoes the Buddhist practice of mindfulness.

One example that reveals the mindfulness of the poetic persona lies in his concentration on his experience of breathing and eructation: "Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind / That blows before and after time / Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs / Time before and time after / Eructation of unhealthy souls / Into the faded air" ("Burnt Norton" III, 15-20). The blowing winds seem to represent the movement of time. In the air flow that signifies temporality, the poetic persona stands

still at the present with his mind occupied by the breathing of his unhealthy body. As Wilson reveals, the practice of mindfulness helps living with the unhealthy body by paying close attention to bodily experiences in the present, including the observation of one's breathing. Hence it seems that the poetic persona possesses the kind of mindfulness practiced by the Buddha to intervene in the physical experience of illness and obtain the potential therapeutic effect.

As established before, the religious pursuit of Buddhist meditation aims at attaining a "purified mind". The purification of mind is tied up with the practices of asceticism in Buddhism in order to detach from sensual desires in the mind. In *Four Quartets*, Eliot envisages different scenarios for the "emptying" of minds: "Emptying the sensual with deprivation / Cleansing affection from the temporal" ("Burnt Norton" III 8-9). The asceticism in *Four Quartets* has been established to be inspired by St. John of the Cross whose ascetic practice of meditation and contemplation have been associated with Buddhist sensibility (Röder 67). According to Murray, Eliot's asceticism, akin to that of St. John of the Cross, has been perceived by other critics as "life-denying, and therefore dangerous" (89). Michael O'Sullivan also thinks that in Eliot's interpretation of incarnation, he exhibits a similar ascetic attitude to St. John of the Cross, based on disgust and shame towards the body (7). The danger of life-denying asceticism coincides with the imposed biopolitical degradation of bodily existence through the affective mechanism of shame, usually gendered (as discussed in the first chapter). As previously argued, Eliot was especially concerned with the gendered experiences of shame, which contributed to his self-mortification and misogyny. Biographers,

including Gordon and Crawford, propose that his inclination towards self-mortification persisted in shaping his religious and transcendental perspectives in the 1930s and the 1940s. I agree concerning the potential violence in Eliot's vision, especially when he views the body as the gendered or racialized "other": I have indicated this tendency in my discussions of his racist and imperialist portrayals of Jewish and Asian cultures. Yet it is important to point out that the practice of asceticism is not necessarily based on the violent mechanism of shame towards one's body, but rather can be based on a therapeutic need for a third space to re-examine the mechanisms of desire.

The asceticism of St. John of the Cross, as described by Jordan Aumann, serves as a means to aid believers in deepening their understanding of God (339). Aumann's defense of ascetic practices provides a platform to explore varied interpretations of divine intention. While some view this intention as an austere reinforcement of self-denial, potentially accompanied by prejudiced views or actions, others see parallels or opportunities for dialogue with the therapeutic teachings of the Buddha. In *Four Quartets*, Eliot appears to gravitate towards this integrative, dialogical approach.

In *Four Quartets*, Eliot employs meditation as a means to explore the liminal spaces and moments of suspension that pervade life. He draws from the theatrical metaphor of the quiet pause between the scene of a play; the lingering wait at a train station when there is an unexpected delay; and even a conceptual funeral where there is no one to mourn or bury: "As, in a theatre, The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed; "Or as, when an underground train, in the tube, stops too long between stations"; "The silent funeral / Nobody's funeral, for there is no one to bury / I said to

my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you / Which shall be the darkness of God” (“East Coker” III 18, 14, 10-13). These moments represent pauses for reflection and introspection. The mindfulness of Eliot’s meditation can be seen in his close attention to perception in the darkness. The poetic persona hears the “hollow rumble of wings” and knows that “the hills and the trees, the distant panorama, and the bold imposing façade are all being rolled away” (“East Coker” III, 15-17). The image of a façade coincides with the Buddhist idea of the hallucinatory nature of life. Tim Lomas and Jnanavaca describe such disillusionment during mindful meditation: “spiritual dying is in the sense of loosening our illusions about ourselves and giving up our self-oriented clinging” (305). The renouncement of “self-oriented clinging” also matches with Eliot’s detachment from and re-examination of desire.

In the poem, the speaker also expresses that “desire itself is movement, not in itself desirable” (“Burnt Norton” IV, 25). Eliot further establishes the link between the movement of desire and the movement in time: “Timeless, and undesiring / Except in the aspect of time / Caught in the form of limitation / Between un-being and being” (“Burnt Norton” IV, 29-32). In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna says that withdrawal from the gratification of desire and senses is the right way to merge with the timeless divinity: “Desireless, free from proprietorship; one should meditate on the inner self” (6:10), (13:12-13). Narsingh Srivastava also establishes that the notion of desirelessness is the equivalent to timelessness in Hinduism and Buddhism (106). Eliot’s practice of meditation requires the suspension of desire to be in an “empty” mind of “internal darkness”, an intermediate space caught between “unbeing and being”. Hence it seems

that the practice of meditation aims to lead to a temporary ontological death.

Eliot further practices “conscious dying” in the scenarios of the overdue stop between the stations of the underground and the silent funeral for nobody. The long stay in the underground itself calls to mind the image of a tomb. Such an image naturally corresponds to the scenario of a funeral in the poetic persona’s meditation. Instead of an occasion for remembrance of specific people, the funeral signifies a general sense of emptiness and death from a transcendent perspective. The depiction of a funeral in the poem is reminiscent of the cemetery reflections found in the Satipatthana Sutta, which includes guidelines for meditating on various stages of a decaying corpse. This practice encourages individuals to internalize the realization that “In the same way, one should reflect that one’s own body is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate” (Anlayo Bhikkhu 75). Prior to transitioning to the meditation on a funeral without a specific subject, Eliot also touches upon themes of physicality and mortality through his use of phrases like “earth feet, loam feet” (“East Coker” I, 38). The representation of a funeral absent of a deceased person can be interpreted as Eliot’s way of highlighting the fragile nature of our collective physical existence, echoing Buddha’s universal message on the inevitability of death during contemplations in a cemetery.

However, although the meditation in the poem has focused on emptying the mind of its desires to reach the darkness of death, it is also worth noting that Eliot stresses that such ascetic practice should be an in-between state of mind. In the poem, the internal darkness is described as “interstellar space”, like the darkness between theatre

scenes or between underground stations (“East Coker” I, 37). Instead of the life-denying, nihilistic and total void commonly found to be the features of Eliot’s asceticism by many critics, as mentioned before, I propose that the focus on intermediate states of mind in *Four Quartets* suggests a different outlook in Eliot’s vision of incarnation.

The setting of the intermediate space in nobody’s funeral calls to mind the Buddhist concept of bardo (the intermediate state between two lives based on the rule of reincarnation). In “Little Gidding”, Eliot describes the intermediate space between two lives as having potential for liberation: “Being between two lives — unflowering, between / The live and the dead nettle. This is the use of memory / For liberation.../From the future as well as the past” (III, 6-10). The poem directly mentions incarnation in similar terms: “Incarnation / Here the impossible union / Of spheres of existence is actual / Here the past and future / Are conquered, and reconciled” (“The Dry Salvages” IV, 32-36). From the poem we can infer that Eliot understands incarnation within the framework of his rumination on temporality at the beginning of the poem. As established before, Eliot subverts linear time and highlights the reunion between spatiality and temporality through the multifaceted meaning of “present”. Indeed, incarnation suggests the moment of unification between the timeless divinity and the body in physical space. It is exactly the intermediate state between unbeing and being. Eliot’s attempt to put the “unbeing” into words brings about the blurred notion of time. Hence Eliot resorts to the philosophy (saṃsāra) and practices (mindfulness and meditation) in Buddhism and Hinduism to body forth his vision of incarnation. Incarnation is discussed in the framework of Krishna’s admonition to Arjuna in “The

Dry Salvages” in which Eliot stresses the message of equanimity for temporary transcendence from the concerns over linear temporality. Besides, Eliot also ascribes the darkness in the meditative mindset to the Christian God. Although St. John of the Cross and the Buddha practice meditation in similar ways, Eliot’s poem takes on the perspective of his Christian belief. Yet at the same time Eliot seems genuinely to resonate with different Asian cultures and religions in order to revive the Christian tradition which, likewise, also emphasizes the materiality and spatiality of incarnation and its related rituals.

As mentioned before, Eliot portrays the image of a Chinese jar to embody his vision of Incarnation: “Only by the form, the pattern / Can words or music reach / The stillness, as a Chinese jar still / Moves perpetually in its stillness” (“Burnt Norton” V, 4-7). Once again Eliot depicts a moment of suspension between stillness and movement in time. According to Porteus, Chinese art, especially calligraphy, demonstrates the fusion of meaning and its physical representation. Specifically, this involves the integration of the characters’ meaning with their embodied form, as depicted through brushwork. Porteus gives the example of the character for thunder in Chinese calligraphy, which aims to bring out the sudden release of power through the brush. However, as revealed before, Porteus’s and Pound’s over-emphasis on the “ideogrammic” aspect of Chinese visual culture leads to the other side of the coin, their deliberate ignorance and arrogant dismissal of Chinese sound or music. Their prejudice occurs because of the hidden power dynamics in a binary opposition whereby one form of perception, be it the abstract form of art or the materialized form, is superior to the other. However, although

inspired by Porteus's pamphlet on Chinese arts, Eliot resists the one-sided appropriation of another culture and argues for co-existence among cross-cultural art forms. Such co-existence is based on his understanding of incarnation in which both the abstract words or music and the materialized body form matter.

Porteus's arrogant attitude towards Chinese music is based on the argument that Chinese music is not "transcendent" or abstract enough, like western classical music, for it is still based to a large extent on spoken characters. Conversely, in "Burnt Norton", Eliot resists Porteus's claim by arguing for the co-existence of words, music and the Chinese jar in his vision of incarnation: "Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts / Not that only, but the co-existence / Or say that the end precedes the beginning / And the end and the beginning were always there / Before the beginning and after the end" (V, 8-12). The materialized body of the still violin is as important as the transcendent musical note it produces. What's more, Eliot materialized words in the following description: "Words strain / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden / Under the tension, slip, slide, perish / Decay with imprecision" ("Burnt Norton" V, 13-16). Eliot appears almost to ascribe the materialized texture of the Chinese jar (crack and break) and the strings of the violin (strain and slide) to the seemingly abstract words themselves. Hence, Eliot presents the coexistent and mutually shifting states between materiality and abstraction through resonating with cross-cultural forms of art to convey his vision of incarnation.

Eliot's approach to Buddhism, Hinduism and Chinese arts transcends an Orientalist appropriation of "otherness" because it acknowledges the co-existence of different

cultures and religions without imposing a universal view of his own religious belief and tradition. His resonance with Buddhism and Hinduism can not only be found in his adoption of the practice of meditation and his rumination on the Bhagavad Gita, but also in his openness to the radical difference between Christianity and Eastern religions. The most fundamental differences in their belief systems are the ideas of monotheism/polytheism and incarnation-salvation/reincarnation. Although Eliot insists on incarnation and the Christian God in the poem, the traditionally monotheistic belief does not impede him from sincerely adopting the ideas of reincarnation and polytheism in *Four Quartets*. Yet critics often take up his perspective as a devout Christian in the 1930s and 1940s, which often results in an overemphasis on Eliot's orthodoxy in his poems from this period. For example, Gardner, as mentioned before, finds the stanzas on the Bhagavad Gita to be at odds with the message of Christianity in *Four Quartets*. However, as previously discussed, Eliot believes that complete orthodoxy is nearly unattainable. It seems to me that it is precisely in Eliot's openness to the radical difference among religions that his religious view can be put to therapeutic use.

In the opening stanza of "The Dry Salvages", Eliot directly draws upon the polytheistic imagination of the river god and his acknowledgment of the existence of gods: "The sea has many voices / Many gods and many voices" (I, 24-25). The many voices of the sea can also be regarded as what happens in the poetic persona's mind during meditation as, according to Buddhist tradition (as previously noted) meditation can contribute to supernatural hearing and sight. The ocean in the poem evokes the Buddhist and Hindu analogy of the "sea of saṃsāra" due to its portrayal in terms of

cyclical temporality, encompassing infinite lives and deaths: “The sea is all about us” with “hints of earlier and other creation”; “There is no end of it, the voiceless wailing / No end to the withering of withered flowers” (“The Dry Salvages” I, 15, 18, 31-32). In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna also reveals himself to be both the all-encompassing time and the ocean: “I am terrible Time the destroyer of all beings in all worlds.... I alone am the creator, maintainer and destroyer of all creation”; “of reservoirs of water I am the ocean” (10:24, 10:32) (11:32). Hence, Eliot’s openness towards a polytheistic poetic imagination can be seen in such details. The poem also draws on the Buddhist analogy of the “sea of saṃsāra” to frame a broader reflection on debt and economic dynamics.

According to David Graeber, the rise of different religions in the axial age of India and China opposed the logic of the market, which was “entangled in military affairs, where it became almost indistinguishable from the mercenary logic of Axial Age warfare” (248). This was because debts were seen as obstacles to reaching enlightenment and ultimate liberation from the cycle of suffering (266). The idea of canceling debts resonated with those who were economically oppressed and marginalized, such as peasants and slaves. Similarly, during the Great Depression, many people were burdened with debt and struggling to make ends meet. Eliot’s interest in Buddhism and its teachings on desire and loss can be seen as a response to the economic conditions of the time. Buddhism emphasizes the impermanence of all things and the inevitability of loss. By examining our desires and understanding that loss is inherent in them, we can achieve a state of equanimity or wholeness, rather than the libidinal debts to the future through the form of pre-consumption.

Meditating Between Critique and Postcritique Perspectives: Challenging Capitalism and Anthropocentrism

As previously established, ascetic and meditative practices are a means of capturing the paradoxical “stillness in the movement of time”, particularly the experience of incarnation/reincarnation. Some critics argue that due to Eliot’s image as a conservative Anglo-Catholic and the direct reference to “incarnation”, Christian incarnation overarches and underlies the whole poem, including elements of Hinduism and Buddhism. However, I contend that the Christian idea of incarnation does not serve as a dominating and orthodox message in the poem. Rather, Eliot envisions Christian incarnation alongside the notion of reincarnation in an equally significant position.

Eliot reincarnates Jesus as a wounded surgeon in his contemporary time in the poem, as evidenced by the lines “The wounded surgeon plies the steel / That questions the distempered part / Beneath the bleeding hands we feel / The sharp compassion of the healer’s art / The dripping blood our only drink / The bloody flesh our only food / In spite of which we like to think/ That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood / Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good” (“East Coker” IV, 1-9). The direct reference to the crucifixion of Jesus can be seen in the poem’s mention of Good Friday and the ritual of Holy Communion. The wounded healer with bleeding hands also evokes the image of a crucified Jesus. Eliot compares the earth to a hospital endowed by a ruined millionaire and establishes a connection between debt and sin in the poem. The patients are indebted to the millionaire’s endowment, and ‘Wherein, if we do well, we shall /

Die of the absolute paternal care / That will not leave us, but prevents us everywhere” (IV, 13-15). The poem seems to suggest that liberation comes from the idea of a transcendent being who defies the logic of exchange, as revealed by Graeber (266). The healer, portrayed as a reincarnated Jesus who reminds us that the only food and drink is his blood and flesh, is the real transcendent and therapeutic force that rises above the logic of exchange.

According to Max Weber, the Protestant ethic in the U.S. monetizes time in order to enhance working efficiency and provide a justification for the belief in predestined success as a result of God’s grace. Eliot portrays the capitalist logic inherent in the Protestant ethic as one of predestined “paternal care” for the “chosen ones”, who are likened to patients in a hospital under the care of a ruined millionaire. Eliot seems to criticize the Protestant value by opposing the monetarized idea of earthly existence in his hospital/millionaire analogy and reimagining the Catholic view of incarnate time. Hence, Eliot seems to propose that the therapeutic potential of meditation in the intermediary state of (re)incarnation lies in its ability to improve focus on stillness between moments, the enhancement of bodily awareness and the attempt to be at ease with bodily existence itself. It allows individuals to slow down, temporarily renounce worldly desires and anxiety, and be mindful of the present moment. This helps patients restore a sense of “wholeness”, however temporary, and recover from feelings of alienation. However, the secular use of Buddhism in therapy suggests that the religion has become integrated into capitalism and has lost its power to critique it. Therefore, Eliot’s incorporation of spirituality into his poetry serves as an example of how religions,

as Graeber reveals of the axial age, originally possessed a critical power. Meditation therapy demonstrates that resilience towards capitalism is not merely passive, but rather can serve as a means of critique and ultimately reshape our understanding beyond capitalism when actively pursued.

The poem also critiques capitalism by examining colonialism through the lens of Buddhist *samsāra*. As mentioned before, the ocean and river are also connected to the colonial history of capitalist expansion in the poem. Eliot describes the American settlers' colonial mindset over the frontier wilderness and the subsequent wish to subjugate it for the use of commercial expansion. The poem proceeds to say that the river god has never been tamed by people. Instead, such a colonialist vision of human control over the natural landscape has been a failure. In the poem, the river has been forgotten by the city dwellers after the building of the bridge and gradually it has been regarded as simply a recipient of wastage: "We cannot think of ... an ocean not littered with wastage". The bridge symbolizes a colonialist sense of triumph over the indigenous frontier. Flowing water has often been related to the signifier of linear temporality. "Water under the bridge" also connotes that experiences in the past should be forgotten. However, Eliot challenges the colonialist view of progress in time by portraying the water/time analogy through the Buddhist framework of cyclical temporality (the sea of *samsāra*). In "Little Gidding", Eliot focuses on the "stillness between two waves of the sea" (V, 38). The fixation upon still moments in movements also corresponds to the practices of meditation. In "The Dry Salvages", the poetic persona fixates his attention on the wastages and wreckage in the water and also hears

multiple kinds of voices from the sea, even the supernatural sounds of the river and ocean gods: “There is no end of it, the voiceless wailing / To the movement of pain that is painless and motionless / To the drift of the sea and the drifting wreckage / The bone’s prayer to Death its God”; “The sea howl / And the sea yelp, are different voices...The menace and caress of wave that breaks on water / The distant rattle in the granite teeth” (II, 31-34, 27-30). As established before, the poem’s concentration on the dead and the heightened sense of hearing are characteristic of meditation. Through meditating on the still moments represented by the detritus in the flowing water, the poem seeks to focus on the pain and suffering, waste and sacrifices of colonialist expansion, rather than forgetting them like “water under the bridge”.

The poem also challenges the colonial anthropocentric view of “untamed” nature through observing and listening to the landscape. For example, the poem describes the anthropocentric interpellation of the rocks alongside the sea: “And the ragged rock in the restless waters / Waves wash over it, fogs conceal it... / In navigable weather it is always a seamount / To lay a course by: but in the sombre season / Or the sudden fury, is what it always was” (“The Dry Salvages” II, 70-75). The meaning and the value of the ragged rock does not depend on anthropocentric interpellation. The rock is assigned with its own ontological existence as the poetic persona empties his mind of the anthropocentric relationship coded in the reading of the rocks’ value. Hence, it seems that the description of the different sounds in the poem points to the interaction between various textures of the rocks and the sea. For example, “the distant rattle in the granite teeth” points to the particularly hard texture of the rock. The poem points to the

materiality of the granite itself by resonating with it in a meditative tone, as against an anthropocentric extraction and interpellation of the rock.

Eliot challenges the Protestant notion of monetized temporality and instead emphasizes the unification of time and physical spatiality. He highlights the stone as the oldest chronometer, emphasizing that physical objects such as rocks also represent the embodiment of time. In “The Dry Salvages”, the poem shifts to the moment of land formation from the sea, which evokes a sense of time that is older than the devices used to measure it: “Ground swell, a time / Older than the time of chronometers” (I, 37-38). This serves as a reminder that the anthropocentric vision is a relatively recent phenomenon in the context of “deep” or geological time. Eliot emphasizes the importance of physical incarnation over transcendental abstract time, highlighting the value of the material world and challenging a monetized notion of time.

Therefore, the liberating potential of meditation lies in the momentary emptying of the mind from the established anthropocentric engagement with the non-human and the opportunity to re-examine the previous affective connections, such as the desire for granite based on anthropocentric extraction of its value and meaning. Meditation can then contribute to a creative mode of engagement with the rocks, such as in the form of musical resonance. Meditation temporarily suspends the awareness of subjectivity through mindful attunement to our sensory perception of the present objects. The sensory perception therefore contributes to affirming a sense of non-human ontological existence. For example, the ragged rock is a seamark in good weather, but it is what it always was when it is not of use to humans. Hence, Eliot aims to reveal how language

covers up its signified objects and becomes a marker of the value attached to them.

Therefore, asceticism and meditation involve temporarily putting aside one's self to examine desires and establish a new form of affective engagement that is not based on the exploitative mode of desire found in commercial demand and supply. In his work, Eliot meditates on the ontological existence of rocks and rivers without their human-assigned meaning or value and re-establishes a musical resonance with them. This resonance occurs when the poetic persona and the rocks are simply "being in the present" without the attached meaning or value in language.

Eliot associates such experiences with happiness, as he separates happiness from any assigned meaning or intended goals: "The moments of happiness — not the sense of well-being / Fruition, fulfilment, security or affection / ...but the sudden illumination — / We had the experience but missed the meaning / And approach to the meaning restores the experience / In a different form, beyond any meaning / We can assign to happiness" ("The Dry Salvages" II, 42-48). Instead, there is a sense of unification between the means and the ends in the moment of happiness, which is not driven by desire and not focused on the future. Eliot's "sudden illumination" and suspension of the desire movement resemble the Buddha-like enlightenment during meditation. Therefore, Eliot assigns an intrinsic value of happiness to the experience of resonance with others that arises from emptying subjectivity from any instrumentalized meaning and being mindful of the present being. According to Wilson, Buddhist meditation's therapeutic power lies in its potential to help individuals encounter their wholeness in being and overcome trauma. Eliot's understanding of happiness also coincides with the

practice of mindfulness-based therapy prevalent today.

Sarah Ahmed delves into the covert power dynamics underlying the societal norm of happiness. She contends that broadening our understanding and feelings towards alternate modes of existence is a valuable counter to a politics of happiness fixated on chasing positive emotions alone. Eliot similarly challenges conventional notions of happiness, severing the association between happiness and a mere positive outlook, thereby creating a spectrum of resonances with diverse life experiences. Ahmed emphasizes that “Opening up the world, or expanding one’s horizons, can thus mean becoming more conscious of just how much there is to be unhappy about” (Ahmed 70). Therefore, meditation in this context is not an inactive retreat from worldly injustices; it aids in establishing links among unhappy meditators, fostering a sense of collective identity and solidarity.

The significance of Eliot’s writing on Buddhism lies in its potential to combine literature with mindfulness-based therapy through meditation. Hiie Saumaa argues that meditation theories often overlook the fact that thoughts are primarily experienced through language, instead focusing solely on controlling them (190-191). Eliot’s poem strives to balance thoughts and thoughtlessness. In the preface on thoughts for meditation and recovery, Eliot explains that his approach to meditative reading involves temporarily relinquishing one’s knowledge and simply “being with the words”, resonating with them through experience (587). This approach is similar to his understanding of happiness, which he construes as a feeling of mindfulness and resonance with others in the present moment, without the need for any specific goal,

desire, or meaning. Eliot's conception of critical reading, which involves applying one's available knowledge or framework to primary texts, aligns with Felski's idea of "suspicious reading" where the critic acts as a *deus ex machina* on the text. Eliot's meditative reading serves as a manifestation of what Rita Felski describes as "resonance", encapsulating a relational and connective approach to texts as opposed to an extractive model of reading. In this light, Eliot's meditative engagement with reading exemplifies a move away from traditional Orientalist frameworks, fostering a mode of knowledge production rooted in genuine, respectful cultural encounters. Michael Docherty argues that the act of "suspicious reading" itself implies a hidden power dynamic between the dominating critic and the silenced text because the text is unable to speak for and defend itself. According to Docherty, Felskian postcritique has the potential to transcend the present mechanistic framework of interpretation. He agrees with Felski's view that "works of art are not merely objects to be interpreted; they also function as frameworks and guides to interpretation" (968).

Eliot's poem also exemplifies this attempt at post-critique. The poem aims to reflect on and reveal the imposed framework of meaning on the rocks, while Eliot resonates with the mere existence of the rock. The granite in the poem influences human perception, conjuring impressions of grandeur in construction and the permanence of landmarks, all of which are attributed to the rock's characteristic hardness. Granite's unique texture can create various sounds when it encounters the wind and the sea. The poem resonates with the existence of the rocks rather than just imposing an existing ideological or cultural interpretation, suggesting the mutual resonances between nature

and culture. Thus, Eliot's contemplative reading can aid in the development of a fresh approach to reading that perceives the dialogic resonances among the primary text, critics, nature, and culture.

In Eliot's poem, readers are invited to engage in meditation by defamiliarizing everyday scenarios, such as the experience of taking the underground or the temporary moment between acts. This creates space for individuals to renegotiate their relationship with their own existence. As mentioned earlier, Eliot shares Nagendranath's approach of merging diverse cultural traditions while compiling expressions of mourning. Eliot's method involves briefly setting aside knowledge of cultural differences and instead concentrating on the state of being and non-being of the departed loved one through the lens of (re)incarnation, thereby bridging the gaps between various cultural traditions of mourning. Therefore, the practice of meditation can also provide space for mourning in a secularized context, as exemplified by Wilson.

Yet although Eliot attempts to apply meditation to understand and resonate with others, his effort seems to be compromised in terms of race. The river and ocean in the poem witness the endless sacrifices throughout colonialism and capitalism: "We come to discover that the moments of agony... are likewise permanent / With such permanence as time has"; "Time the destroyer is time the preserver / Like the river with its cargo of dead negroes, cows and chicken coops" ("The Dry Salvages" II, 56-62, 67-68). However, Eliot's detached perspective as a privileged white man is disturbing, as he mentions the death of slaves alongside cows and chicken coops without giving enough weight to the miseries of the history of the slave trade. His critique of colonialist

and capitalist expansion is mainly conducted through a non-human perspective of the river and ocean, which reveals his privileged white man's perspective. Although racial otherness is mentioned, it seems to be poorly handled by Eliot as a side issue. For example, the “brown god of the river” also points to the colonizers’ view of the indigenous landscape as a frontier to be conquered. Eliot does not give enough weight to systematic violence in colonial and capitalist history, neutralizing their suffering into the grand and transcendent narrative of moments of agony preserved in the saṃsāra time (flowing water cycle). The poem’s somewhat indifferent tone when addressing the horrors of colonial slavery dilutes its intended critique of capitalism.

However, Eliot’s understanding of incarnation is further complicated in relation to his interaction with Native American culture. As previously established, Eliot employs meditation as a method to concentrate on the moment of (re)incarnation, specifically the convergence of spatial and temporal dimensions, as well as the body and spirit. The concept of incarnation can be observed in various Christian rites, including the Holy Communion, which honors incarnation through the consumption of Jesus’s symbolic flesh and blood. The symbolic cannibalistic commemoration of incarnation is not unique to Christianity.

Xiaofan Amy Li’s research delves into the ways in which Antonin Artaud and Michel Leiris approach the other in their ethnographic encounters, utilizing blood and cannibalism as a means of connecting with and incorporating the other’s culture. In both Artaud’s and Leiris’s work, blood serves as a metaphorical and literal substance that breaks down the boundaries between self and other. For Artaud, blood allows him

to access the primitive and savage aspects of himself and the other, while for Leiris, it is a means of embodying the other and integrating their cultural practices into his own. Li argues that cannibalism is not just about consuming flesh, but a metaphorical process of assimilating the other's beliefs and ways of life, resulting in a transformation of the self. She gives the example of the Tarahumara people's peyote rituals: "The central idea of the peyote cult is that peyote is a divine personality who gives itself as a gift to its hunters and eaters" (1038). During the ritual, the Tarahumara people dance and eat peyote to be possessed by the spirit of the cactus. Li contends that the divine peyote fills their body and consciousness, resulting in a feeling of limitlessness and infinity. The individual's self dissolves into the collective ritual, creating a diffuse and ubiquitous presence. The ritualistic practice of consumption and dancing functions as an initiation into cannibalism. The ingestion of peyote enables a spiritual transformation and openness to alterity.

Eliot's exploration of otherness through the themes of incarnation and cannibalism is complex. While on one hand, he displays a Eurocentric perspective towards cannibalistic practices of "heathen" cultures, and on the other hand, he appears to be receptive to the rituals of cannibalism and dancing that are inherent in the imagination of incarnation.

In Eliot's "East Coker", the depiction of a corn dance at an English folk festival emerges as a pivotal motif. This scene, steeped in the traditions of rural England, not only conjures a meditative landscape that connects the present with ancestral pasts but also plunges the reader into a metaphorical exploration of darkness. While firmly rooted

in English cultural heritage, Eliot's portrayal intriguingly resonates with the thematic elements found in D.H. Lawrence's descriptions of Native American corn dances, particularly in "Dance of the Sprouting Corn" from his travel essays collection *Mornings in Mexico* (1927).

Saumaa's scholarship underscores the centrality of dance rituals and altered states of consciousness within Native American traditions, as vividly captured in Lawrence's travel essays. Lawrence's writings offer a rich, philosophical contemplation on the individual's symbiotic relationship with the cosmos. His narrative, in essays like "Dance of the Sprouting Corn", intertwines the physical act of dance with a broader metaphysical understanding, encapsulating the resonance between the self and the universe.

Eliot's poetic rendition, akin to Lawrence's narrative approach, employs dance as a symbolic device to dissolve the boundaries between the self and non-human otherness. Particularly, Eliot's reference to human flesh as "earth feet" and "loam feet" (l. 38) nourishing the corn, not only anchors the poem in human physicality but also subtly gestures towards a de-anthropocentric perspective. This perspective resonates with Li's interpretation of cannibalism, not in its literal sense, but as a metaphor for the assimilation of "otherness" through the act of eating. Eliot's imagery suggests an openness to the concept of alterity, akin to Li's notion of metaphorical cannibalism — an act that involves embracing and internalizing the unfamiliar, thus reshaping one's self-awareness and perception.

By contrast, in *The Cocktail Party*, Eliot's understanding of cannibalistic rituals

and incarnation becomes narrow-minded and Orientalist. *The Cocktail Party* is a play written by T.S. Eliot in 1949. The story revolves around a troubled couple named Edward and Lavinia, who are on the verge of a divorce. Lavinia seeks the help of a mysterious therapist named Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly, whom she hopes can save her marriage. In the play, the tension is resolved with the exile and crucifixion of Celia, Edward's clandestine lover during the indigenous riots on the island of Kakinja. The message at the end strongly implies a sense of missionary conversion and redemption of the Christian empire. Eliot depicts two groups of Kakinja: one that is more Christian and "civilized", while the other "uncivilized" group worships monkeys. The play proceeds to depict Christian natives killing and eating monkeys to remove their impact on crops, and progress is made as a result. Conversely, the "uncivilized" group thinks that the Christian group's killing of monkeys is the problem and instead kills Christians to lift the curse on monkeys. This is a story from a Christian-centered perspective on cannibalism, which only becomes an unobject form when baptized.

Kristeva's theory of the abject can be relevant here, as the Christian sacrament of Holy Communion involves the symbolic consumption of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, embodying the concept of incarnation. Kristeva's ideas of catharsis and abjection suggest that indigenous people, such as the monkey-worshippers of Kakinja, were converted to Christianity in order to distance themselves from their savage and abject cannibalistic practices. Jesus is perceived as the ultimate catharsis. Celia's crucifixion by the unconverted "savages" can also be seen as an act of catharsis.

Eliot's fascination with ritual signifies more than a mere aesthetic choice. It reflects

a deeper yearning to revitalize society through collective participation and a genuine effort to understand and draw inspiration from a plethora of cultures. His plays, steeped in religious symbolism, often align with the path of traditional Christian motifs, revealing an inherent challenge to step outside the bounds of a Eurocentric worldview. This tension between embracing a broader perspective and succumbing to imperialistic notions is discernible in his writings.

To draw this chapter on Eliot and religious otherness draws to a close: we have navigated through Eliot's complex intersections of capitalism, the Anthropocene, and imperialism, primarily under the umbrella of religious contemplation, intensified by his 1927 conversion. A central focus has been Eliot's depiction of Asian otherness, with the lens of Orientalism critically dissecting the portrayal of anti-Asian stereotypes, notably in *Poosum*. However, works such as *Four Quartets* offer a redeeming glimpse of Eliot's genuine endeavor to foster therapeutic cross-cultural resonances. Despite his Christianity in the 1930s and 1940s often exhibiting a Eurocentric shade, glimmers of his appreciation for Hinduism, Buddhism, and Chinese arts are discernible. This analysis has been grounded in the reparative and postcritical frameworks of critics like Sedgwick and Felski, championing a reading of Eliot that acknowledges his efforts at cross-cultural dialogue, while being wary of Orientalist representation. Through the intricate tapestry of sounds — ranging from the “heathen” undertones to the music of the quartets infused with diverse cultural echoes — Eliot crafts a soundscape of cross-cultural and human-non-human resonances. These resonances, profound and nuanced, attempt to transcend the confinements of imperialistic or capitalistic narratives,

revealing Eliot's multifaceted engagement with various cultures, spiritualities, and the intricate interplays between them.

In examining Eliot's engagement with meditation and its potential as a counterpoint to colonialist and capitalist ideologies, we can also find its profound relevance in our contemporary age, where mindfulness practices face a risk of being diluted by capitalist influences. Ronald Purser's 2019 coinage "McMindfulness" critiques this phenomenon. Drawing a parallel with the quick, superficial nourishment offered by fast-food chains, Purser contends that modern mindfulness has been repackaged as a quick solution to both personal and societal ills, neglecting the deeper structural challenges. Eliot's *Four Quartets* delves into the intricate balance between meditative reflection and a critique of capitalist and colonialist structures, offering a reimagined perspective on how the reparative practice of meditation can function as a powerful tool of critique.

Conclusion

This thesis has conducted an investigative journey into the complex ways in which T.S. Eliot's oeuvre engages with themes of otherness. These themes are manifested through layers of affect, history, and embodiment, examined within the frameworks of critique and post-critique. The study has explored the realms of the marginalized, the alienated, and the "othered", scrutinizing Eliot's multifaceted interactions with these motifs to uncover the underlying societal hierarchies and power dynamics. These issues not only resonate with Eliot's historical context but also address contemporary concerns. By undertaking this exploration, this thesis has aimed to enrich the current scholarly understanding of Eliot, offering a nuanced perspective that recognizes both his complicity in and deviation from prevalent notions of race, gender, and colonialism.

From Eliot's pre-war poetry in the 1910s to his poetry and drama spanning the 1930s to the 1940s, this thesis has examined Eliot's portrayal of various forms of "otherness". It has woven together themes of race, gender, capitalism, and colonialism, exploring their intersections in each chapter. Eliot's depiction of "otherness" unveils his anxieties concerning subjects such as race, gender, and colonialism, as well as his interactions with non-human entities, all explored within specific historical contexts marked by pandemics, wars, and/or colonial history. His work frequently engages with "othered bodies" — those marginalized due to their deviation from established norms. This thesis has sought to demonstrate that Eliot's perspectives on otherness are complex and multifaceted, sometimes aligning with, and at other times challenging, prevalent societal notions, thereby presenting a spectrum of attitudes. Moreover, the affective and

embodied dimensions of Eliot's engagement with otherness expose both his criticisms and potential paths toward a more reparative understanding. By delving into these specific, contextualized representations, the thesis reveals that while some themes, such as his anti-Semitic sentiments, are resistant to reparative readings, others offer more nuanced engagements, highlighting the diversity of Eliot's literary spectrum.

My thesis enriches the existing scholarship on Eliot, engaging with prior critical analyses of his portrayal of "otherness" while simultaneously forging new paths into the post-critical potential of exploring the affective and embodied nuances of various manifestations of otherness in his writing. Drawing from insightful previous works on Eliot's problematic representation of femininity and Jewishness, I have integrated the historical context of the 1918-1920 pandemics, thereby deepening the understanding of "othered" bodies amidst a pervasive atmosphere of paranoia. By employing the theoretical frameworks provided by Sedgwick and Ngai, I have navigated the complex interplay of emotions such as paranoia and shame, shedding light on their impact on Eliot's portrayals of gendered and racial otherness, and critically examining the reparative possibilities that the affect of shame may unveil, in contrast to the apparent limitations of paranoia.

This thesis has further delved into the relatively underexplored domain of Eliot's global connections to colonialism and imperialism. His tenure at Lloyds Bank stands out as a pivotal element in my analysis, providing a nuanced understanding of the commodity market anchored in the colonial economic structure. Building on existing

assertions about Eliot's critique of financial imperialism, I have expanded the discourse to examine how these themes manifest in varied realms such as libidinal exchange, the commodity market, and colonial agriculture. A distinctive facet of my approach is the inclusion of diverse locales such as Algeria and India, gleaned from Eliot's banking records, further emphasizing the profound intersections of capitalism, (neo)colonialism, and ecological degradation. Positioning *The Waste Land* within a broader global and colonial context, have aimed to shed light on the poem's engagement with capitalist structures, while also exploring potential avenues for reparative understanding and connection in a fragmented world.

This thesis has further attempted to provide a comprehensive understanding of Eliot within the contexts of imperialism and animality by illuminating his depiction of various animals in *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, interpreting it through the imperialist and racialized discourse of the "Yellow Peril". Conversely, the study has also underscored Eliot's ability to transcend Orientalist and anthropocentric narratives, probing into his nuanced perceptions of non-human states in *Four Quartets*, which is enriched by his engagement with Buddhist and Hindu philosophies. This thesis offers a reparative reading of Eliot's contemplative stance, highlighting the potential of literature's role in meditation. It advocates a mode of reading that departs from critical and extractive approaches, emphasizing resonance and immersion in the meditative experience of literary texts. Furthermore, this analysis nurtures a cross-cultural connection with the non-human world and promotes a reading perspective that transcends capitalist limitations.

This study delves into the intricate tapestry of “otherness” in literature, asserting its multifaceted representation beyond a mere binary of acceptance or marginalization. By meticulously unpacking Eliot’s engagement with themes of otherness, the research underscores the interplay between historical contexts, societal norms, and literary expressions, prompting a reevaluation of canonical texts through fresh, post-critical lenses. The emphasis on affective and embodied dimensions offers a blueprint to probe deeper into literary works, uncovering latent nuances and reparative pathways. The research also approaches literary scholarship as an inherently interdisciplinary endeavor, marrying historical contexts, diverse philosophies, and critical theories, and seeking to enrich the discourse on “otherness” across literary epochs.

While this thesis has centered on Eliot’s engagement with themes of “otherness”, it has also acknowledged that broadening the spectrum to encompass voices from authors with direct “othered” experiences, be it gendered, racial minority, or colonial backgrounds, can further enrich the discourse. Such inclusion would not only supplement the existing dialogue but also offer a nuanced comparative study, weaving together diverse perspectives. Additionally, the frameworks and lenses applied to Eliot present promising avenues for the examination of other writers with similarly complex portrayals. Future investigations into canonical figures, contextualized within their historical settings, could further illuminate the intricate web of critical challenges they present, and, importantly, reveal potential reparative pathways through an exploration of affective responses and embodiment.

Finally, the exploration of “otherness” in Eliot’s works serves as a timely mirror to contemporary societal challenges. As issues of gender, race, and (neo)colonialism continue to shape global narratives, understanding Eliot’s multifaceted perspective fosters a deeper reflection on our own biases and positions, prompting a nuanced, empathetic approach to enduring disparities, as well as encouraging a continuous dialogue on inclusivity, empathy, and the transformative power of literature.

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Fig. 2.2. “Daddy, What Did You Do in the Great War?” Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, London, 1914-1915. British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/daddy-what-did-you-do-in-great-war>.