

The “observers” attendant in the poems *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, *Portrait of a Lady*, *Preludes and Rhapsody on a Windy Night* from Thomas Stearns Eliot’s *Prufrock and Other Observations* as quintessential figures of modernity as defined by Alain Touraine's *Critique of Modernity*.

by
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For Deon and Joel Marillier

Preface

I hereby state that this entire thesis, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own original work.

I wish to thank my supervisor, Dr William Bizley of the Department of English, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, for his valued and unwavering support.

Abstract

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Title: The “observers” attendant in the poems *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, *Portrait of a Lady*, *Preludes and Rhapsody on a Windy Night* from Thomas Stearns Eliot’s *Prufrock and Other Observations* as quintessential figures of modernity as defined by Alain Touraine’s *Critique of Modernity**

This thesis posits that the “observers” attendant in Eliot’s poems *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, *Portrait of a Lady*, *Preludes and Rhapsody on a Windy Night* can be considered quintessential figures of modernity. Against a backdrop of more than 200 years of thought on the concept of modernity – a notion that in recent decades has been much under siege – French sociologist Alain Touraine, in his *Critique of Modernity*, offers a reinterpretation of the modern. I chose to hold this text against the four poems by Eliot because Eliot himself has been described as “emphatically modern”⁺.

Recalling the initial triumph of the rationalist vision of modernity, Touraine calls for modernity to be redefined as a continuous and reflexive relationship between Subject and Reason, subjectivation and rationalisation. Using this idea of the modern subject having two faces (subjectivation and rationalisation) as a model of a quintessential figure of modernity I have attempted to match the “observers” to this blueprint offered by Touraine. I hope to show that these figures, wandering the streets of the rational and increasingly industrial and

* Touraine, *A Critique of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell) 1995

alienating world of the city and sitting drinking tea in its parlours, can be seen as both casualties of “classical” modernity and as the vanguard of Touraine’s “new modernity”. Almost drowning in the rationalism of metropolitan existence these figures are at once sensing their absorption by this rationalism and fighting to free their intense subjectivity – the very struggle that characterises Touraine’s modern subject.

Finally, I hope to show that the combination of rationalisation and subjectivation within the modern subject, while seemingly at odds with Eliot’s theories (especially regarding the “objective correlative” and “inner voice”) is not as far from his practice of poetry and criticism as may be assumed at first glance. The figures he has created in these four chosen poems testify to this.

⁺ “He [Eliot] is still emphatically modern.” Tamplin R 1987 *A Preface to T S Eliot* (London and New York: Longman) p8

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CHAPTER 1

Two faces

Defining a quintessential figure of modernity

Modernity has two faces and they gaze at one another:
rationalization and subjectivation.

Alain Touraine¹

In 1917 Thomas Stearns Eliot published *Prufrock and Other Observations* which includes the poems *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, *Portrait of a Lady*, *Preludes* and *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*². I hope to establish a template of a possible quintessential figure of modernity and hold the figures (“observers”) attendant in these four poems against this template, for together, I will argue, these figures form the composite of an emblematic figure of modernity. To create a skeleton for such a figure I have relied largely on Alain Touraine's *Critique of Modernity*, in later chapters using other scholars of modernity to provide a fuller definition of this figure who moves through or is carried along by³ a world of modernity.

The poetry of *Prufrock and Other Observations* reflects the modernity which the poet inhabited, a world in which, as Hargrove puts it, “the human being was lost amid the rush of metropolitan existence, the horror of world war and the deterioration of established values” (Hargrove 1978: 4). The poems have at their core images of individuals who are, like the world they inhabit, uncertain, broken, trampled and suffering. They are fragmented figures in a fragmented world of futility. The first publication in 1915 of *Preludes* and *Rhapsody on a*

¹ Touraine 1995: 205

² I will abbreviate *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* to simply *Prufrock*, *Portrait of a Lady* to *Portrait* and *Rhapsody on a Windy Night* to *Rhapsody*.

³ “We are all embarked on the adventure of modernity; the question is whether we are galley slaves or

The classical conception of modernity has seen it "defined solely in terms of the efficacy of instrumental rationality and the mastery of the world that comes from science and technology" (205) thus effacing the other, no less important, element of modernity, namely subjectivation. Max Horkheimer wrote that reason alone cannot defend reason. Touraine marks this as a reference to the subject (211) and as "a refusal to give central importance to the traditional-modern dichotomy". Instead, the subject holds the two within itself for "modernity's subject is none other than the secularized descendant of religious expression of the subject" (213).

Modernity's two faces – rationalisation and subjectivation – seemingly at odds with one another, are key to the identity of a quintessential figure of modernity and I would argue that it is the attempt to hold within itself this seeming contradiction that gives such a figure one of its key traits. Touraine writes that modern society has seen a divorce between rational instrumental action and the personal subject but has also discovered their interdependence (215). His view is that to prevent one element of modernity from absorbing the other there cannot be either subjectivation or rationalisation but both together.

This can only be done by recalling that the exclusive triumph of instrumental thought [rationalisation] leads to oppression, just as the exclusive triumph of subjectivism [subjectivation] leads to false consciousness". (216)

The modern world ... increasingly abounds with references to the Subject. That Subject is freedom, and the criterion of the good is the individual's ability to control his or her actions and situation, to see and experience modes of behaviour as components in a personal life history, to see himself or herself as an actor. *The Subject is an individual's will to act and to be recognized as an actor.* (1995: 207)

J. Alfred Prufrock has the will to act but does not. He and the observer in *Portrait*, I will argue, aspire to this subjecthood but teeter on its threshold. The taking of afternoon tea is a somewhat time-honoured tradition yet both observers seem to recognise it as representative of rituals that have become meaningless. Though they sense the futility of these little activities that lend

structure to their daily lives they cannot quite escape the social expectations placed on them and feel a need to break in on these, sometimes artificial, scenes. In *Portrait*, the young man wants to escape all that the lady represents (again the ritual is afternoon tea). The quote from *The Jew of Malta* suggests how little he might value her. Yet while he acknowledges the futility of the rituals, he still takes part in them – “Let us ... admire the monuments, discuss the late events and correct our watches by the public clocks” (*Portrait*, lines 37 to 40). The last phrase especially gives a sense of the bureaucracy that he at once despises because it is futile and embraces because it has become habit. He is at once a part of tradition and questioning of it; a perfect example of Touraine’s modern subject.

While these observers spurn some of the futility of tradition and bureaucracy (rationalization) they do not quite embrace the freedom of action (subjectivation) that the other side of modernity offers. Prufrock wants to act, but between thought and action there seems to be some barrier. He is not even sure if he is an actor because seemingly the external world, the world outside himself, does not recognise him as such. The “women come and go/ Talking of Michelangelo” (*Prufrock*, lines 13 and 14) – they seem oblivious to him. His uncertainty renders him inert. Touraine believes that the continuing struggle between subjectivation and rationalisation is one of the identifying marks of the Subject. Prufrock pauses one step away from breaking in on the external world and I would argue that though he does not fully embrace the dichotomy of modernity, it is this struggle to become an actor that gives a figure of modernity his quintessence.

"Subjectivation," Touraine writes "is the antithesis of the individual's surrender to transcendental values. Man once projected himself on to God; in the modern world, man becomes the basic value. Freedom is a creativity which is its own end and which resists all forms of dependency" (1995: 209). It is within this freedom that Prufrock, as a quintessential

and representative figure of modernity, flounders. To become an autonomous social actor he must struggle against society's expectations and escape his dependency on the little rituals of tradition which lend structure to his life. "The Subject," writes Touraine "urges the individual or the group to seek their freedom in endless struggles with the established order and social determinisms" (1995: 209). Prufrock is trapped between the expectations he places on himself and those placed on him by others. The struggle is left unresolved and renders him inert but his *awareness* of the need to move beyond himself is what may finally provide him with the impetus to act.

Touraine describes the subject as "a call to transform the Self into an actor. It is an I, an attempt to say I, in the full knowledge that personal life is dominated by, on the one hand, the Id and the libido and, on the other, social roles"(209). I will argue that while Prufrock can "say I" ("Let us go then, you and I", line 1) he does not fully embrace this selfhood. The more he reflects and indulges in introspection the less sure he feels of the "I". The "you" he addresses – who could vouch for his presence and subjecthood – seems to be only another part of himself. Freud⁴ was "aware that desire and reason are incompatible and that reason implies social rules" (Touraine 1995: 129). This then speaks of the duality of human nature, a "you" and an "I" within one person, which echoes the duality of the modern Subject who tempers desire with reason.

Between consciousness and self-consciousness

According to Touraine, modernity "can only exist because of the growing interaction between subject and reason, between consciousness and science" (1995: 206). Consciousness then is the key to subjectivation, and the quintessential figure of modernity would be one who strives

towards consciousness in order to interact with reason. However Touraine believes that self-consciousness⁵ conceals the subject (226) and reveals the antisubject (227).

The quest for what is most personal and most subjective inevitably leads to the discovery of something very impersonal. It is only when the individual forgets himself and speaks to the other ... that he is projected out of his own self and his social determinations, and that he becomes freedom (1995: 227).

True subjecthood is only possibly when the individual is recognised by others as a subject and recognises them as subjects. Prufrock's awareness of this need for recognition (although he does not act on it) is the first step towards his embracing subjecthood. The young man in *Portrait* is recognised by the woman as a subject but cannot escape his introspection and indecision long enough to have more than superficial contact with her. The figures attendant in *Preludes* and *Rhapsody* do not interact at all. They are observed only fleetingly or as synecdoches, emphasising the urban alienation that is the stage awaiting the entrance of modernity's subject.

Touraine warns that:

Nothing could be more antithetical to the subject than the consciousness of the Ego, introspection or that most extreme form of obsession with identity: narcissism. (210)

and also notes that:

We lead several lives and we have such a strong impression

⁴ Touraine describes *Critique of Modernity* as "staying within Freud's shadow" (Touraine 1995: 131).

⁵ "Self consciousness, as the term is ordinarily used, implies two things: an awareness of oneself by oneself, and an awareness of oneself as an object of someone else's observation. These two forms of awareness of the self ... are closely related to each other ... The heightened sense of always being seen, or at any rate being potentially seeable, may be principally referable to the body, but the preoccupation with being seeable may be condensed with the idea of the mental self being penetrable, and vulnerable (Laing 1965: 106)." This is Prufrock's malady. Although "an awareness of oneself as oneself" is an important pre-requisite for interaction with others, it is the other form of self-consciousness that makes Prufrock feel vulnerable and makes his mind seem porous to the images from the street.

that this Self is not our identity that we flee it by using drugs
or simply by surrendering to the constraints of everyday life.
(209)

So while subjectification requires consciousness, it must eschew extreme self-consciousness for modernity makes self-consciousness so unbearable that the inhabitant of modernity, or rather modernity's passenger, finds himself seeking unconsciousness. A quintessential figure of modernity would be one that must navigate between the consciousness he needs to become an actor⁶ and the self-consciousness that threatens to drag him into the isolation of solipsism.

Prufrock is deeply self-conscious, deeply introspective, so that self-consciousness threatens to drown his subject. The closeness of the individuals to themselves seems at times unbearable and these four poems are peppered with images of attempts to escape this self-consciousness, the image of pausing on a threshold, of the moment before bolting. They are rich in imagery redolent of this "twilight" world between the escape from and regaining of consciousness – sleep, half-sleep, somnambulism, depressants and stimulants, dreams and daydreams, madness and anaesthetisation. I would argue that these images of escape into semi-consciousness are an attempt to escape *extreme* self-consciousness in order to embrace subjecthood.

Though he doesn't quite succeed, Prufrock seems to strive towards consciousness, towards being recognised as an actor, towards interaction with other people. It is self-consciousness he seems to fear. Though a degree of self-consciousness is necessary for interaction, for becoming an actor, it is intense self-consciousness that can lead to solipsism and isolation.

No one principle defines modernity and it is no more reducible

⁶ The term actor can be ambiguous. I use it in the way Touraine uses it, to describe someone who takes action, rather than one who acts (upon a stage). Prufrock, however, as well as the young man in *Rhapsody* would like to be ones that take action but seem only to equip themselves (with costumes and masks) as though they are preparing to make an entrance onto a literal stage.

to subjectivation than it is reducible to rationalization. (214)

Touraine's "new modernity" holds in tension reason and Subject (219). It is defined as the link and the tension between rationalization and subjectivation. The subject of this new modernity then is the heir to the contradictory heritages of Renaissance and Reformation and "recognizes that they are in part complementary and that its own *raison d'être* is to give them all a new lease of life through a combination of knowledge of the world and Self-knowledge, and personal and collective freedom". (221) This life of the Subject is, according to Touraine "a work of art constructed out of disparate materials" (222). Modernity is a dialogue between reason and the Subject which can never be brought to an end, never truly resolved, because it "keeps open the road to freedom" (375). The Subject, as the emblematic figure of modernity, must hold within itself this tension, these seeming contradictions. The only way of avoiding the fragmentation of modern society is for the individual to embrace fragmentation, so there is not divorce but complementarity between reason and Subject (374).

The combination is conflict-ridden but the conflict is one between forces which share the same reference to human creativity and which reject all essences and all principles of order. (367)

The observers form a composite of such a figure of complex duality, of ongoing unresolved conflict.

Towards the transcendent

The images of seeming unconsciousness and somnambulism also echo this theme of modernity's two faces. The street stroller or *flâneur* takes his dreams to the street to see if they will survive. The dreams then represent subjectivation and the city, rationalisation. Verlaine wrote of the merging of voyeur (dreamer) with voyager (rational inhabitant of the city) – hence the embodiment of modernity's emblematic figure. This attempt to introduce something transcendent to the fleeting moments of city life may not succeed in the poems but it is hinted

at:

[P]hilosophers of history and society identify with one or another aspect of the crisis of [classical] modernity... they are obsessed with the search for Being, which they will find in nature, in beauty and especially in life ... *Philosophies of life* are both an intellectual expression of modernity and a reaction against the intellectualism of a culture reduced to instrumental rationality. It was only with the work of Bergson that they reached France ... they provide the starting point that allows thought to break free of rationalism which is increasingly being swallowed up by conformism and social utilitarianism. They are the starting points for a critical tendency without which the constitution of the Subject would be inconceivable, even if there is considerable tension between all philosophies of Being and all notions of the Subject. (Touraine 1995: 117)

I include this extract because it highlights an important link. Tamplin points to particularly

Eliot's *Rhapsody* as autobiographical:

It [*Rhapsody on a Windy Night*] was written in 1911 when Eliot was back at Harvard following his year in Paris. It is very much an 'observation' from an over-world-weary young man's stance. Paris is important in the making of the poem. The preoccupations with time and memory were equally (and earlier) preoccupations of the French philosopher Henri Bergson, whose lectures Eliot attended in Paris... (Tamplin 1987: 125)

The four poems of *Prufrock and Other Observations* may be echoing some of the ideas of Bergson's "search for being". That Eliot was influenced by Bergson⁷ lends some validity to the argument that he (Eliot) may have encountered the writings of Bergson that form the basis for some of Touraine's ideas on modernity, particularly the uneasy relationship between "philosophies of Being and all notions of the Subject" (Touraine 1995: 117). I think that *Prufrock and Other Observations* embodies a search for a "philosophy of being", for

⁷ The most distinct philosophic influence on the poems in the 1917 volume is ... Bergson. Eliot acknowledged that at a certain epoch of his life he was very much influenced by Bergson's *Matter and Memory*; this must have been about 1911 when he was hearing Bergson's lectures in Paris and working on 'Prufrock', 'Portrait of a Lady', 'Preludes' and 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night'. His later rejection of Bergson does not preclude a brief period

something transcendent, a search whose end is hinted at in *The Waste Land* and reached in *Ash Wednesday*. Though the observers do not find meaning, they have embarked on the journey towards it by acknowledging the meaningless within and around them.

It is because contemporary human experience is shattered in to fragments that I have dwelled so long on the fragmentation and decay of modernism ... We all belong to the same world, but it is a broken and fragmented world. If we are to be able to speak once more of modernity, we must find a principle that can integrate this contradictory world and put the pieces back together again. (217)

Touraine acknowledges the fragmentary nature of modern life and writes of an "attempt to construct the unity of a person". The modern subject must be one who embraces this attempt. A quintessential figure of the modern environment would be one who, though he may not succeed⁸, at least *attempts* the construction of unity, a unity that must "transcend the multiplicity of lived time and space" (208).

Prufrock and the observers in *Rhapsody* and *Preludes* live lives not characterised by unity but by a series of disconnected moments. Memory should provide the continuity that draws these moments together and makes sense of them yet there is a sense in *Rhapsody* and *Preludes* that memory is lost, shattered, or so stiflingly present that it only emphasises the monotonous, futile and fragmentary nature of life. The poems are rich in imagery that evokes this sense of fragmentation – "a life composed so much, so much of odds and ends" (*Portrait*, line 21), "the thousand sordid images of which your soul was constituted" (*Preludes*, lines 27, 28) and "a crowd of twisted things" (*Rhapsody*, line 4)

of influence. (Gish 1981: 2,3)

⁵ "The subject never triumphs" (Touraine 1995: 209)

Continuing the Romantic mission?

The emergence of the subject cannot be seen as a continuation of the Romantic mission, for the subject of Touraine's modernity carries none of the hubris of the Romantic. Instead of expressive confidence, the modern subject can even be, like J. Alfred Prufrock, a self that doubts its own presence. Instead of the Romantic's worship of the mind, the modern subject realises that the mind can be no more than "streets that follow like a tedious argument of insidious intent" (*Prufrock*). The thick wall of the Romantic personality has become porous and the mind seems even to merge with the street. This subject, unlike the Romantic who revels in his private existence, seeks constantly to break in on the public world, to at once embrace his personal freedom and to become a social actor. The subjectivity of the subject, I will show, is constantly tempered by rationalisation.

Nor can Touraine's modern subject be said to resemble the late Romantic who valorises action for action's sake, as a cure for the cult of the private individual. The modern subject, instead, is no hero. He makes no triumphant entry into self-confidence. The subject never triumphs.

Modernity means a never-ending dialogue between subject and reason (Touraine 375). Hence the modern subject enjoys none of the sense of resolution and triumph that the late Romantic might:

Eliot... rejects Whitman's hero-figure, 'the stalwart and well-shaped heir who approaches' (*By Blue Ontario's Shore*) in favour of the hesitant and introspective Prufrock proceeding crabwise through life. (Tamplin 1987: 68)

In *The Prelude* (1805 text) Wordsworth saw London as 'An undistinguishable world' to most of its inhabitants, one which need not remain 'an unmanageable sight' to the man who observed 'in steadiness' and had 'a feeling of the whole'. (Mackinnon 1983: 15)

The LOVE SONG of J. ALFRED PRUFROCK

Prufrock, as a quintessential figure of Touraine's modernity would have to embody "a principle that can integrate this contradictory world and put the pieces back together again" (Touraine 1995: 217). This image of a figure of cohesion is a contradictory one for the Subject is always divided in two (218). The Subject of new modernity must hold together subjectivation and rationalisation, for only the continuing tension between the two can "reunify the fragmented field of modernity" (218). Touraine's modernity finds much of its substance in the influences of the theories of Durkheim, and Prufrock seems to embody Durkheim's idea of the duality of human nature – *homo duplex* – where the world of society comes in to conflict with the world of desire, what Schopenhauer saw as an opposition between the world of representation and the world of will (128). As a forerunner of what Touraine would call classical modernity, Durkheim warned that the advance of modernity would lead to diminished happiness and increased dissatisfaction and frustration (129). The observers in *Prufrock*, *Portrait*, *Preludes* and *Rhapsody* are neither happy nor satisfied; they embody fragmentation, futility, even despair. Nietzsche and Freud also "revive a dualism that had long been destroyed by the spirit of the Enlightenment and philosophies of progress. Even though their main enemy is Christianity and its definition of the Subject as a human soul created by God in his own image, they contrast Being with action" (131). I see Prufrock as a figure fragmented into his "beingness" (inwardness) and his action (outwardness), or rather his attempts at action.

Prufrock is a figure torn between his desire to be recognised within the social landscape and his attempt to escape the stifling rigidity of social rituals and traditions. Though he succeeds at neither there is a sense of constant struggle. Hargrove describes Prufrock as a "double self, the public Prufrock and the private one" (Hargrove 1978: 50). Prufrock doubts the presence of his

public self as a social actor and cannot quite move beyond the introspection of his private self. The streets are as much real streets (public) as they are a city of the mind (private), whose thoughts “follow like a tedious argument of insidious intent” (*Prufrock*, lines 8 and 9).

He projects his own complex feelings of helplessness and inadequacy, of spiritual disease and numbness, into the atmosphere of the evening urban landscape ... The mazelike, dirty streets paralleling the twisting and turning avenues of Prufrock’s mind lead him to recognize the same sterility in his own life. (Hargrove 1978: 50)

This visitation to the maze of the mind, according to Bizley, leads some readers of *Prufrock* to equate his self-consciousness with pathological solipsism (Bizley 1986: 29) when in fact “Prufrock’s problem is not so much the solipsistic one of getting out of himself as the confessional one of getting into history” (30). Prufrock does not believe that the self is all that exists or can be known¹¹. He longs to escape from self and into “history” and though he does effect this escape he still has the intention. I believe this theory gives weight to my contention that Prufrock is attempting a move towards Subjecthood, towards becoming a social actor by struggling against self-consciousness, and therefore is an emblematic figure of Touraine’s modernity.

Prufrock travels on a journey through an urban landscape (but also through his own mind) and seems to find no answer to the futility and fragmentation he sees. He has “an overwhelming question” (line 10) but whoever he addresses is encouraged not to ask the question. It is perhaps a question that cannot be asked because it cannot even be formulated.

Prufrock makes a visit, perhaps one that will make the asking of the question unnecessary. But lines 13 and 14 do not offer a solution. If the visit is to “the room”, there are no answers to be

¹¹ Solipsism, the theory that the self is all that exists or can be known. Liebeck, H and Pollard, E (eds) 1994 *The*

found there, only women coming and going speaking of Michelangelo (line 11): the image is an unsettled one of ceaseless movement, transience, exclusion. The women do not acknowledge Prufrock's presence as an "I". Even Michelangelo, whose stature is almost too weighty for the shoulders of this short sentence, seems to be just another subject for the women to talk "tediously and ignorantly" (Hargrove 1978: 51) about. Why would they acknowledge Prufrock if they scarcely acknowledge Michelangelo?

Prufrock wants this acknowledgement but does he dare ("do I dare" and, 'do I dare'", line 38) to "disturb the universe" (line 12) of his introspection, or of the drawing room? Does he dare to insinuate himself into the social arena? Yes, his attire, his "necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin" (line 43) means that, outwardly, he is ready to face the scene in the drawing room. But he has his escape route planned; at the last minute, should his resolve fail him, he will be able to "turn back and descend the stair" (line 39).

While Prufrock needs the acknowledgement of others to escape self-consciousness and embrace subjecthood, the very people he turns to for this acknowledgement are caught in a landscape of repetitive futility, represented by "evenings, mornings and afternoons" (line 50) and the tedium of measuring out one's life with coffee spoons (line 51). He cannot explain this futility to them – "It is impossible to say just what I mean!" (line 105). Though he wants to tell ("Shall I say") how what he has witnessed in the streets "gathers up all the negative qualities of his own existence" (Hargrove 1978: 52) he feels himself inadequate as "a pair of ragged claws scuttling across the floors of silent seas" (line 73), an "anonymous clawed creature, without identity, companionship, or human significance" (Hargrove 1978: 53). How will he move beyond the futility if he cannot even explain it to others who live in the same world of futility?

Prufrock does not and will not express aloud his vision of

Oxford Paperback Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

emptiness and the universal question which it provokes...
(Hargrove 1978: 53)

He does not have the strength or courage to “force the moment to its crisis” (line 80). Instead of Prince Hamlet, who is concerned with questions of import, Prufrock is rather Polonius, “who has a minor and ludicrous role” (Hargrove 1978: 54) and can only concern himself with questions like “Shall I part my hair behind?” (line 122), a question which places him squarely in the futile world of fashion he had hoped to escape. Terrified of asking or even formulating his “overwhelming question” Prufrock returns to smaller, insignificant quandaries. Yet does this not make him even more truly modern? In an era that was turning away from grand gestures, could the “overwhelming question” even be entertained?

The image of Hamlet emphasises Prufrock’s attempts to escape from reflection into action. “Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is a statement on the merits of action as opposed to dreaming or reflection” (Madsen 1978: 103) yet the figure of Hamlet himself is seen as one that is often caught between self-analysis and action. “To be or not to be – that is the question,” he says (III, i). Prufrock’s exclamation that he is not Prince Hamlet can be seen as an attempt to reject the Hamlet-like self-scrutiny and indecisiveness that he sees in himself. Instead Prufrock might be the fool (Yorick) whose seeming nonsense may contain some wisdom.

The poem ends with images of the sea which Eliot uses both as a symbol of a creative, life-giving force and as a symbol of destruction. Perhaps Prufrock drowns in the “meaningless drawing-room world” (Hargrove 1978: 54), or perhaps the “human voices” are the voices that finally acknowledge his presence and enable him to drown to himself and become an actor, a subject. Although there is not a sense of resolution at the poem’s end, there is still the sense of a constant tension, a tension that marks Prufrock as a figure of modernity. Though he does not act, he has the will to act and this is the first step towards Subjecthood.

PORTRAIT of a LADY

The young man in *Portrait* is a figure torn between desire and reason¹² just as the modern subject, as defined by Touraine, struggles constantly between subjectivation and rationalisation. His desire is to extricate himself from his relationship with the woman but he finds himself trapped by social rules and rituals, and, like Prufrock, cannot quite bite “the matter off with a smile” (*Prufrock*, line 91). He knows he must “make a cowardly amends” in a socially appropriate manner but suffers from much of the same lack of self-possession that Prufrock exhibits. Tamplin describes the protagonist in *Portrait* as a sensitive thinker “alienated by the demands of society” (Tamplin 1987: 57). Tamplin is too kind. A thinker the young man may be but not “sensitive”. His eagerness to break with her and the futility she represents makes him detached, indifferent, even cruel in his responses to the lady.

But I must avoid making this one of those “doleful accounts that make it a weary tragedy of isolated souls” (Bizley 1986: 64), “commentary that wrings its hands over two land-locked souls” (66). The poem is tragi-comic.

This poem illustrates, even more than *Prufrock*, that the very stage, the drawing room, that he hopes to break in on is as futile as his own existence and has a two-dimensional and artificial quality. This problematises to some extent the notion of Touraine’s modern subject becoming a social actor by suggesting that the move into the public space may not necessarily offer the subject a triumphant birth accompanied by satisfaction and meaning. This does not make the observer in *Portrait* any less modern but merely serves to show that the embracing of Touraine’s modernity provides a constant sense of struggle, where the subject’s attempt to

¹² Freud, within whose shadow Touraine acknowledges his work falls, was “aware that desire and reason are incompatible and that reason implies social rules” (Touraine 1995: 129).

burst in on the rational world may not always offer a release from the sense of futility that is fuelled in the subject's own mind, unless the subject moves to transform that world. This is the black comedy of *Portrait*. The young man recognises how ludicrous both his role and the role of the lady is but acts too late (or not at all) to break free of the charade.

The setting – which reveals an “empty refinement” (Crawford 1987: 1) – and the lady exude a sense of futility. As Hargrove puts it:

On the upper level of society, meaningful emotion has been “refined” into empty form, and the elegant settings of the rich reveal the same hollowness as do the sordid settings of the poor. (Hargrove 1978: 45)

The reference to Juliet's tomb (line 6) suggests an atmosphere of death and futility, which is heightened by the reference to December (winter) and the darkness of the afternoon.

Immediately the young man is “pinned” to obligation because the lady has “saved this afternoon for you” (line 3). But he seems only to hear her voice as one would distant music, suggesting that he is bored by her words. The one jarring “false note” is created by his own thoughts, the “dull tom-tom” “absurdly hammering a prelude of its own” (lines 32 to 35). This echoes the imagery in *Rhapsody* where the streetlight “beats like a fatalistic drum”(line 9). The hammering emphasises inevitability and is like a voice of conscience and a call to action. He cannot ignore the sense that he must extricate himself from the relationship but he immediately thinks of things to do that will distract him from the task at hand ... smoking, admiring the monuments, discussion, and drinking. His own life is as much filled with futile ritual (as much with “odds and ends”) as the lady's with her teas and concerts, yet he must act in her world if he is to end his association with her.

In the second scene “the light [of the spring sunset] and the flowers hint at a hope of rebirth” (Hargrove 1978: 46), a rebirth that never comes. The lady continues with her monologue which the young man hears as “the insistent out-of-tune of a broken violin” (lines 56 and 57). The image of fragmentation and decay echoes the “cracked cornets” of stanza I. Later he seems touched by her words and wonders how to make his “cowardly amends” (line 69) but again he cannot face thinking of the situation and talks of the newspaper. He keeps his countenance. This suggests the face of a clown who conceals his lack of confidence with a carefully painted face. It might also conceal the violence, or at least indifference, he feels toward the lady, the thread of which is traced through the poem, hinted at in the quote from *The Jew of Malta*, and in the last line where her death might make him smile. This is redolent of Baudelaire’s *Portraits of Mistresses* where there is a suggestion at the end of the piece that the young man kills his mistress.

Again in the third stanza winter returns, heightening the young man’s sense of dis-ease. His self-possession flares and then, remarking his expression in the mirror, gutters. This also echoes Baudelaire’s *Portraits of Mistresses* where the mirror:

reflected all my feelings and gestures with the ironic exactness
of my own conscience, so that I could not allow myself a
single unreasonable gesture or feeling without immediately
seeing the unspoken reproach of my inseparable spectre
(Baudelaire 1991: 93).

The mirror – like the dull tom-tom and the street piano and the smell of hyacinths which activate his memory and conscience – shatters his self-possession. He sees how ludicrous his inability to act is – he is a clown, a dancing bear, a parrot, an ape (line 112). The smile, which could be a triumphant one, is reflected in the mirror as an empty gesture, for though it is a gesture made in the world he hopes to break in on, the victory is hollow, for the world is an empty and artificial one. The smile must fall “heavily among the bric-a-brac”.

The final verses offer no resolution. The poem that started with images of death, now ends with the possibility of death. She has said “You will write, at any rate./ Perhaps it is not too late.” (lines 106 and 107) but he realises that once he finally decides to act decisively it *will* be too late. He *will* write but she will die while the pen is in his hand. He has not been sincere, has not acted decisively and is still plagued with questions. And should he have the right to smile? Only if he answers the dull tom-tom which alerts him to escape his futile existence. Its “capricious monotone” (line 34) “is at least one definite ‘false note’” (line 36). Yet the false note (aptly placed in inverted commas) is actually the only true note when held against the falseness of the interior stage and its interaction.

Despite his inaction, the young man in *Portrait* is quintessentially modern because of his struggle to act. Though he lacks the impetus he has the will. He has recognised how the claustrophobic interior embodies the futility and fragmented nature of both his, the modern’s, habitat and his psyche. To become the subject he must make the final step of throwing back the curtains, sweeping cups and bric-a-brac off the tables and dismissing the orchestra. The subject must transform his world.

PRELUDES

Enlightenment thinkers welcomed the maelstrom of change and saw the transitoriness, the fleeting and the fragmentary as a necessary condition through which the modernizing project could be achieved.

Harvey¹³

The Enlightenment appeal to the rational saw an embracing of “the transitoriness, the fleeting and the fragmentary” but Touraine sees this as only one side of modernity. While the

rationalisation of Enlightenment meant the embracing of the fragmentary, subjectivation must seek something that unifies, that begins to draw the fragments together. *Preludes* is a poem rich in the symbolism of fragmentation but which also hints at something transcendent (a discussion I continue in Chapter Three).

The temporal world dominates the poem “at four and five and six o’clock”(line 42). The clock serves only to mark a monotonous succession of futile activities multiplied by the number of people that perform them. Thousands of “muddy feet” (line 17) press through “sawdust-trampled” (line 16) streets. Thousands of hands raise “dingy shades in a thousand furnished rooms” (lines 22, 23). Not only is the consciousness of the individual shattered into fragments (“a thousand sordid images”, line 27) marked by time, but the individuals themselves seem isolated from *one another*. The synecdochic use of “feet” (lines 17 and 41), “hands” (line 21), “fingers” (line 43) and “eyes” (line 44) reinforces the sense of fragmentation. Other images of dissolution, fragmentation, futility and urban decay are “burnt-out ends” (line 4), “grimy scraps” (line 6) and “broken blinds and chimney pots” (line 10). The image of newspapers as “grimy scraps” reiterates the sense of transitoriness. Yesterday’s news becomes today’s detritus.

The monotony of life from day to day means that the individuals are “assured of certain certainties” (line 45) – as certain as they are that the lamps will be lit at six o’clock – yet, for the observer, this assurance does not provide meaning to the rituals. There is a sense that, for the observer, “purpose is lacking, every day is a meaningless prelude to a work that is never begun, a tedious wait on a platform from which trains no longer run (Cahill 1964: 22)”.

I see *Preludes* as a sequence leading from a sense of the dominance of the modern world over

the individual (rationalisation) – where the observer feels the world to be more real than he is – towards, at the end of the poem, an acknowledgement of self and the birth of a subject (subjectivation) out of the rational world. The first prelude is, besides the observer, largely unpeopled, with the only suggestion of inhabitants being the smell of steaks and the grimy scraps of newspapers “about your feet”. The individual is a lonely figure in a gusty, rainy and drab scene of decay. In the second prelude the people are referred to only synecdochically and in prelude III a “you” is introduced. But the “you” is no company for the observer. She is watching the “the night revealing / the thousand sordid images” (lines 26 and 27) of her own life. Early in prelude IV there is a “he”. This suffering figure being “stretched tight across the skies” (line 39) or “trampled” is as much lost and suffering in the cityscape as the observer. At last, in line 48, the observer is moved by “fancies that are curled / Around these images, and cling: / The notion of some infinitely gentle / Infinitely suffering thing”. To me the lines suggest a move away from the outwardness of the first preludes towards inwardness and self-consciousness, as if the “infinitely suffering thing” is the observer himself. Prufrock is an observer who seems more “inward” than “outward”. In *Preludes* the observer has the opposite problem, he sees the outer world as more real than he. Prufrock struggles to become an actor on the social stage while the observer in *Preludes* battles to be “inward”. I see both of these struggles as the mark of the modern Subject, where there is an effort to “combine knowledge of the world and Self-knowledge” (Touraine 221).

At the end of *Preludes* there is perhaps hope for the observer, despite his infinite suffering, to become, like the ancient women, a hardy survivor of the modern, rational world. The old and hollow rituals, can become re-inhabited by the subject and informed by the rational, and can be transformed.

RHAPSODY on a WINDY NIGHT

In *Rhapsody* the street lamps which beat “like a fatalistic drum” isolate moments and objects for inspection. Memory, the only mechanism by which these isolated moments can be drawn together, is either lost altogether (“The moon has lost her memory”, line 55) or shattered into fragments (“the memory throws up ... a crowd of twisted things”, lines 23 and 24) or is so vividly and terrifyingly present that it emphasises the futility of the one meaningless moment followed by another. “Midnight shakes memory as a madman shakes a dead geranium” (lines 11 and 12) – the image is one of futility. Midnight can no more activate the memory than a madman can a dead geranium. Yet even when memory is singled out at the end of the poem as “the key” it seems to offer no hope of coherence.

The symbols embody the sense of decay, fragmentation and futility that echo a world at war – “torn and stained” (line 20), “twisted” (line 24), and “broken” (line 30).

Bizley, in *A ‘Decadent’ Motif in the Poetry of T.S. Eliot (1908 – 1930)*, takes the view that the dissolving of memory makes the poem truly rhapsodic¹⁴ because life no longer marshalls the protagonist to the “floors of memory”. Rather midnight offers “reaches” where there were “divisions” and “whispers” where there were “clear relations” (Bizley 1986: 108). Bizley, along with the protagonist, exults in the mad triumph of the irrational.

To me, *Rhapsody on a Windy Night* is no more a rhapsody than *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is a love song, or *Preludes*, a prelude, except in its “composition in irregular form”.

¹⁴ Rhapsody – 1. an ecstatic written or spoken statement. 2. a romantic musical composition in irregular form. (Liebeck and Pollard 1994: 687)

Prufrock never finds enough self-possession to address his love song to anyone, and *Preludes* struggles to be a prelude to anything. But, in defence of *Rhapsody* as a true rhapsody, Bizley writes:

Who wouldn't prefer ... the dislocation of the witching hour?

to Bergson's "clearly ordered process which records and dates every event..." (1986: 108). Of course we might want to escape Bergson's dusty dry offering of memory in favour of "Rhapsody, broad and moonlit, out there on the streets" (108) but I don't see *Rhapsody on a Windy Night* offering any of the frivolity that Bizley suggests it might. It offers dislocation, yes, but also horror and visions of futility, ugliness, fragmentation and, finally, death. The death comes, argues Bizley, after the return of daylight, and with it, memory who, once more, "briskly schedules the day" and extinguishes the rhapsody. Memory spoils the rhapsody rather than bringing cohesion.

To me there is no promise of "rhapsodic triumph" in the grinning doorway in which a woman stands at half-past one. The crooked corners of her eyes suggest age and her stained dress, poverty. Her hesitation shows that she invites liaison (as Bizley puts it "a liaison that will be an event") no more than the observer looks for it, and seemingly he does not. Her image seems to suggest to him other memories of brokenness and sordidity, and then he moves on to other cameos.

Where Bizley sees the cat as "not unlovely", a character who has "wildness and identity, energy and precision" (110) I see a ravenous animal desperate for even some stale fat, a creature living by instinct. This scene at half-past two, again one of futility, shows strong Baudelairian influences. A parallel is drawn between cat and child, whose reflex movements are automatic. In *The Poor Child's Toy*, Baudelaire writes:

Then their hands will rapidly snatch up the gift and they will take flight, like cats who go and eat far away from you the morsels you've given them, for they'll have learnt to have no faith in man. (Baudelaire 1991: 56)

The romantic symbol of a child would be one of innocence, of hope and potential. Here the symbol is corrupted into one of mistrust. In *The Clock*, Baudelaire writes about a Chinese child telling the time by looking into the eye of a cat. In the same piece, looking into the eyes of his lover, a man is asked:

'What are you looking for in the eyes of that creature? ... Do you see the time there?' I would unhesitatingly reply: 'Yes I see the time; it is Eternity!' (Baudelaire 1991: 52)

But looking into the eye of the child in *Rhapsody*, the observer sees nothing, no vision of eternity nor anything that will transcend the futility of the moments and recollections he is living through.

Where Bizley describes the crab cameo as one of spontaneous response in which contact is made (111), I see the image of the crab as simply reiterating the sense of blankness and automation evoked by the cat and the child. Even symbols that should offer revelation – a door, a key, a ring of light, a stair – lead to nothing but the circuitous monotony of daily life, which is nothing more than a living death:

The lamp said,
'Four o'clock,
Here is the number on the door.
Memory!
You have the key,
The little lamp spreads a ring on the stair.
Mount.
The bed is open; the tooth-brush hangs on the wall,
Put your shoes at the door, sleep, prepare for life.'

The last twist of the knife.

(lines 69 to 78)

Bizley writes that

... daylight's arrival tears our 'flaneur' in two, and separates forever the honesty and the fantasy that make his ambivalent life-style. The effect is like murder. (Bizley 1986: 113)

To me this echoes the duality of the modern subject. In *Rhapsody* fantasy is presided over by a mystical moon, reality by the literal sun; the former representing subjectivation, the latter, rationalisation. For the modern this duality is a necessity and the attempt to completely separate the two is "like murder".

* * * * *

Each of these four poems has powerful imagery of fragmentation, futility, decay and even death. Modernity's quintessential figure is himself fragmented, "a traveller full of both memory and hopes who discovers and constructs himself in his daily attempt to connect past and future (Touraine 1995: 202). Touraine speaks of an "attempt" because although the subject never triumphs, he is constantly trying to reconcile the opposites within himself. It is this tension within himself, the holding together of the two faces – rationalisation and subjectivation – and the attempt to navigate both his fragmented mind and fragmented world that makes him truly modern.

CHAPTER 3

Twilight

Between the idea
And the reality...
Falls the shadow

The Hollow Men¹⁵

In Chapters 1 and 2 I have already introduced the idea of the twilight world of duality – between subjectivation and rationalisation – which the modern subject inhabits. This struggle manifests itself in the way Prufrock and the observer in *Portrait* are lost in a twilight world between thought and action, between longing to be a player in company and longing to retreat, between their inner and outer lives. In this chapter I continue to study this twilight metaphor. The quintessential figure of modernity is one that must navigate between a consciousness that makes life unbearable because of his awareness of his fragmented and futile world and a self-consciousness that threatens to drown his subject should he retreat into it:

We lead several lives and we have such a strong impression
that this Self is not our identity that we flee it by using drugs
or simply by surrendering to the constraints of everyday life.
(Touraine 1995: 209)

Prufrock and the other observers live variously in a twilight, between dusk and dawn, between sleep and waking, sanity and madness. This twilight is a retreat. It is the world between the Cartesian “I think” and “I am”. Bizley quotes Michel Foucault

who tells us that the ‘double movement’ inevitable in ‘the modern cogito’ is the very reason why

¹⁵ Eliot, T.S 1954 *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber) p80

the 'I think' does not ... lead to the evident truth of the 'I am'. Indeed, as soon as the 'I think' has shown itself to be embedded in a density throughout which it is quasi-present, and which it animates, though in an equivocal semi-dormant, semi-wakeful fashion, it is no longer possible to make it lead on to the affirmation 'I am'.

In that 'equivocal semi-dormant, semi-wakeful' reflection, unable to affirm an 'I am', we get the Prufrockian case, the case that, in *Preludes*, finds the prostrate soul giving vent to the unfolding panorama of a 'thousand sordid images'. (Bizley 1986: 16)

The reflection, I believe, is a 'semi-dormant, semi-wakeful' one because although the subject hasn't fully grasped the "I am", hasn't become a social actor, he *has* moved beyond detrimental self-consciousness of "I think", beyond the "pathological solipsism"¹⁶ with which Prufrock is often associated. It is this one step out of solipsism that can identify the observers as subjects of Touraine's modernity who constantly struggle to embrace their subjecthood.

Though the observers in the *Prufrock* poems are not yet awake, they are not asleep, and it is their twilight worlds, their duality, that identifies them as quintessential figures of Touraine's modernity. The twilight then is also a threshold. It is where the modern stands on the brink of subjectivity which is itself a twilight because it is between subjectivation and rationalisation. In this chapter I will identify the particular imagery in each poem that emphasises this twilight (literal and figurative) existence. This includes images of anaesthetisation, sleep, half-sleep, somnambulism, depressants and stimulants, sanity and madness.

The LOVE SONG of J. ALFRED PRUFROCK

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock starts with a twilight landscape in which evening has been

¹⁶ The equation of Prufrockian self-consciousness with pathological solipsism has, I have suggested, done a great deal of harm to the reading of Eliot (Bizley 1986: 29).

anaesthetised into half-consciousness "like a patient etherised upon a table" (line 3). The image of the streets extends the theme of neither-nor; the streets are neither full nor empty, they are half-deserted. The "one-night cheap hotels" have offered their patrons only "restless nights" (line 6), an image of neither sleep nor complete wakefulness.

The imagery in lines 15 to 24 extends the sense of obscurity. The landscape is difficult to navigate because of a "yellow fog" and "yellow smoke" that lingers in the air and "slides along the street", because of a "soot that falls from chimneys" (lines 15 to 22). The foggy landscape echoes the fogginess of Prufrock's mind plagued by indecision.

[T]his yellow fog... is symbolic of what Drew calls "the creeping, choking atmosphere of spiritual miasma" which exists in the souls of Prufrock and his fellowmen. It is the numbing spiritual torpor which Baudelaire calls ennui and Christians call acedia, an inescapable apathy which, creeping into every corner, draws Prufrock hypnotically into its passionless spell. (Hargrove 1978: 51)

In this twilight of indecision, Prufrock is in conversation with himself trying to convince himself that there is time for him to prepare himself to burst onto the public stage, time to "prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet" (line 27). Before the ritual "taking of toast and tea" (line 34) he must rehearse ("indecisions", "visions" and "revisions"). He feels he must, at the very least, give an outward appearance of confidence. He can prepare "a face" (a clown-like image) and adjust his clothing, his coat and tie. But even these will not protect him from scrutiny and criticism. If he remains, they will note his thinness, if he retreats they will criticise his baldness as he descends the stair. He epitomises indecision – he can make a decision to act "which a minute will reverse". He is caught in a twilight world between his need to act and his fear of action.

It is here we see the tragi-comedy that Prufrock embodies. He is a ridiculous figure who not

only hesitates before a decision but hesitates before indecision! Worse still, the stage he hopes to burst upon is nothing but the seemingly two-dimensional drawing room filled with cut-outs of people who embody the very futility he has seen on the streets. Their voices penetrate his twilight world but he seems unable to break the surface of his reverie to alert them to the futility of their lives. It is as if he has returned from the dead with news of the underworld but doesn't know how to share the experience with the living, to "spit out the butt-ends of my days and ways" (line 60) and to describe how he has "gone at dusk along narrow streets" (line 70), the literal streets and the byways of his own brain.

The pace of the poem seems to increase with Prufrock's indecision and agitation until it slows in line 75 with "And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!/ Smoothed by long fingers,/ Asleep ... tired ... or it malingers" as if Prufrock himself would like to escape into sleep or at least into feigned illness. Imagining himself amid the ludicrous props of the drawing room stage – the tea and marmalade, cakes and ices, the porcelain – he tells of how he wants to say that he is "Lazarus, come from the dead, come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all" (line 94) but he wonders if such action would be "worth while".

Citing Rimbaud's *Une Saison en enfer* as "the founding moment of the consciousness of the subject in contemporary culture", Touraine writes that:

The I [of the subject] is revealed to itself only when it becomes detached from all personal and social bonds, only through the derangement of the senses or through a mystical experience. And this discovery of the I does not survive the return from hell. The subject is burned in the flames that lit it up... (Touraine1995: 274)

Prufrock, the end of the poem suggests, does not survive the return from hell either. The return cannot be survived because there can be no return for the subject. Touraine describes the subject as the "individual's ability to reflect upon his or her own identity" (274) and the I of the

subject is born when it is “detached from personal *and* social bonds” (274)[my italics]. This is Prufrock’s hell – the no man’s land, the twilight world between the I and society. This is the world of the modern subject who descends into hell when he can stand outside himself and outside his social setting in order to critique both¹⁷. Standing back from himself, Prufrock can see someone who cannot quite break with tradition and societal expectations. He wears masks (“prepare a face”). Touraine writes that:

The face and the gaze are hidden behind masks. Our faces seem shapeless and our gaze seems empty, in the same way that the unemployed feel that they have lost their social existence as well as their professional existence [are these the “lonely men in shirt sleeves”?]... if we play the game long enough, we realize that it is all make-believe (Touraine 1995: 273).

This is Prufrock’s hell. This is the twilight world of the modern. He has seen his mask, his own artificiality, and he has seen the sham culture of the drawing room. The result of this realisation will, according to Touraine, have one of two effects – it will drive the subject into

a narcissism which rejects all commitment and which flits from role to role and from situation to situation in search of an I that can escape all roles...

or

it can also be the will to be a subject, rather than escaping roles and breaking machines, we find the logic of a power or apparatus that forces us to defend the subject (Touraine 1995: 273).

The former is the path seemingly taken by the young man in *Rhapsody* who rejects commitment and “flits from role to role” – the dancing bear, the parrot, the ape. The latter is, I believe the path (or rather potential path) of Prufrock who has the will to become the subject and who is waiting for his inertia to pass.

¹⁷ “And subjectivation is always that antithesis of socialisation, of adaptation to social role or status, provided

Interrupting his introspective and Hamlet-like soliloquy he exclaims (perhaps protesting too much) that he is “not Prince Hamlet”. Instead he claims to be “the fool”, the clown or jester who is nothing but a parody of people whose lives he hopes to break in on.

The end of the poem does not resolve Prufrock’s inability to act. The mermaids will not sing to him. “He can scrutinise the magic and mythic but cannot make contact with it. He knows he is paradoxically the victim of his own myth. (Mackinnon 1983: 28)” for the very world he dreams of breaking in on is steeped in an artificiality that is likely to drive him back onto the streets or back into himself.

The final lines of the poem suggest that human voices break in on the underwater world of Prufrock’s introspection. Again he seems caught between two worlds. He has “lingered in the chambers of the sea” but the drowning suggests this is not his habitat. He hears the voices of humans perhaps beckoning him back to their world. Perhaps the drowning hints at a rebirth onto the public stage, the rebirth of the subject. Perhaps it means that the subject does not survive the trip to hell and “is burned in the flames that lit it up” (Touraine 1995: 274).

PORTRAIT of a LADY

In *Portrait* the opening scene is clouded by smoke, fog and the darkness of the late afternoon. Again the imagery echoes the young man’s own inertia and inability to act, a twilight between thought and action. The references to Juliet’s tomb and to Chopin’s “resurrection” suggest the twilight world of the living dead; the lady and the young man are both alive but caught in a

that we do not become trapped in to a counter-culture of subjectivity” (Touraine 1995: 274)

world of futility and meaninglessness.

I would like to discuss, in some detail, line 36 “let us take the air, in a tobacco trance”. This image of smoking appears in *Prufrock*:

Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-end of my days and ways?
(lines 59 and 60)

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?...
(lines 70 to 72)

in *Preludes*: “The burnt out ends of smoky days” (line 4) and “short square fingers stuffing pipes” (line 43).

and in *Rhapsody*:

The reminiscence comes
Of ... female smells in shuttered rooms,
And cigarettes in corridors
And cocktail smells in bars.
(lines 62, 66 to 68)

Richard Klein writes in *Cigarettes are Sublime* that

[t]he introduction of tobacco into Europe in the sixteenth century corresponded with the arrival of the Age of Anxiety, the beginning of modern consciousness that accompanied the invention and universalization of rational, scientific methods, and the concurrent loss of medieval theological assurances. The Age of Anxiety gave itself an incomparable and probably indispensable remedy in the form of tobacco. (Klein 1995: 27)

This lends some appropriateness to the “tobacco trance” of the young man in *Portrait*, a figure of “modern consciousness” navigating the “Age of Anxiety”.

Nothing, it appears, is simple where cigarettes are concerned; they are in multiple respects contradictorily double. They both raise the pulse and lower it, they calm as well as excite, they are the occasion for reverie and a tool of concentration, they are superficial and profound, soldier and Gypsey, hateful and delicious. Cigarettes are a cruel, beautiful mistress; they are also a loyal companion. (Klein 1993: 21)

The cigarette then becomes a further symbol of the modernity's contradictions and duality. The cigarette (or pipe) provides the young man in *Rhapsody* with a temporary escape from the almost overpowering scene in the drawing room. As in Laforgue's *La cigarette*, where the cigarette is likened to a relationship with a woman, who is "terrible, ferocious, demanding, but absolutely, passionately desirable, who allows no compromise" (Banville in Klein 1993: 56), the cigarette is at once a symbol of the woman and a symbol of escape from her:

Onward, you living, keep up the fight, poor future skeletons,
I am plunged into infinite ecstasy by the blue meandering that
Twists itself toward the sky and puts me to sleep,
Like dying perfumes from a thousand smoldering pots.
(Laforgue 1970: 333)

The "dying perfumes" is evocative both of the slow death of the woman in *Rhapsody* and the death of the relationship between her and the young man. Yet even as the smoker escapes futility he embraces it, for the one cigarette can only lead to the next because a cigarette, in Klein's words, "inflames what it presumes to extinguish" (1993: 45). *Prehudes*' "burnt out ends of smoky days", symbolic of the modern's twilight existence, emphasises this futility, as does the smoke that rises at dusk from the pipes of lonely men.

Smoking cigarettes engenders the gauzy pleasure of ephemera; it promotes the dissolving of the I, the movement of depersonalisation that is the condition of the Mallarmean poetic experience. (Klein 1995: 32)

But this dissolving of the I is so temporary. The young man's tobacco trance, like the monuments and discussion of late events, provides only a fleeting escape. Ultimately the

cigarette (or pipe) becomes just another dandyish prop that he employs to give a certain impression of himself.

PRELUDES

The image of a twilight world of semi-consciousness is carried into *Preludes*. In the second Prelude “the morning comes to consciousness / Of the faint stale smells of beer (line 14).

Though the morning “comes to consciousness” it is as if those who inhabit the morning do not, as if they are automatons. Though they walk the same streets, they do so in a trance-like state.

The “faint stale smells of beer” (line 15) followed by the “press to early coffee-stands” (lines 17 and 18) are images of first an escape (into drunkenness) from the scene and then an attempt to re-enter the scene, with coffee as the stimulant. This echoes Prufrock’s situation of being at once eager to break in on the scene and flee from it. Baudelaire wrote in *Never be Sober*:

You must always be intoxicated. That sums it all up: it’s the only question. In order not to feel the horrible burden of Time which breaks your back and bends you down to earth, you must be unremittingly intoxicated. (Baudelaire 1991: 85)

This half-lit world flows into Prelude III. It is dawn and light is creeping between the shutters (line 31) heralding a vision of the street:

You had such a vision of the street
As the street hardly understands
(lines 33 and 34)

Moody writes that the

oppressive spleen is eased when it is expressed as an objective vision... (Moody 1980: 24)

Moody identifies the “you” as the observer’s alter ego (1980: 25). The subject is therefore able to have an “objective” vision through his/her alter ego. The subject experiences his/her predicament both subjectively and “objectively”, thus is subjectivation tempered with rationalisation. Moody writes that

[t]he ‘vision of the street’ is determined by experience and yet is a criticism of it: so that the soul, which is a product of its world, may separate itself from it by a process of understanding (1980: 25)

How like Touraine’s modern subject. Like the subject, the soul inhabits a twilight world in which it is both part of and detached from its origins in the world.

I would argue that Bergson’s description of consciousness being divided into intuition and intellect conjures up a similar sense of duality in the modern subject, with intuition being close to subjectivation and intellect to rationalisation...

Intuition ... is a lamp almost extinguished which only lights up now and then, for a few moments at most. But it lights up wherever a vital interest is at stake ... it throws a light feeble and vacillating, but which none the less pierces the darkness of the night in which intellect leaves us. (Bergson 1911: 291, 292)

The flickering on the ceiling is like the flickering of the modern subject whose subjectivity Eliot would like to put to rout altogether but which is nevertheless present in the face of intellect and rationalisation.

RHAPSODY on a WINDY NIGHT

Dusk stimulates the mad – I remember two friends of mine who were made quite ill by it. One of them would disregard all the bonds of friendship and politeness ... the other ... became, as evening fell, more bitter, more sombre, more trying ... his wild, crepuscular madness directed itself not just toward others, but also towards himself.

from *Evening Twilight* by Charles Baudelaire

The modern subject lives on the cusp of rationalisation and subjectivation, in a world of constant struggle, between the waxing of one and the waning of another. The lunar imagery of my argument is conveniently echoed in *Rhapsody*, where the figure seems to visit or be visited by a world of delirium, over which the moon presides.

Touraine speaks of the I of the subject only being revealed when it becomes detached from all personal and social bonds “through derangement of the sense or through a mystical experience” (1995: 274). *Rhapsody* embodies a sense of madness and derangement.

The moon broods over the poem. The combination of moonlight and gaslight gives the street a “fitful and garish lustre” (Benjamin 1969: 51) holding it “in a lunar synthesis” (line 25). The image gives a false sense of cohesion for as the moon seems to hold together everything in her gaze the street-lamp sputters and pulses, beating “like a fatalistic drum” and isolating objects for inspection. The moon seems to “dissolve” memory’s “clear relations” (lines 5 and 6) heightening a sense of the mind’s dislocation. This “debasement of Romantic lunar iconography is a Laforguean characteristic” (Mackinnon 1983: 29).

Foucault describes how, between 1650 and 1800, the distance between reason and madness was established and how, ultimately, reason came to subjugate madness. He calls for the mending of this broken dialogue between pure reason and frenzied unreason:

madness and non-madness, reason and non-reason are inextricable involved: inseparable ... and existing for each other, in relation to each other, in the exchange which separates them. (Foucault 1965: xii)

The appearance of madness in *Rhapsody* suggests “frenzied unreason”. Can this not be seen as the foil for reason and the so-called rational world? Armed with madness the modern subject can attempt to break in on this world. It is only reason’s non-acceptance of unreason that creates imbalance.

CHAPTER 4

Transcendence

An absent presence

The presence of the Subject within the individual can be seen as both distancing the individual from the social order, and as an immediate lived experience. Religious texts abound in accounts of this absent presence.

Alain Touraine¹⁸

If we are to be able to speak once more of modernity, we must find a principle that can integrate this contradictory world and put the pieces back together again.”

Alain Touraine¹⁹

There are images that hint at transcendence in the *Prufrock* poems. And these, which point towards the imagery in *The Waste Land* and *Ash Wednesday*, have often been used to fuel the argument that the God Eliot sought was at last found in 1927²⁰ before Eliot wrote *Ash Wednesday* (1930), thus providing proof of the plausibility and sincerity of his conversion. The argument is that, like the figures in the poems, Eliot had moved from futility and fragmentation to rebirth (“stirring dull roots with spring rain”²¹). He who had been incapable of action had acted.

Without necessarily discounting the possibility of a sincere conversion, I would like to suggest

¹⁸ Touraine 1995: 292)

¹⁹ Touraine 1995: 217

²⁰ “Meanwhile, Eliot’s views on society and religion were converging, to resolve themselves in 1927, when on 29 June he was baptised in the Church of England, which he was affectionately to call in 1931, in *Thoughts on Lambeth*, ‘that oddest of institutions’.” (Tamplin 1987: 28).

²¹ Lines 3 and 4, *The Waste Land*

that this progress, visible from *Prufrock* to *Ash Wednesday*, points as much to the discovery of the modern Subject (as defined by Touraine) as it does to conversion. In *Thoughts after Lambeth*, Eliot writes:

What in England is the right balance between individual liberty and discipline? – between individual responsibility and obedience? – active co-operation and passive reception? And to what extremity are divergences of belief and practice permissible? These are questions which the English mind must always ask; and the answers can only be found, if with hesitation and difficulty, through the English Church. (Eliot 1951: 376)

I would argue that this balance need not come through reference to a transcendent being in the form of God but rather through the discovery of the modern Subject who is “transcendent” in his ability to step back both from himself and society, who holds in tension subjectivation and rationalisation in order to identify “the right balance between individual liberty and discipline”.

Interestingly, God is conspicuous by his absence from *Thoughts after Lambeth*. The Church is spoken of, impassively, as an institution. In that essay and in *The Idea of a Christian Society* Eliot’s approach is largely cerebral. Of course, there is no reason why Eliot, used to an academic impassivity and reserve, should not speak of his faith purely in cerebral terms.

...we must treat Christianity with a great deal more intellectual respect than is our wont; we must treat it as being for the individual a matter primarily of thought and not of feeling. (Eliot 1939: 8)

Yet, to me, a reader who has sensed the desperation in the lives of the observers in the *Prufrock* poems, and experienced the powerful imagery of drought and dismemberment in *The Waste Land* followed by the fountains and the gardens of *Ash Wednesday*, it is surprising that there is not in the converted Eliot more of a sense of immense relief and resolution, not just for the mind but for the heart. There seems to be in Eliot’s conversion none of the Wesleyan “I felt my

heart strangely warmed". While the argument of whether or not Eliot's conversion was sincere is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the fact that we *cannot* establish "beyond reasonable doubt" that his conversion went beyond simply an embracing of the church (as institution) rather than the Church (as the body of Christ) lends some weight to the argument that instead of finding God, Eliot had discovered himself as modern Subject, with the church (as institution) merely providing the tools for this discovery. Perhaps he found both God and the Subject.

The desolate backstreets, cheap hotels and low-class restaurants of *Preludes* and *Rhapsody*:

are not just reminders of the transient life of a metropolis but, as Drew remarks, symbols of "the homelessness of the human soul." (Hargrove 1978: 50)

Eliot's embracing of his modern Subject and his soul finding its home through conversion are not necessarily mutually exclusive, for Touraine's vision of his "new modernity" is roomy enough to accommodate both.

We must openly reject the idea of a break between the darkness of religion and the light of modernity, for modernity's subject is none other than the secularised descendent of religious expression of the subject. (Touraine 1995: 213)

Not only does modernity (as defined by Touraine) have its roots in Cartesian Dualism:

Descartes' grandeur stems from the fact that the rationalist author of the *Discourse of the Method* also defends an extreme dualism which transforms the Christian idea of a creature made in the image of its Creator, in to a philosophy of the personal Subject. (Touraine 1995: 47)

and Luther's Reformation:

How can we fail to see that this [Luther's] theology of faith ... is one of the main sources of ethical individualism? It appeals to the responsibilities of human beings who have been freed from mediations between heaven and earth, and whose

solitude and very impotence allows them to see the self as a personal Subject. (Touraine 1995: 38)

But religion continues to provide appeals to the subject:

We have to conclude ... that there is an underlying unity to all appeals to the Subject ... And ... it would be absurd not to recognize and defend all manifestations of the Subject, no matter where they come from and irrespective of whether those who support them do or do not believe in heaven. (Touraine 1995: 290)

Although Touraine describes subjectivation as the antithesis of the individual's surrender to transcendental values, this is informed by his constant reiteration of the continual and conflict-ridden relationship between Rationalisation and Subjectivation. This makes room for the notion of subjects who, though they "believe in heaven", are in a constant state of negotiation with those values said to be transcendental. There is no immediate and unconditional surrender to these values. The subject wrestles with God.

The choice between a religious world view and a positive world view is an artificial choice. (Touraine 1995: 215)

For the birth of the subject and/or the discovery of God to be heralded in the *Prufrock* poems we must find evidence of the transcendent. Transcendence for the modern subject may simply mean transcending his own self-consciousness in an effort to act.

The LOVE SONG of J. ALFRED PRUFROCK

Baudelaire described one half of modernity as being "the transient, the fleeting, the contingent" and the other as being "the eternal and the immutable" (Harvey 1989: 10).

Touraine's emblematic figure of modernity is a traveller "who discovers and constructs himself in his daily attempt to connect past and future" (Touraine 1995: 202). This voyager, the rational inhabitant of the city, is in search of something that will transcend the transitory nature of city life, a vision that will transcend the stagnation of a life that is lived moment by moment.

Prufrock is not yet a traveller (except of the mind) though he is at work with the journey's preliminaries. Prufrock knows that there is an "overwhelming question" to be asked about life's futility. Though he cannot even frame the question, let alone find an answer, the fact he knows it must be asked is preparation enough for his potential journey.

Part of modernity's meaninglessness and futility comes from its status as *tabula rasa*. Gish speaks of observers in the Prufrock poems as illustrating a

split between a qualitative, enduring self and a quantitative discontinuous world (Gish 1981: 4)

Classical modernity embraced only this quantitative, discontinuous world which was thrust upon the modern human being (the qualitative, enduring self). Modernity lost half of itself and suffered memory loss as it shed what Touraine believes is its heritage. Touraine's subject of the "new modernity" re-establishes the link between the past (memory) and present (desire). The modern subject "comes to consciousness" of something beyond modernity's fragmented field

[f]or what is discontinuous and completely separate in the external world is unified by consciousness (Gish 1981: 6).

Where once the "Prufrocks" were invaded by the rational world, they now prepare to project themselves onto this world.

There is little to suggest the existence of something that will aid Prufrock in his attempt to

move beyond the crippling indecision of the moment and conquer his inertia. The poem's epigraph from Dante's *Inferno*²² signals a trip to hell from which no one returns, yet even Prufrock has "a visionary insight into the paradisaical world of meaningful existence, symbolised by the sea and its life-rhythms of creation, destruction, and re-creation" (Hargrove 1978: 54). As already outlined in Chapter 3, the hell vision is not necessarily negative and could be representative of the modern holding within himself the continuing struggle between rationalisation and subjectivation.

Other imagery that hints at "a beyond" includes the fog and smoke. These suggest the presence of something hidden, something that will be visible when the fog clears. When the fog, literal and figurative, clears, perhaps the answer to his "overwhelming question" will be visible.

Perhaps Prufrock will act. The fog is personified as a cat --

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the windowpanes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house and fell asleep.
(lines 15 to 22)

-- which, though it has temporarily been infected by Prufrock's inertia, may yet leap again and become a symbol Prufrock's own enlivening. Gish writes that Eliot's poem progresses in a

movement from boredom, frustration and despair to significant action, acceptance and serenity (Gish 1981: viii).

If Eliot's poems can be seen as a progression, then Prufrock's inertia may be dispelled in *Ash*

²² "If I thought my answer were to one who ever could return to the world, this flame should shake no more; but since none ever did return alive from this death, if what I hear be true, without fear of infamy I answer thee." Dante's *Inferno* XXVII, 11, 61 to 66.

Wednesday, where the speaker seems to be a more resolved Prufrock.

And I pray that I may forget
These matters that with myself I too much discuss
Too much explain
(lines 27 to 29)

He is able to identify the source of his discontent, to frame his questions and to act, thus transcending the futility and fragmentation of his life:

Because I know that time is always time
And place is always place
And what it actual is only for one time
And only for one place
I rejoice that things are as they are
(lines 16 to 19)

He seems to ascend from the hell of his indecision up the three stairs from “the devil of the stairs” (line 100) to “the hawthorn blossom and a pasture scene / The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green” (lines 109 and 110). He encounters a figure of restoration, “one who moves in the time between sleep and waking” (line 133).

PORTRAIT of a LADY

The observer in *Portrait* is also aware of the futility of life lived in isolated moments dominated by the clock (“correct our watches by the public clocks”, line 39), and as with Prufrock, though he takes no action, it is this awareness that prepares him for his search for something that transcends this. The lady acknowledges his awareness of life’s fragmentedness:

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!)
(lines 20 to 22)

Prufrock had “seen the moment of [his] greatness flicker” and “the eternal footman hold [his] coat and snicker” (lines 84 and 85) and was afraid of his mortality. The lady in *Portrait* invokes the spirit of Chopin who can be resurrected – the image of a return from the dead. But the music, though it suggests something “beyond”, is, like the music Prufrock hears (“music from a farther room”, line 3), distant, sometimes discordant, suggesting an as yet unformed vision of a beyond. Yet, in *Portrait*, the juxtaposition of the classical ariettas (“violins”, “cornets”, lines 16, 17, 29, 31) with the almost tribal “dull tom-tom” (line 32) and vaudeville (“a street piano, mechanical and tired / Reiterates some worn-out common song”, line 79) serves as an interruption to the young man’s reverie, as though they are trying to alert him to something beyond the “insistent out-of-tune” (line 56) of the woman’s voice.

The interruption of the “dull tom-tom” is redolent of Santerre’s drums which Baudelaire mentions in *Solitude* (Baudelaire 1991: 64):

Our prattling races include individuals who would feel less reluctant to accept the final agony if, from the scaffold, they were allowed to harangue the crowds at length, with no fear of Santerre’s drums²³ stopping them untimely in full cry.

Santerre’s drums encourage the individual not to delay his death any further with useless talk. So the tom-tom interrupts the young man’s thoughts encouraging him to end his conversation with himself and die to his indecisiveness. Only in this way will he transcend his situation.

“Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance” appears first in line 36 and as a refrain in line 113. As already discussed in Chapter 3, the cigarette or pipe can be seen as an escape, yet it can also call to mind something beyond the day to day futility that the young man finds himself in, hence

²³ Given the mission to escort Louis XVI to the guillotine, Santerre commanded his drummers to interrupt the king’s farewell speech.

he calls for us to experience this tobacco trance. The cigarette can be seen as:

a symbolic instrument ... a sacred object ... endowed with magical properties and seductive charms ... a conduit to the transcendental. (Klein 1995: xiii)

For Prufrock and the young man in *Portrait* are “confined and isolated by time” (Gish 1981: 10), by the steady round of teas and the incessant drawing room chatter. This existence is marked by scientific time, by the clock of the rational world. These observers cannot reconcile this with their own inner times, their “sucession of desires and fears” and “longing for beauty and sympathy” (Gish 1981: 11). This inner time is the time of the subject. Experiencing this split between inner and outer life means that Prufrock (and the young man in *Portrait*) has an “inability to take the chance of living according to his own feelings and desires” and so surrendered himself to “time in the form of an empty round of events” (Gish 1981: 11). Gish argues that it is only “the Word” entering the meaninglessness of time that can give it meaning (72). Enter the subject. My argument is that the subject provides this meaning. The little hiatuses in the flow of the thoughts of Prufrock and the young man (like the music and the tobacco trance) provide them with moments to consider becoming subjects by breaking in on the outer world.

The moment of taking cigarette allows one to open a parenthesis in the time of ordinary experience, a space and a time of heightened attention that give rise to a feeling of transcendence ... It procures a little rush of infinity that alters perspectives, however slightly, and permits, albeit briefly, an ecstatic standing outside oneself. (Klein 1995: 16)

This relates back to Bergson’s theory:

Spirit for Bergson, is pure memory. Matter is pure perception. (Gish 1981: 5).

I would argue that memory then is the inner duration (subjectivation) and perception is the

outer time measured by the scientific clock (rationalisation). The rational world then only makes sense when it is entered by the subject, who uses memory to draw together the disparate moments of existence in the city.

This theme is carried over into *Preludes* and *Rhapsody*. Gish writes that:

Each [of these two poems] places consciousness against a background of the cycle of time, either the alternation of day and night or the successive hours of the day. Each suggests the capacity of consciousness for some insight transcending or unifying the fragmented images of the external world, *not a timeless perfection but a recognition of time's nature and meaning* [my italics]. (Gish 1981: 4)

Gish suggests that there is no presence or suggested presence of a divine figure, that transcendence is merely the recognition of "time's nature and meaning". This again points to the subject rather than to God.

One final image that suggests something that transcends the moments the young man is living through is the imagery of seasons in *Portrait*. This does have echoes of the seasons Rimbaud wrote of (*A Season in Hell*). Rimbaud described "the implacable turning of the seasons, and the denial of happiness implicit in their movement" (Schmidt 1967: xiii) because he saw the end of a season as the end of a season of happiness. It is possible to turn this around and say that the season of unhappiness the young man in *Portrait* is experiencing will soon end, and this points to the chance for him to act, to become the subject who makes sense of the rational world.

PRELUDES

Prelude I introduces a decaying world on a gusty, rainy evening. The scene is unpeopled except for the you (of “your feet”, line 7) and the hint of others (“smell of steaks in passageways”, line 2). The final line, line 13, is separated from the other 12 and offers a symbol of possible revelation:

And then the lighting of the lamps.

But it is as if there is no one there to witness the vision except “the lonely cab-horse” (line 12).

In Prelude II, dawn breaks on the same world. There is no relief from the drudgery that the stanza suggests. Prelude III offers a relief from the night that reveals “the thousand sordid images / Of which your soul was constituted” (lines 27 and 28). Again the light that “crept up between the shutters” (line 31) brought “such a vision of the street / As the street hardly understands” (lines 33 and 34). It is as though the morning is not only creeping into the room but into the mind, offering a fresh vision. Mackinnon describes this as:

an extraordinary conjunction of the sublime with the sordid.
The woman has a moment of inner knowledge and certainty
which can ‘hardly’ be communicated. (Mackinnon 1983: 25)

This signals some progression from the inner confusion and uncertainty of Prufrock.

Finally, in the fourth Prelude “The conscience of the blackened street” (line 46) is “stretched tight across the skies” (line 39) and “trampled by insistent feet” (line 41).

The street itself is ‘impatient to assume the world’. It takes no time to reflect or observe, unlike its conscience. (Mackinnon 1983: 26)

Here the street, the rational world, is, like classical modernity, defined by what it destroys. Classical modernity destroyed the notion of the subject. The rational world had no conscience. The fourth Prelude speaks of the survival of a conscience. The subject becomes the conscience of rationalisation. This creates the enduring image in the observer's mind of "some infinitely gentle / infinitely suffering thing" (lines 50 and 51) – perhaps a fragmented figure that inhabits the modern world but an enduring and surviving figure like the "ancient women / Gathering fuel in vacant lots" (lines 53 and 54).

RHAPSODY on a WINDY NIGHT

At first reading it seems impossible to find a hint of anything transcendent in *Rhapsody*. But, as already touched on in Chapter 2, it suggests that opening up a deep crevasse between the dream (subjective) and the reality (the rational) can lead to death. Hence it can act as a warning that the two should be held in tension rather than separated altogether, thus providing the modern subject with a complex "unity" that transcends the shattered fragments of modernity.

The other suggestion of something transcendent in the poem is the vivid use of smell – dust and eau de Cologne (line 58), nocturnal smells (line 60), chestnuts (line 65), female smells (line 66), cigarettes (line 67) and cocktail smells (line 68). These smells that "cross and cross across her [the moon's] brain" (line 61) seem almost comforting in their familiarity. They are both a rooted to the present and redolent of something beyond themselves. Smell, like memory, also makes frequent appearances in Baudelaire, offering a suggestion of a beyond. Sartre says of smells:

While giving themselves unreservedly they evoked an inaccessible beyond. They were at once bodies and, as it were, the negation of the body (Sartre 1949: 168).

Mackinnon writes that:

They [smells] exist definitely, but elude definition by opening an extension to the 'inaccessible beyond'. (Mackinnon 1983:13)

This echoes Touraine's description of the modern subject as an "absent presence" (Touraine 1995: 292), where the subject is both able to live immediate experience (subjectivation) and step back from it (rationalisation).

Even the image of death at the poem's end is not without its transcendent vision. "Death" writes Baudelaire "may come as a release. Death offers a new start" (Mackinnon 1983: 19). Perhaps it is a death before a new life. Perhaps the search for meaning only begins once life's meaninglessness has been acknowledged.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

He [Eliot] is still emphatically modern.
Ronald Tamplin²⁴

But what might Eliot, who was “emphatically modern”, think of the divided modern subject as defined by Touraine? A brief look at his views on poetry and criticism might go some way towards providing an answer to the question.

As I have said already, Eliot is clearly against the triumph of the Romantics’ subjectivism. In *Tradition and the Individual Talent* he advocates a process of “depersonalization” which the poet must undergo, and argues that through this depersonalisation “art may be said to approach the condition of science” (Eliot 1951: 17). He goes on to claim that

The more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates (18).

Such thinking points more to the rationalised side of Touraine’s figure of modernity and away from subjectivation. The mature poet, Eliot claims, has the ability to distill, through an unconscious method “a new thing” from “a very great number of experiences which to the practical and active person would not seem to be experiences at all” (21). Somehow the poet removes himself from the experiences in order to create this new thing. The poetry then becomes neither a “turning loose of emotion” nor “the expression of personality” but an escape from both (21). I would argue that for the poet to reflect the image of the quintessential figure

of modernity, as defined by Touraine, his poetry must be wrought of both the scientific (rationalisation) and the subjective (subjectivation). Though Eliot lauds the art-as-science approach (17) there is evidence that he did not achieve this in his own work.

I would agree with Bizley who sees Eliot's approach in this essay as running the risk of "sterilising the authorial 'presence' in an art work" and thereby "scatter[ing] away the secret of his own special creativity" (Bizley 1986: 114). Bizley cites the "comic survival of 'I am' on the stage that 'I think' tries so hard to circumvent". Few would argue that there is no evidence of a subjective Eliot in his poems and Bizley argues that

some of the best Eliotic satire is directed precisely against the separatedness that Eliot recommends. (Bizley 1986: 115)

Some have even argued how strongly *Prufrock* resembles Eliot, how strongly the poems from *Prufrock* to *The Wasteland* (1917 to 1922) reflect much of Eliot's own struggle as "the man who suffers" and how they herald his "conversion" in 1927 which is then strongly echoed in *Ash-Wednesday* (1930).

Despite his theory, Eliot's practice points to the embracing of both subjectivation *and* rationalisation ... as is embodied in the observers of *Prufrock*, *Preludes*, *Rhapsody* and *Portrait*.

A look at Eliot's theories on criticism fuels my argument further. In his essay entitled *The Function of Criticism* he writes of works of art as autotelic (Eliot 1951: 30). That the latter are not biographical outlets ties in with Eliot's description in *Tradition and the Individual Talent* of "divert[ing] interest from the poet to the poetry" as a "laudable aim" (22).

24 Tamplin R 1987 *A Preface to T S Eliot* (London and New York: Longman) p8

Not only is the work of art supposedly not a product of the subjective – meaning the critic should not look to the poet’s life for clues to his work – but the critic himself should avoid listening to his “inner voice” (29). Instead the “most important qualification” for a critic is “a very highly developed sense of fact” (31). Interpretation, Eliot argues, is only legitimate when it (instead of responding to the “inner voice”) puts “the reader in possession of the facts” (32). This strangely positivist stance is quickly countered by the argument that “the inner voice” can be at work anyway in the unavoidably subjective process during which the critic decides which facts he will put his audience in possession of and which he will omit. Touraine’s argument takes into account the unconscious association of ideas as part of the subjective, part of the “inner voice”, whereas Eliot seems to be wanting an unnatural detachment that is in danger of making the author a mere (in Eliot’s words) “filament of platinum” (Eliot 1951: 18). I hope that my argument will have shown that a theorist like Touraine can accommodate both “faces”, what Eliot might call conscious and unconscious, in the realm of the subject.

In his essay *Hamlet*, Eliot describes Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as “an artistic failure” (Eliot 1951:143). It has failed as a work of art, Eliot claims, because of Shakespeare’s inability to find Eliot’s most notorious formula for a “face” of art cleansed of all subjectivity, his famous formulation in the *Hamlet* essay of the “objective correlative” (1951: 145). The assumption is that Shakespeare allowed the subjective to creep into his art unchecked. Yet how does the critic come to that conclusion without *first* examining the artist as subject? Because Eliot has declared *Hamlet* non-art (because of its subjectivity) he the gives himself licence to go against what he described as a “laudable aim”, that is diverting interest from the poet to the poetry. At the end of his *Hamlet* essay, his appetite for details of the poet’s (or in the case of Shakespeare and *Hamlet* the non poet’s) life becomes insatiable:

We need a great many facts in his biography; and we should

like to know whether, and when, and after or at the same time
as what personal experience, he [Shakespeare] read
Montaigne... (Eliot 1951: 146)

It is chicken and egg... to label art as non-art the critic must note how subjectively it has been created, yet even to begin the process is to assume the art is not autotelic and therefore has failed already. Thus is Eliot's theory of avoiding subjectivity a complex, even impossible, practice.

The critic can no more ignore the "inner voice" than the artist can keep her/ himself out of the art. Both attempts are necessarily reflexive processes in which subjectivation and rationalisation are in constant struggle.

Like their creator, the four figures in *Prufrock*, *Preludes*, *Portrait* and *Rhapsody* reflect this quintessential tension of a figure of Touraine's "new modernity".

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