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Letter from the Editor

Alexandra Jamieson

Appearing in the ninth volume of the St Anne's Academic Review (STAAR) are ten pieces from current or recent members of St Anne's College, University of Oxford. This edition of STAAR includes articles from the humanities, sciences, and social sciences as well as a new section, SPARK reviews. This is in order to have a dedicated section for film, TV and book reviews.

STAAR went through a number of transformations last year and we have ensured they were continued this year. Most notably, peer review was successfully conducted on all research articles and opinion pieces. In the online version the reviewer comments will be made available for download, in the spirit of open peer review. We are very pleased with how implementing this evaluation process has gone. I am very grateful to my team of editors who were enthusiastically behind inviting reviewers and handling the review process. It has been a great success with each of the five accepted articles having at least two reviews leading to a total of 13 reviewers involved with STAAR this year.

This year is the ten-year anniversary of STAAR and to honour this we have ten articles in this year's edition as well as a letter from the first editor-in-chief, Daria Luchinskaya. We are very grateful to Daria for writing this letter, reflecting on ten years of STAAR. While in the past STAAR has had a theme for the articles, the 2019 publication, with its five academic articles, has been made to allow members of the college to submit articles on any subject they wished. This has led to a very diverse set of articles, from dispelling misconceptions of nuclear energy to exploring artistic representation in the Roman period.

New to STAAR this year was SPARK reviews headed up by Daniel Mercieca. Dan was instrumental in creating SPARK reviews, including coming up with the name and developing it into its own section of STAAR. I am very grateful for all the hard work Dan has put into making SPARK reviews what it is today. Thanks to Dan's efforts there are five very insightful reviews ranging from a review of the book *Why We Sleep* to a review of the popular British television series *Years and Years*. I look forward to seeing SPARK reviews develop further over the next few years.

Last year STAAR ran a crowdfunding campaign to ensure it continued to have funds to support the running of the journal in the future. The campaign was a success, raising enough funds to keep STAAR self-sufficient for a few years. Again, I would like to thank everyone who donated funds to help STAAR back in 2018.

It was a pleasure to have worked alongside such a great team of editors. It has been a joy and I offer my sincerest gratitude to all. They maintained academic integrity throughout and were committed to ensuring the ninth volume of STAAR was a success. Additionally, I am thankful to Valeria Taddei for always being there to discuss ideas and for her commitment to the role of Production and Web Design Manager.

It has been a pleasure to serve as the editor-in-chief.
I hope you enjoy reading our ninth issue of STAAR.

Sincerely,
Alex Jamieson

Letter from STAAR initiator and editor-in-chief, 2008-10

Daria Luchinskaya

First, a huge thank you to everyone involved with this new issue and with previous issues of STAAR. It is wonderful to see St Anne's Academic Review go from strength to strength, and to look back at how it has progressed over the ten years (!) since its first appearance.

Back in 2008, interdisciplinarity was in the air at St Anne's. The MCR had set up informal discussion groups with invited speakers, and the College introduced Subject Family talks and dinners, to share research with College members. STAAR was founded in this context to promote the research interests and achievements of the St Anne's community, to bring together the junior and senior members of the College and to inform alumni of the exciting graduate research going on in St Anne's. STAAR also offered an opportunity for MCR members to get involved with the different stages involved in the making of a journal and to find out more about publishing. I learned a lot from my editorial board (Karen Heath, Michael Youdell, Christina Mayer, Rhianedd Jewell and Maria Amir) and from College members, to whom I remain grateful.

STAAR was originally envisaged as an online-only journal that would print research articles of around 1,500 words in length, and shorter pieces, for example, about the St Anne's discussion groups, prizes, scholarships, trips or project placements. The main aim was for all the articles to reflect the ethos of the Subject Family talks: written with an educated but non-specialist audience in mind. Our main challenge, however, was finding enough material to include, and understandably so, STAAR was a new initiative and people were busy. We persevered. After the very first issue launched on the 10th of December 2009, accompanied by drinks, vol-au-vents, and the St Anne's toy beaver mascot, it was much easier to continue with the second. Before we knew it, it was over to the next editor-in-chief, and one could say that STAAR became established at that point.

Over the years, STAAR has been evolving with every issue thanks to the dedicated editorial teams that have taken turns to direct the journal. STAAR always welcomed creativity and it's lovely to see poetry, creative writing, and now translation included throughout the issues. The new SPARK creative reviews of films, fiction, poetry and other cultural works, allow further playful engagement with the journal.

STAAR now looks much more professional than it did in 2009. The main changes that stand out are getting an ISSN in Volume 3 (2011), becoming typeset in Volume 5 (2014), and coming up with a consistent 'look' from Volume 7 (2017) onwards. I note that in Volume 8 (2018), the journal set up a peer review process, opening further avenues for becoming involved with STAAR. I am also pleased to see that the editors recently led a successful crowdfunding campaign. That's fantastic, beyond anything I could have imagined when our team started STAAR ten years ago.

I am very proud of and so impressed by all the hard work that each editorial team has put into each volume to make it their own and to get to where STAAR is today. I hope that STAAR continues to be a part of College life, and wish it, and future STAAR participants – writers, editors, readers, everyone, every success. If you've ever thought about becoming involved, give it a go! You won't be disappointed.

Daria Luchinskaya
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Research

The “Problem of Context” in modernist expression: myths of continuity and aesthetic individualism in Stein, Stevens, Eliot, and Auden

Luciano Grigera-Naon

Abstract. Although the concepts of “(historical or cultural) continuity” and “individualism”, just like the adjacent pair of terms “wholeness” and “particularity”, appear to oppose one another, both present attractions that potentially separate the individual from his environment and therefore from the consequences of his own actions. Such is the “problem of context” referred to in this paper’s treatment of modernist writing, which seeks to capture how navigating two discrete attitudes towards aesthetic and moral concerns—the “humanist” and the “religious” as critic T.E. Hulme put it—can serve as a framework for understanding some of the technical novelties employed during this literary period. That authors like Gertrude Stein, Wallace Stevens, T.S. Eliot, and W.H. Auden—a selection among which are included expatriates, skeptics towards liberal democracy, and members of the self-proclaimed “Lost Generation”—all pursued some degree of “objectivity” within their work, ironically, exposes the superficiality of analysing that task by a singular standard. Whether it be as a rebellion against abstract symbols of perfection, stability, and apocalyptic nostalgia in war-time, or as the representation of superhuman agencies that can justify both an impersonal mythical order and, contrarily, the individual need for moral awareness, these authors’ techniques offer radically different ways of assimilating their circumstances. It is precisely by attuning to their specific approaches that one can analyse how they reinvisioned the role, or the futility of the individual as a participant in his historical situation and thereby the stakes of this “problem”.

* * *

The ‘modernist’ label that is associated with American and British authors from the first half of the twentieth century—as a term implying some form of literary innovation—carries with it the connotation of Ezra Pound’s imperative to “make it new”, but ultimately addresses more than just a self-conscious renovation of style. This aspect of ‘recentness’ extends to unprecedented ways of assimilating the reciprocal influence bearing between the individual and his environment. Accordingly, the poetry and experimental prose of modernists such as Gertrude Stein, Wallace Stevens, T.S. Eliot, and W.H. Auden accommodate novel formulations of selfhood that destabilise the Rationalism of previous centuries, while also searching for faithful portrayals of a decaying interwar period more generally. Such a renewed consideration of the subject’s integration in the world often steered away from the aesthetic cultivation of self prominent in Romantic predecessors, and towards cultural pessimism: expressions of pantheistic unity between mind and nature, like the Wordsworthian “sense sublime” that fuses the speaker’s emotional interiority with the landscape’s description in *Tintern Abbey*,

became misplaced and ineffectual alternatives.¹ This paper aims to show that rather than offering a subjectivity in harmony with its exterior, modernist writers were confronted with the experience of having their context arise as an issue for their art; just as they coped with the temptation of imprudently abstracting the patent evil of mass death and of political disintegration from their social realities.

This discontent towards Romanticism, albeit a local concern about excessive emotional inwardness, is traceable to the skepticism of pre-modernists like John Ruskin, who, as Edward Lobb remarks, attributed clarity of vision to the act of “establishing the connection between *aesthesis* and *theoria*” in art—between perception of the outer world’s observable qualities and the apprehension of some moral content which is embodied within them.² The attempt to reconcile both of these elements may be seen, from another angle, as implying an adjacent disjunction relevant to modernist expression. One which—later inherited by proponents of the Marxist-materialist interpretive tradition like György Lukács—transposes the failure of objectivity into a denunciation of innovative formal techniques. Accordingly, novelty of style replaces subjectivity as the locus of blame for impairing the poet’s representation of actuality, including its socioeconomic and political themes, as *distinct* from his state of mind. So, if modernism’s subversion of “sentimental” poetry is both a conscious initiative to assimilate the situation of the age without disfiguring it, and, at the same time, answerable for the eccentricity of its performances, the question remains as to how such a form of engagement avoids contradiction.

T.E. Hulme’s critical writings gathered in *Speculations*, propose two alternative brands arising from this period’s standard of transparency towards the world, the “humanist” and “religious” attitudes, which provide a framework for understanding precisely how authors fused personal imagination with their surrounding contexts.³ Respectively, these assert either a relativism “lacking the sense of values as absolute” and celebrating, as is the tendency in Stein and Stevens, the vitality of elemental experiences, or on the other hand, an apologetics of Original Sin, which is variously manifested in the poetry of Eliot and Auden as the limitation that “man can never himself *be* perfect”.⁴ That modernists’ distinctive ways of mediating their integration in an exterior can be judged both as essentially occurring *within* the sphere of immediate human interactions and, conflictingly, as revealing a necessary continuity *beyond* the finite individual, suggests that analysing the stakes of their involvement renders any singular “ideal of objectivity” (and its enthronement) superfluous. Instead, in a less straightforward manner, looking at how such criteria as “clarity” and “perfection” are negotiated against particular mental traps ranging from seductive fatalisms to the estranging effects of social apathy, may provide more beautifully “definite” answers.

As a precursive influence to what Hulme identifies as the “humanist” strain in modern thought, the twentieth century saw philosophers and psychologists abandon the idealist conception of a “thinking I” or “soul”, which, independent from sense perception, exists as the intellectual activity in man grounding the possibility of experience altogether—or as Hannah Arendt puts it: the supremacy of

¹ Cf. Wu (2012), pp. xxxii–xlv

² Lobb (1981), p. 83

³ Hulme (1936), p. 47

⁴ Ibid.

a “noumenal” (a thing as it is in-itself) rather than a phenomenal foundation of reality that is “therefore the ageless, sexless, without qualities, and without a life story”.⁵ Such thinkers as William James and Henri Bergson avowed the relevance of empirical data and demanded, unlike the Kantian framework, that the notion of selfhood be defined according to the subject’s changing external relationships to his surroundings, including the multiplicity of sensations apprehended at different moments thereof.⁶ The difficulty of representing an unstable, contingent self mirrors the poet’s struggle for historical involvement within his time: art faced the predicament of assuming a degree of social realism that engaged the devastation of contemporary circumstances, without imprudently abstracting into the visionary, as opposed to the ordinary world. Moreover, a central challenge to modernism’s rendering of catastrophe lies in the threat of trivialising its urgency by invoking symbolisations that cast evil and destruction as superhuman forces beyond our control—and therefore our responsibility—to actively resist danger. As such, these abstract determinations of the individual’s role in history, whether they are manifested as coercive ideological commitments (e.g. Auden’s resistance to Fascism) or consolatory metaphysical ideas (e.g. Steven’s allegory of Satan), are the sources of danger compromising both personal and artistic agency. Through unique acts of defiance of their own, modernist writers employed various formal techniques and espoused notably different attitudes to adapt their language to the enterprise of authentically remaining ingrained in their particular contexts.

As a major proponent of contextualising the self by locating it in subjective experience rather than in an enduring, extra-sensible faculty or “*actus purus* of Thought”, William James (1842-1910) developed a “phenomenological method” that opposed theoretical constructions of consciousness.⁷ In this sense, his ‘radical empiricism’ discarded the metaphysical dualism that divided experience into objective and subjective categories as a mere heuristic device, favoring instead an account of “passing mental states” as the successive relations that form the individual’s continuously changing thought process and thereby serve as its fundamental ontological facts. James’ conception of a “functional identity” based on this “stream of consciousness”, and on a direct connection with the empirical world rather than an immaterial locus of subjectivity (in the Kantian sense), surfaces in one of his foremost pupil’s emulation of this penetrating mode of perception in her own writing.⁸ Gertrude Stein’s experimental prose, in its continuous rupture and reordering of semantic coherence, depicts human personality as a manifestation of this indefinite internal fluidity.

In particular, Stein’s discourse in *Three Lives* (1909) attests to the influence of her psychology professor at Harvard, relying on extended prepositional phrases that elude any firm markers of both the personality and descent of its protagonist, Melanctha. The subject of this eponymous narrative—and of the second “life” featured in the collection—is introduced as the daughter of “always that pleasant, sweet-appearing, pale yellow woman, mysterious and uncertain and wandering in her ways”, and who, as the sentence runs on, “was close in sympathy and thinking to her big black virile husband”. Melanctha’s status as a mulatto is not delivered in a conventional verbal phrase but is rather subsumed in an associative onrush of

⁵ Arendt (1978), p. 43

⁶ Schwartz (1985), pp. 20–49

⁷ Scott (1977), pp. 183–191

⁸ James (1892), p. 202

adjectives, which reveals other internally contrasting, non-physical aspects of her persona clashing against one another. In such sentences, nouns are subjugated to the insistence of the “transitive parts of the stream of consciousness”, or what James deemed the clauses that emphasise an immediate progression of interrelated differences cohering the objects of our mind. Thus, Stein’s exposition of Melanctha is a way of asserting, even of enacting the latter’s persona; it is not, therefore, developing a type-figure which corresponds to any recognisable psychological temperament. By disclosing an increasingly complex set of relationships, Stein frustrates any attempt at bringing order to its various elements and of thereby achieving insight into Melanctha’s interiority, which exists only as a partial representation constantly in process.

Without a centered subjectivity upon which the reader can ground his sympathy, Stein’s prose ceases to point towards an easily identifiable object and so often suspends the communication of pathos. As is initially suggested by her hereditary ambivalence, Melanctha’s sensibility is constantly presented in flux and is reinforced by the abundant piling of conjunctions in her descriptions. Conferring attention to the associative aspects of language in this way further enhances the “feeling of *and*” James attributes to the subject’s experience “as readily as we say a feeling of blue or a feeling of cold”.⁹ Similarly, in dislocating any stable predicate or signifier that could conclusively *define* Melanctha, Stein displaces the emphasis on discrete divisions laid out by traditional devices of plot (i.e. chronological ordering of events) and character (i.e. trait attribution).¹⁰ The ongoing insecurity of Melanctha’s lover goes as far as to attempt at stabilising the relational quality of her unpremeditated personality; he is, in his own words, perplexed by a “real beauty” that is as fleeting as seasonal change and “makes one feel like summer, and then a way to know, that makes everything . . . certainly seem to be real for the little while its lasting”. Flouting the project of describing Melanctha amounts to lending her a certain degree of autonomy, since part of redeeming her *nature* involves disavowing the comparative artificiality of linguistic determinations—those which reduce a multiplicity of spontaneous differences to rigid classifications.

As a member of the ‘Lost Generation’, a term Stein herself coined for the group of expatriate American writers (including T.S. Eliot) and that addressed a common recognition of aimlessness among the First World War’s survivors, she would come to formulate her cohort’s ethos in a later lecture as the product of alterations in their shared circumstances: “we inside us do not change but our emphasis and the moment in which we live changes”.¹¹ This extemporaneous responsiveness to their environment directly marks the opposition between ‘wandering’ and ‘wondering’ in *Three Lives*—two incompatible modes of loving, and of assimilating one’s partner in love. The former serves as both a euphemism for Melanctha’s sexual promiscuity and a metaphor for her thoughtless impulse or “power of mood” in the act of loving. Whereas, at times, even in explicit dissent, the latter ironically applies to her beloved Jeff Campbell, and his obsessive loyalty to preordained moral frameworks that cannot yield, via untiring analysis, an *understanding* of individuality as founded on feelings. This incompatibility surfaces in the lovers’ interaction when Jeff complains: “with your never remembering anything only what you just then are feeling in you”, which verbalises a tendency to define Melanctha’s love for him according to

⁹ Ibid., p. 162

¹⁰ Cf. Nicholls (2011), pp. 622–638

¹¹ Cf. Stein (1935), pp. 287–312

his standards. In this way, Jeff is imposing a historical record upon his lover’s perpetual self-actualisation, since she lives by the present moment of her experience, not her past actions. To rebel against such an oppressive demand, Melanctha rejects memory—Jeff’s insistence on “remembering right”—as justification for her sincerity and revises her lover’s stoic exhortation for narrative transparency: “it’s because I am always knowing what it is I am wanting when I want it”. By dialogically setting up both lovers’ attitudes as mutually dependent reactions of one another, Stein reveals the juxtaposition of two interdependent styles of speaking rather than a collision between totally differentiable characters.

This mutual play between Melanctha’s emancipatory disruptions and Jeff’s determinate expectations parallels, on a more local level, Stein’s view about history’s adaptability to prevailing social attitudes throughout time, as she states in a lecture titled “Composition as Explanation”: “each period of living differs not in the way life is but in the way life is conducted and *that* authentically speaking is composition”.¹² Stein clarifies that by composition she means the way a given state of affairs or situation is perceived at any determinate point, or in her words: “what those who describe it make of it,” in turn, “makes a composition, it confuses, it shows, it is, it looks, it likes it as it is, and this makes what is seen as it is seen”.¹³ In this light, Jeff’s self-reprimanding remark about being a “slow-minded kind of fellow, (...) never sure about what you mean by all that you are always saying to me”, informs the tension afflicting his epistemic uncertainty. He aspires towards an impression of his lover as vivid as a “real religion” despite Melanctha’s indiscernibility, her moment-to-moment emphasis of particular emotions. Jeff unsuccessfully projects sequential progression onto an object whose representation *is* the simultaneity of her relations and so, too, betrays his wishful illusion of containing her existence within an identifiable, rational space. Such an impression of coherence is sustained, in part, by Jeff’s insistence on a stable center of meaning external to the amorous relationship; he provides a set of references (e.g. his formulaic “always living good and being regular”) in relation to which Melanctha insubordinately “plays out” her subjectivity.¹⁴ Exposing the recalcitrance of Melanctha’s performativity against the pressures of rationalists like Jeff is itself an artistic gesture. It allows Stein to exert her own agency over language by denying “logocentrism” and by staging Melanctha’s relational determination within a constraining—all the while material—social environment.¹⁵

A similar mental act of revision, devising momentary stays against idealistic claims about reality at large, is manifested in the ephemerality of any totalising symbol of death in Wallace Stevens’ (1879-1955) “Sunday Morning”. This poem debuted in *Poetry* magazine in 1915, the same year as Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, but expresses an ambiguous disillusionment altogether different from that of the latter. Hulme described its secular spirituality as delivering a “spilt religion”, one which invokes the earthly naturalism of the Romantics while at the

¹² Cf. Stein (1926), pp. 493-504

¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Cf. Ford (2002), pp. 26–7, 38

¹⁵ As used by Jacques Derrida, this term addresses concepts that fix structures of meaning and are invested with absolute authority, including examples such as Plato’s “form” or Kant’s intelligible domain; it is precisely this desire for “immobility” that Melanctha destabilises and emancipates herself from in her interactions with Jeff Campbell.

same time retaining a paganism that tempers its expressions of paradise.¹⁶ The deterministic force of prophecy takes on the appearance of fiction in this poem, and remains excessively distant from the immediacy of mortality as it is paled by the observable permanence of nature: “Neither the golden underground, nor isle / Melodious, where spirits gat them home . . . has endured / As April’s green endures”. In stanza VI, this worldly relocation of immortal domains is subsequently checked by a devalued promise for eternity; which, alternatively, is devoid of the spiritual remoteness of blessed abodes like the subterranean Elysium or the divinely bestowed Elysian fields listed before: “Or do the boughs / Hang always heavy in that perfect sky, / Unchanging, yet so like our perishing Earth?”. It doubts the metonymic representation of nature’s sensuality in the previous stanza—in which the impendingness of death propels “boys [to] . . . pile pears and plums” at girls’ feet—as an untenable sign for peaceful perfection. Stevens is hereby invoking a paradigm of revocable myths with a self-awareness in the use of metaphor as a necessary falsification of faith, one which transforms the “heavenly fellowship / Of men that perish and of summer morn” into a statement about mechanical death in wartime. The catalogue of imaginary afterlives, even as a pastoral hope for eternity in nature, is insufficient replacement for the human liability to dying in combat.

Yet, a compromise is arrived at through the questionably optimistic refrain: “Death is the mother of beauty”, and suggests that the imminence of destruction itself invigorates the experience of life. This sobering bathos, or anti-climactic transition into the trivial concreteness of the world, is allegorised by the last stanza’s philosophy; it couples the metaphysical weight of abstract generalisations (e.g. “We live in an old chaos of the sun”) with their ominously natural instantiations (e.g. “casual flocks of pigeons make / ambiguous undulations as they sink”). The descent into a ‘diminished aesthetic’ addressing mundane humanity ironises the poem’s final affirmations, since comforting naturalisms, regardless of whether they idealise the earth or a heaven beyond, falsely tame death. In this way, Stevens’ poetic concern with the opposition between imagination and reality also voices a conflict lying within language: the modernist preoccupation with symbols which are assigned the status of fate and render superfluous the renewal of metaphors. This, in turn, represents the loss of those expressive vehicles capable of temporarily attuning to the nuances of a changing context.¹⁷

It is telling that Stevens handles this threat of ‘romantic subjectivism’ using a mock-heroic idiom in “Comedian as the letter C” (1923)—a title which itself derides symbolic transformations—since irony, unlike straightforward signifiers, transmits meaning obliquely, or in a way that is not directly deducible from the words used to express it, but only from inference. The poem adopts different epithets to address a classical quest-figure, Crispin, whose scope of vision undergoes a dramatic enlargement. His enhanced perspective is expressed in the shift from his initial description as a “lutanist of fleas”, or examiner of the minute, to his transformation into “a skinny sailor peering in the sea-glass”, a hyperbole for the impression of a world so expanded that it only exists for the mind of a solipsist or “introspective voyager”, who, contrarily, denies empirical detail apart from his capacity as spectator (i.e. the “ruses that were shattered by the large”). The impotence of the isolated subject imagining his own private, rarefied world stems from Crispin’s grandiose ambition, “the thing that makes him envious in phrase” and drives his

¹⁶ Allen (2015), p. 2

¹⁷ Cf. Ford (2002), pp. 103–04

desire for achieving authorship of what he encounters as an instance of the sublime: “the quintessential fact, the note / of Vulcan, that a valet seeks to own”. Crispin’s mythological association of Vulcan, the Roman god of fire with destructive and fertilising powers, underlies his aesthetic ambition to appropriate the divinity’s terrestrial counterpart (“Gesticulating lightning, mystical”) as *his* own creative act, as the possession “for *his* quill to catechize” (emphasis added). Yet, even the promise of art as a medium for self-aggrandisement is eventually checked by Crispin’s realisation that debased terrestrial objects outlive the distortive artifice of their observers’ abstractions: “The plum survives its poems / . . . colored by ground / Obliquities of those who pass beneath”. Interpreting this as a comic parable for poetic frustration, however, does not license the elevation of earthly particulars into “fictive flourishes that preordained / His passion’s permit”. Such a reading rather reinforces Crispin’s self-awareness of his own process of mental decreation, which occurs in line with his abandonment of metaphors according as they become obsolete representations of their object. This acquired commitment to the concrete leads Crispin to reevaluate his assimilation of the external world, acknowledging that language should record “the surviving form, / For him, of shall or ought to be in is”, instead of rendering fixed mediate signs.

Although Crispin’s disciplined realism restrains his visionary formulations and thereby disenchant his surroundings, it prevents him from extrapolating his personal sense of futility to his environment: “Was he to company vastest things defunct / With a blubber of tom-toms harrowing the sky?”.¹⁸ The traveler’s conclusive “return to social nature”, which represents his settlement within both a quotidian and familial setting (“The world . . . daubed out / Of its ancient purple . . . / Came reproduced in purple / family font”), offers an implicit answer by portraying the final stanza as an affirmation of historical *continuity*. Therefore, by integrating himself within a community, Crispin ridicules the apocalyptic fantasy put forward by his previous rhetorical question and demonstrates the poet’s ability to inflate the vanity of personal endeavour into “an instance of all fate”, or into a claim about his entire generation’s catastrophe. This infringement of the private upon the public sphere motivates a rejection of historical teleology, especially as a narrative that inexorably tends towards cultural decline as its end point. Instead, by demonstrating how pressures of context interrupt introversion and compel the poet to situate himself within his time, Crispin demonstrates the imperative of “confronting, therefore, a set of events, not only beyond our power to tranquilize them in the mind, . . . [but] that engage us in what is direct and immediate and real”.¹⁹

Alternatively, T. S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” propels the unconsolidated relationship between its eponymous speaker and an anonymous lover by transplanting the purported subject of experience altogether. Personified objects reflecting Prufrock’s mental state throughout the poem become the locus of his unfulfilled desire and thereby confirm his insular subjectivity. Already in the opening lines, social failure infects the very impulse to courtship between “you and I” and initiates the transfer of Prufrock’s numbness to his atmosphere: “When the evening is spread out against the sky / like a patient etherized upon a table”. The simile dislocates the speaker from himself—as is dramatised by attributing the dissociated pronoun “you” to Prufrock’s identity—and enforces a lack of integrity

¹⁸ Cf. Longenbach (1991), pp. 92, 190, 201–04

¹⁹ Stevens (1960), p. 22

that blocks the possibility for action as does, in this case, the anaesthetic conditioning the agent's motivation.²⁰ Accordingly, the deferral of love is staged by Prufrock's own rhetoric as he segments himself into synecdochic bits ("How his hair is growing thin!"; "But how his arms and legs are thin") and similarly partitions time in a reiterated act of self-revision: "The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase / (...) Then how should I begin? / (...) And should I then presume?" Stasis is metaphorically brought on by the spatialisation of time in language, the "temps symbolique" Henri Bergson puts forward in his concept of the "*moi sociale*", precisely because any mode of *representation*—as occurs in everyday dialogue or communication—clogs the flow of consciousness with words.²¹

Bergson, unlike James, sees the flux of experience, or what he deems the movement of "*les durées*" in real time, as the grounding of personal identity; which, in its turn, is disrupted by linguistic symbols that paralyse the fluid movement of thought by dividing it into discrete parts. Therefore, Prufrock's diminished state is not discovered, like Crispin's, by a sojourn in a sobering material world but is rather a self-inflicted consequence of his metonymic discourse, since it fragments his identity and precludes meaningful engagement with anything external to it. The self is discontinuous with its public figure on account of its anticipated disembodiment: "there will be time / To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet". In "Prufrock", just as the perpetually diverted lyrical voice cannot affirm the unaddressed speaker's self-possession ("I have heard the mermaids singing each to each"), consummation always remains provocatively exteriorised and interposed: "the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully / Smoothed by long fingers, / (...) beside you and me".²² Prufrock's disengagement with his environment is therefore made literal by the transfiguration of his yearning, which is evoked by his own symbolic disintegration.

In Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), the impossibility for intimacy is encountered as a generalised condition beyond any personal plight. The suppressed voice migrates across multiple and strikingly undifferentiated personas, blurring the chronological or physical boundaries which establish individuality and instate separateness, especially as is exhibited by the vicarious prophet's self-portrait: "I Tiresias, . . . / Old man with wrinkled female breasts . . . / Perceived the scene and foretold the rest". "Like a taxi throbbing waiting", Tiresias' mythical reenactment is realised by the poem's mechanical sexual encounters; it dates back to antiquity but cannot be relegated to the past as it asserts itself in the exchange between stock-figures of modern times ("Exploring hands encounter no defence; / His vanity requires no response, / (And I Tiresias have foresuffered all)).²³ In other words, Tiresias serves a structural purpose in the poem by carrying over this paradigm of automaticity, which Eliot explicitly assigns to "the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest"—including the sterility of both sexes as they combine in one hermaphrodite body.²⁴ Thus, the meaninglessness of conforming to a detached social continuum does not merely carry over the anonymity and involuntary determinism of erotic behaviour, but it also upholds the cyclical sterility of the waste land. A generalised apocalyptic context is sustained by the impossibility of

²⁰ Cf. North (1991), pp. 74–80

²¹ Bergson (1955), p. 108

²² Ellmann (2013), p. 79

²³ De Man (1996), p. 96

²⁴ Eliot (2005), note to line (IV.218)