



ALSO F.H. BRADLEY
A Hegelian Reading of T.S. Eliot's Negativity

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On 19 June 1906 Theodore Roosevelt penned a brief note accepting the resignation of William Torrey Harris from his position as United States Commissioner of Education, a post he held for 17 years. "I think it is a safe thing to say," the President wrote, "that all the people of our country who are most alive to the need of the real and thorough system of education have felt a peculiar pride and confidence in you" [Leidecker 581]. Roosevelt had reasons to be effusive. In the course of Harris' four decades as a pioneer in American education, he successfully sought to establish the position of superintendent as the head executive of public school systems, resisted the call for a two-tiered trade-school elementary program based on Prussian education, consistently preserved the beleaguered distinction between moral and religious instruction, adapted the German notion of *kindergarten* to public elementary schools, implemented one of the first teacher salary schedule programs as head of the Saint Louis board of education, and as U.S. commissioner made it the norm to recommend policies on the basis of outcome measures rather than opinion polls or expert conjectures. Between Reconstruction and the turn of the century, Harris, founder of the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* and one of the three leaders of the so-called Saint Louis Hegelian movement just after the Civil War, presided over the modernization of education in America. And then in early 1908, as his biographer notes, a little more than a year into his retirement, he began re-reading Hegel's *Philosophy of History* for the seventeenth time [Leidecker 583].

At the same time Harris made his final return to Hegel's lectures of 1830-1831, twenty-year-old T.S. Eliot was in his third year of classes at Harvard, having moved to Massachusetts from his childhood home of Saint Louis four years before. His course of study at Smith Academy, a Saint Louis prep school founded by his grandfather, would have been shaped in part by the emphasis Harris had placed on broad, practical studies in his supervision of Saint Louis public high school curricula over the previous two decades. So there is mild irony in the fact that, although he grew up in the most intense site of Hegelian social activism in turn-of-the-century America, and in part because of the egalitarian impulses the chairman of the Saint Louis board of education read Hegel to nourish, Eliot would not have been led to any readings in the philosopher until his introduction through

his Harvard professor George Santayana. Eliot's first course with the elder critic and poet was on the history of modern philosophy, and in his year as a candidate for a master's degree, he took a second class from Santayana, entitled "Ideals of Society, Religion, Art and Science in their Historical Development" [Howarth 84]. Santayana's essays leave little doubt that he would have expressed serious reservations about Hegel in this class—but the exposure nonetheless left Eliot with a strong if incomplete sense of Hegel's distinctive role in the history of philosophy.¹

In this essay, I want to offer a new Hegelian perspective on the early modernist legacy to twentieth century American poetry by focusing on the limited understanding of Hegel's idea of a dialectical development of self-consciousness as this notion has come into American poetry and criticism. Specifically, I intend in this chapter to argue against the prevailing opinion that the poetics of early modernism which T.S. Eliot articulated are post-Hegelian and to suggest instead that Eliot's early poetics of impersonality are more Hegelian than he—and the majority of subsequent critics—have come to recognize. My aim in the present essay is to extend an argument I have made at length in another article, "The Spirit of St Louis?: Reassessing Whitman's Hegel," where I tried to offer conceptual and historical grounds for thinking of Whitman's formal expression of the idea of the self as a site of mutual belonging as the origin of the concerns that would shape the subsequent life of structural ideas in American poetry and the foundation of a still tenable Hegelianism in thought about poetics today.

My primary argument in this essay will be that Eliot's early poetics of impersonality should not be read merely as the emergence of a radical new kind of negativity towards conventional selfhood made possible by a sharpened distinction between a cultural and social realm—the sort of high modernism widely thought of as the common point of origin for American poetry of the twentieth century. In contrast with this view, I aim in this essay to suggest that Eliot's poetics of impersonality can also be read along Hegelian lines as the product of tensions set into play by Whitman's own poetics of reconstructed selfhood. Specifically, I argue that Whitman's

¹ Hegel appears to Santayana to be the author of a philosophical system so ambitious for total and comprehensive understanding that all the struggles which make differences meaningful are effaced in his work—an opinion which Santayana did not change from the time of his earliest encounters with the philosopher until his writing of a second preface to the 1925 edition of his *The Life of Reason* (1905): "I was not studying history or psychology for their own sake: my retrospect was to be frankly selective and critical, guided by a desire to discriminate the better from the worse. But by what standard could I distinguish them? The first suggestion for such a work had come to me in my student days, on reading Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. It had seemed to me that myth and sophistry there spoilt a very fine subject. The subject was the history of human ideas: the sophistry was imposed on Hegel by his ambition to show that the episodes he happened to review formed a dialectical chain: and the myth sprang from the constant suggestion that this history of human ideas made up the whole of cosmic evolution, and that those episodes were the scattered syllables of a single eternal oracle. It occurred to me that a more honest criticism of progress might be based on tracing the distracted efforts of man to satisfy his natural impulses in his natural environment" [44]. Hegel cannot offer an "honest criticism of progress" because he seeks, in Santayana's view, to rush to a culmination without dwelling on the conflicts particular to any single moment of desiring consciousness. Likening the "omnivorous spirit" of such a philosophy to what he calls "some dialectical Walt Whitman," Santayana is one of the first American thinkers to insist on the view of Hegel, which has by now become long familiar, as a man so impatient to totalize that he cannot adequately mark the value of individual difference [44].

recognition that the self is ultimately a social construction and his commitment to exemplify in his poetry a new conception of the self became animating elements in Eliot's early poetics, and that Eliot's repudiation of the endlessly inclusive self-representation in Whitman's work through his own notion of a poetics of impersonality was largely motivated by the way that Eliot's own experience of generational difference shaped his expression of the underlying commitments the two poets share. I mean to offer a reading of early modernist poetics not as breaking with conventions of identity into autonomous sites of agency through a redefinition of the cultural sphere, but rather as deepening the meaning of individuality for a community of constructed selves, the sort of community Hegel gave the name spirit.

My attempt to demonstrate the viability of such a Hegelian interpretation of the belated position of a poetics of impersonality has three parts. In the first section of the essay, I establish the continuity between Whitman's claims for the transpersonal power of philosophy in "Democratic Vistas," discussed at length in the essay mentioned above, and Eliot's own early philosophical explorations of selfhood by looking at the conclusions of Eliot's doctoral dissertation, "Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley." As Eliot became more convinced that poetry rather than philosophy could be the language of self-exploration, I argue, he developed the idea of the poem as offering a "new art emotion" independent of conventional affects and he began to conceive of the capacity of poetry to represent a self in predominantly negative terms. In the second section, I consider the prevalent sense in works about the relationship between Eliot's early philosophical and poetic investigations and Hegel that the Hegelian dialectic cannot adequately describe the force of Eliot's negativity, and offer in contrast to this opinion a reading of Lionel Trilling's argument in *Sincerity and Authenticity* that Hegel's discussion of *Rameau's Nephew* early in the sixth chapter of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* tellingly describes the importance of negativity for the modern artist. In the third section, I return to the arguments in Hegel's text, which Trilling briefly summarized, looking less credulously than Trilling does at the definition of the cultural sphere as a domain of autonomy from conventional selfhood. I attempt here to draw parallels between a revised perspective on Eliotic negativity and Hegel's larger account of the dialectic of spirit as the construction of increasingly broadly representative self-consciousness across generations of constructed selves.

Before beginning this argument, however, I want at the outset to make clear what I take to be the prevalent notion of early modernism's definition of poetry as the field of negativity towards received forms of selfhood. Perhaps the paradigmatic instance of such a view comes in James Longenbach's claim in *Modern Poetry After Modernism* that for the vast body of interesting twentieth century American poetry "the 'middle way' was found not between Eliot and Ginsberg [...] but within an Eliotic inheritance that poets found more varied and accommodating than most readers recognized" [6-7]. Most concerned to define the "full flush of modernist achievement" as offering subsequent generations of poets—beginning with Hart Crane—the opportunity to "choose from among a variety of poetic practices, not between them," Longenbach emphasizes the way Eliot's work

opened up and enlivened a broad range of attitudes toward poetic forms and structures as viable modes of expressive agency [7, 20]. He sees in Eliot the inaugurator of an expanded and empowered sense of the autonomy of the poet, the inventor of a sphere of culture, which could generate identities at once inclusive and deeply antithetical to conventional forms of selfhood.

Longenbach's is a particularly blunt articulation of the historiographical attitude that shapes the majority of critical treatments of twentieth-century American poetry, though he is somewhat vague in his characterizations of the Eliotic legacy. A compellingly concrete reading of the refusals made available to subsequent poets by such a valorization of cultural agency implicit in Longenbach's account emerges, however, in an early passage of Lynn Keller's 1987 *Re-making it new*, a study of the relationship between four modernist and four postmodernist poets,

These, then, are some major tendencies one can observe in the poetry that grows out of the modernist tradition, present in varying degrees and combinations in four paradigmatic poets: an intensified interest in art and verbalization as processes rather than products [...] an eclectic approach to literary tradition [...], a desire to embrace and play with both the limitations of language and the disorder or contingency of experience; a distrust of imposed orders and thus an interest in dissolving the rigid categories of conventional dichotomous thinking. [13]

The multifaceted modernist definition of the cultural sphere as a realm of evasion of conventions which Keller describes is the legacy I want to re-interpret in this essay. For, by looking at the development of such a realm of negativity through Hegel's description of its genesis, I hope to point out the widely overlooked ways in which such a poetics is continuous not so much with the establishment of a domain of autonomous agency for poets as with

the aim of reconstructing selfhood, that animated the lifework of Walt Whitman, a writer Eliot vehemently spurned.²

Part One

In his search for a language that would allow him to speak from beyond the confinements of the individual self, 1917 was the year, in which Eliot's sympathies were perhaps most acutely divided. He had been working at that point for two years on his doctoral dissertation, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley*. The final chapter of that work, "Solipsism," shows Eliot having followed philosophy as far as he could in pursuit of knowledge of the world outside the self and finally conceding that he has found nothing substantial. After a lengthy analysis of what Bradley calls "immediate experience" into the opposed categories of self and world, Eliot becomes concerned at the end of the work with the problem of a conflicting multitude of selves making competing claims about their shared world:

Since I can know no point of view but my own, how can I know that there are other points of view, or admitting their existence, how can I take any account of them? [141]

This raises a sticky epistemological problem—how can philosophy give an authoritative account of reality if such an account can only make an appeal to alien points of view? Yet as Eliot sees it, behind the specter of solipsism lies the more important recognition that his own self-knowledge has been constructed by social energies and interactions:

The self, we find, seems to depend upon a world, which in turn depends upon it; and nowhere, I repeat, can we find anything original or ultimate. And the self depends upon other selves; it is not given as a

² A contrast with Harold Bloom's discussion of literary heritage and generational difference in *The Anxiety of Influence* should establish what I mean to bring into question in this essay. Bloom's argument famously rests on the idea that poets struggle for identity by unconsciously distorting the message of those who have influenced them most. The trope for doing this, which comes closest to the dialectical movement I mean to describe, Bloom treats as "kenosis," the mechanics of which he discusses in this way: "*Kenosis*, in this poetic and revisionary sense, appears to be an act of self-abnegation, yet tends to make the fathers pay for their own sins, and perhaps to pay for those of the sons also. I arrive therefore at this pragmatic formula: 'Where the precursor was, there the ephebe shall be, but by the discontinuous mode of emptying the precursor of his divinity, while appearing to empty himself of his own.' However plangent or even despairing the poem of *kenosis*, the ephebe takes care to fall soft, while the precursor falls hard" [91]. Just after this description, Bloom claims that all poetic identity is to be understood in a dialectical relationship with other poets. Yet the possible forms such a dialectic could take he lists as "transference, repetition, error, communication." What is missing from Bloom's account is a Hegelian understanding of the dialectic as an experience of difference which becomes reconceived as the ground of a deeper identity. Writing from within a sense of literary tradition shaped by Eliot's own formulation of impersonal and unique speaking positions created within an aesthetic sphere, Bloom focuses on techniques of achieving negative identity, whereas I want in this essay to suggest that Eliot's own negative movement ought to be seen as elaborating the consequences of an earlier recognition about the relation of the self to poetic structure. Subsequent developments in this tradition, unlike Bloom's tradition of perpetual exceptions, will not be confined to a field in which poetic identity stands in a primarily negative relation to conventional identities.

direct experience, but is an interpretation of experience by interaction with other selves (see *Appearance* 219). *The self is a construction...* [italics mine, 146]

It does not take long, in Eliot's hands, for the problem of solipsism to revert to the deeper problem of the impossibility of perfect knowledge of the self. Because "the self is a construction" by which an individual's conscious experience is both determined and isolated, it is also to some extent a cell in which access to the transpersonal becomes impossible.

And to get beyond the merely personal, Eliot was deciding in 1917, would lead into not the domain of philosophy but of poetics. Perhaps the clearest signal of this change in allegiances comes in a passage at the end of his dissertation which expresses in a rudimentary form the central tenet of his subsequent attitude toward poetry. The passage comes as he is making concluding qualifications about the concepts with which one might talk about truth, and it leaves little doubt that his confrontation of the issue of solipsism has left him exasperated with the paltriness of the truth claims philosophy can make.

What makes a real world is a difference of opinion. I remember a phrase of Eucken's, a phrase which had a certain *entrain* about it: *es gibt keine Privatwahrheiten* (there are no private truths). I do not recall the context, and am not concerned with the meaning which the phrase had there; but I should reverse the decision, and say: All significant truths are private truths. As they become public they cease to become truth; they become facts, or at best, part of the public character. [165]

Since appeals to truth among constructed, isolated selves can only have to do with resolving differences of opinion and not with demonstrably shared access to transpersonal reality, there can be nothing of ultimate significance about truth. It is a rhetorical category.

In this respect, philosophy can only begin to describe transpersonal reality at a point where individual meaningfulness has already ended, in the domain of facts. Oddly, for a doctoral candidate in British philosophy, Eliot's figure of the futile philosopher as he makes this point is not Bradley himself but Rudolf Eucken, a professor of philosophy at Jena and the winner of the 1906 Nobel Prize for literature, a popular intellectual figure Eliot would have encountered during his 1910-1911 visit to Paris. Eucken, then in his mid-seventies, was famously dogmatic, anti-intellectual and individualistic. The central argument of his work, as summarized in Boyce Gibson's 1906 *Rudolf Eucken's Philosophy of Life*, is that "a negative movement from a self-centered, self-enslaved individuality to a God-centered personality, a movement from the sense-world to the self, and through the self inwardly to God, is at once the assertion and the salvation of our true selfhood" [20].³ For Eucken, philosophy could describe the movement by which one passes from the isolation of a knowledge of merely private truths into a transcendent, religious realm in which such particularity gives way to

³ It is important to notice in this summary how far an intellectual world in which Eliot could call such a perspective Hegelian is from our own. For as accounts of the development of modern philosophy now tell the story, it is this ideal of authenticity as grounded in introspection that Hegel felt to be Kant's most burdensome legacy to philosophy.

a universal communion.

It is just such a faith in the possibility of self-transcendence—to say nothing of its value—that seemed anathema to Eliot by the end of the investigations his dissertation mapped. There appeared to him no nameable reality beyond the experience of the constructed self. The furthest one might reach in one's strivings to find one's essence recognized and confirmed outside oneself is through one's own contributions to a constantly evolving, shifting "public character." At the same time that he was beginning to commit himself to such claims in his doctoral dissertation, Eliot was also writing the essays for *The Athenaeum* and *The Egoist* which would eventually be collected as his first book of criticism, *The Sacred Wood* (1920). His aim for that book was to establish his own coherent aesthetic position in "the repeated assertion that when we are considering poetry we must consider it primarily as poetry and not another thing" [viii]. Poetry, he argued in the book's opening essay, "The Perfect Critic," was to be read not for knowledge or refined expression so much as for a fusion of impressions and associations into what he called in a later essay "a new art emotion" [57]. Such an "art emotion" is the point at which the uniqueness of a writer's sensibility can begin to insinuate itself into the public character—the kind of expression through which language, amid the ruined expectations of philosophy, can produce significance in the place of truth.

The ideal critic, Eliot says in the opening sentence of his essay on that subject, one possessed of the rare organ of a sensibility capable of discerning this new form of emotion, would be like Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Contrasted with this ideal, Eliot examines a handful of "imperfect critics"—English, American and French—and finds them all lacking, on the whole, a sense of balance and perspective. However, he reserves his briefest and most acerbic sketch for, of all people, Eucken:

During a good part of history the philosopher endeavored to deal with objects which he believed to be of the same exactness as the mathematician's. Finally Hegel arrived, and if not perhaps the first, he was certainly the most prodigious exponent of emotional systematization, dealing with his emotions as if they were definite objects which had aroused these emotions. His followers have as a rule taken for granted that words have definite meanings, overlooking the tendency of words to become indefinite emotions. (No one who had not witnessed the event could imagine the conviction in the tone of Professor Eucken as he pounded the table and exclaimed *Was ist Geist? Geist ist...*). If verbalism were confined to professional philosophers, no harm would be done. But their corruption has extended very far. [Sacred Wood 9]

It is a surprising and largely unnoticed reappearance that the misguided philosopher makes in these overlapping works of Eliot's early maturity. But holding the Eucken of the dissertation and the Eucken of *The Sacred Wood* so close together, the continuity between the two works is in a sense painfully clear. Eucken's dogmatic "verbalism" begins Eliot's first book of criticism in part because it is also the unhappy ending of his first and last book of philosophy. Turning one's ultimate isolation from other selves into a locus of shared experience through language must take another form than the philosopher's urge for truth allows.

In the context of his frustrations with philosophy at the time, then, I take Eliot's assertion in the introduction to *The Sacred Wood* that he is interested in establishing poetics as an independent discipline to mean specifically that he is seeking a critical discourse for poetry which can describe the way it communicates the deepest aspects of selfhood which philosophy cannot reach. Read as such a post-philosophical movement in his ongoing investigation of the self, one of Eliot's first critical formulations, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" can be seen as a corrective to Eucken's insistence that there are no private truths, which takes the form of an original theory of how such truths do in fact become part of the public character. Among its rhetorical functions, the central metaphor of this essay—that the sensibility of the artist is like a filament of platinum which catalyzes a reaction between oxygen and sulfur dioxide without coming into contact with either of them—offers a way to think about the usefulness of language in communicating transpersonal significance without any reliance on the idea of truth. For the illuminating perspective on selfhood offered by the poet, in Eliot's view, is evidenced by the perceptibility of his alienation from the voices he creatively combines. The art work is the sign of some experience of his own continuity through relation that he has had the discipline to force into intelligibility, though for precisely that reason it means the work will express a self in an ultimately negative way:

The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material. [54]

In the sphere of agency Eliot describes, authentic individuality is only perceptible in the way a consciousness integrates its negativity, the way it infuses, alters and passes beyond the personae in which it appears:

The point of view which I am struggling to attack is perhaps related to the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul: for my meaning is, that the poet has, not a "personality" to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. [56]

If the self cannot pierce through the sutures of its own construction to reach a soul, it can nevertheless manifest its difference from any of these threadbare forms of selfhood by working a "peculiar and unexpected" combinatory magic in an expressive medium.

Though Eliot would posit his understanding of how one is to attend to such an expressive evasion of personality in a range of contexts, no contrastive figure made his point quite as forcefully, or as often, as Whitman. Eliot's first mention of Whitman in his mature prose comes in another essay of 1917, "Ezra Pound: His Metric and His Poetry," which, like the rest of Eliot's early essays on modern poets, did not appear in *The Sacred Wood*. By the time Eliot was writing this monograph, Pound had been disparaging Whitman's poetics in his own prose and verse for ten years, so

there was ample cause for Eliot so sternly to direct attention elsewhere.⁴

The metres and the use of language are unfamiliar. There are certain traces of modern influence. We cannot agree with Mr. Scott James that among these are 'W.E. Henley, Kipling, Chatterton, and especially Walt Whitman'—least of all Walt Whitman. Probably there are only two: Yeats and Browning. [167]

Pound's modern influence involves taking some of what Eliot goes on to call the attitude and vocabulary of two writers we would now call romantic, but on the question of Pound's meter, the rules by which he structures the poem, Whitman's own romantic notion of the organic growth of metrical laws from the poet's representative urge is "least of all" relevant. Pound's freedom from narrow formal prescriptions, Eliot reiterates, comes not through the Whitmanian legacy of measures which take no extrinsic regulation but from his own painstaking development of a worldly poetic education:

There are influences, but deviously. It is rather a gradual development of experience into which literary experiences have entered. These have not brought the bondage of temporary enthusiasms, but have liberated the poet from his former restricted sphere. This is Catullus and Martial, Gautier, Laforgue and Tristan Corbière. Whitman is certainly not an influence; there is not a trace of him anywhere; Whitman and Mr. Pound are antipodean to each other. [177]

Pound's notion of poetic structure is governed by the same impulse that has taken him to the antipodes of the Whitmanian legacy—experience, escape from restricted spheres, a possession of the poetry of the ages.

What makes Pound so manifestly not Whitmanian, in other words, are his refusals of any conventional American identity and his technical ability to make new art emotions, expressions not of a personality but of a distinctive mastery within a cultural sphere. It is true that Pound's own repeated announcements of this left Eliot no other argument to make. But it is also quite clear that Eliot gave his assessment of Pound out of a conviction that the poetics of his friend and contemporary indeed were superior to the ones that benighted American critics insisted on comparing them to. The source of the qualitative difference is Pound's deeper understanding of the nature of freedom in poetry:

The freedom of Pound's verse is rather a state of tension due to a constant opposition between free and strict. There are not, as a matter of fact, two kinds of verse, the strict and the free; there is only mastery

⁴ In addition to the instances of Pound's anti-Whitmanian fervor cited in the first chapter, two mentions of Whitman in *The Spirit of Romance* (1910) bear noting in the context of the argument in this chapter. In that early work, Pound formulates his sharpest critiques of Whitman, by contrasting him with European poets of the late middle ages: "The disciples of Whitman cry out concerning the 'cosmic sense,' but Whitman, with all his catalogues and floundering, has never so perfectly expressed the perception of cosmic consciousness as does Dante" and "Villon never forgets his fascinating, revolting self. If, however, he sings the song of himself he is, thank God, free from that horrible air of rectitude with which Whitman rejoices in being Whitman. Villon's song is selfish through self-absorption; he does not, as Whitman, pretend to be conferring a philanthropic benefit on the race by recording his own self-complacency" [155, 168].

which comes of being so well trained that the form is an instinct and can be adapted to the particular purpose in hand. [172]

Eliot's insistence that Pound's metrical organization is guided by a cultivated instinct for rhythmic tension distinctly does not express a preference for one cadence over another. It signals rather Eliot's sense that the significance of poetic meter is not its quality as sound at all but rather how forcefully it conveys the character of "mastery which comes of being so well trained that the form is an instinct." What he means by metric is not rhythm, but the evidence of education, an international and catholic perspective, cultural sophistication.

Eliot's claim that there "is no escape from meter; there is only mastery," in another essay of 1917, "Some Reflections on *Vers Libre*," is perhaps the most concise statement of how thoroughly he sought to transpose the Whitmanian freedoms of Carl Sandburg and Edgar Lee Masters [189]. The contrast could not be more stark. Where Whitman's model of poetic structure has its roots in Transcendentalist individualism and the Quaker notion of "light within," Eliot's comes out of the language of animal husbandry.

Yet it is precisely where the crucial metaphors in the two men's poetics overlap that we can notice the continuity which this version of the difference between Whitman and early modernism—Eliot's version—obscures. In the context of these opposed notions of poetic structure in Eliot's monograph on Pound, put Whitman's "For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" next to the function of the "filament of platinum." The two poets' differences of opinion about the authenticity and value of self-expression remain as clear as ever. But what they have in common, it becomes clear, is the idea that the act of structuring a poem does not simply accomplish a formal delineation, through which its experiential current can move but in fact catalyzes disparate possible aspects of selfhood into a new and exemplary way of being.⁵ The notions of what this selfhood

⁵ Richard Badenhausen's narrative in "In Search of 'Native Moments'" of the way Eliot's early, vehement rejections of a Whitmanian legacy softened into a more accepting later view is most interesting for its account of how some of the first reviews of *Prufrock and Other Observations* would have put him gallingly close to Edgar Lee Masters and Carl Sandburg, writers of "The Western School." Badenhausen quotes this review by Edgar Jepson: "I have found a poet, a real poet, who possesses in the highest degree the qualities the new school demands. Western-born of Eastern stock, Mr. T.S. Eliot is United States of the United States; and his poetry is securely rooted in its native soil [...]. Could anything be more United States, more of the soul of the modern land than 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Pruffrock' [sic]?" [81]. Yet, as Badenhausen argues, once Eliot's own English identity had been secured, he came to a quite different view of Whitman, saying of his poems in a 1944 lecture: "When you study and reread them, you find that they cannot be compressed or shortened without mutilation; nor can Whitman's ever be made more rhythmical as poetry. It is perfect, although at first it looks far from it" [86]. Rosemary L. Gates implies a much more longstanding affinity between Eliot and Whitman, arguing in "T.S. Eliot's Prosody and the Free Verse Tradition: Restricting Whitman's 'Free Growth of Metrical Laws'" (1990) that not only was Eliot's early prosody decisively influenced by French models who had been influenced by Whitman, but that his later verse reveals how much of his own distinctive rhythm was a refinement of the metrical freedom Whitman had opened. In Eliot's "Choruses" from *The Rock*, Gates argues, Eliot "had found his own rhythm (his own voice, we might say), and it was one drawn from the Whitmanian free verse movement, restricted in ways that Eliot chose, and possessed of a simplicity his earlier virtuosity could not comprehend" [576].

must look like are perhaps still antipodean: the atoms in Eliot's catalytic chamber are the opposite of Whitman's spiritual dust because they do not contain any part of an inner self. But the faith that an idea of poetic structure can be made adequate to the task of representing a new attitude towards the reconstruction of the self is their common creed.

Part Two

I take it to be a fair generalization that Eliot's shift from the philosophical pursuit of self-transcendence through knowledge of reality to the poetic pursuit of an escape from the bonds of conventional selfhood into a "new art emotion" achieved through artistry is what Longenbach, Keller and others mean by the origin of modernism in American poetics. What I mean to demonstrate in this essay is that when such claims as Eliot's for the radical newness and difference of the poet's character are re-read through a Hegelian aperture, they appear to announce not an epochal break but rather the second generation of attempts at a shareable self-consciousness for a poetic community in which even the innermost self must be acknowledged as a cultural construction. Before looking at what such a Hegelian account of Eliot's definition of poetic selfhood can reveal about the relationship of early modernism to the poetry that came before and after it, however, I want to offer a brief review of the received sense of what role Hegelian thought played in Eliot's shift from philosophy to poetry in his exploration of the self.

Those critical accounts of what was revolutionary in Eliot's early poetics which approach the question through a contrast with the concerns of his dissertation have, nearly without exception, found Hegelian philosophy inadequate to the negative thrust of Eliot's critical idea of the relationship of the poet to his society. In twentieth-century America, the work of Hegel has been judged to suffer the flaw of culminating in an unripe absolute, an end of philosophy which seems incompatible with the recognition of how essential to modern selfhood the refusal of commonly available identities is. Recent works on the philosophical background of Eliot's poetics all seem to view Hegel as the name for an effacement of the importance of negativity in self-definition, a philosopher who cannot conceive of the indispensable role of an autonomous aesthetic sphere in framing the power of this negativity. Paul Morrison takes the Adornean position in *The Poetics of Fascism* (1996) that Eliot is only a bad faith Hegelian, insofar as he tries to preserve a sense of the dialectical struggle for individuality in a world that has already been robbed of meaningful differences by commodification [99]. Richard Shusterman's story of Eliot's philosophical development similarly presents Hegel as the figure who beckons him to an end-run around history, toward a purely theoretical and absolutist notion of mind:

Through continued pursuit of philosophy, Eliot himself underwent a significant philosophical development, which reflects the major developmental current in twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy. This movement begins with the early scientific realism and positivistic objectivism that was inspired by the revolt against the Hegelian idealist tradition represented by Bradley, but then turns to a

growing awareness of the hermeneutic, historicist, and pragmatic character of human understanding. [32]

Shusterman reads Eliot's intellectual growth as leading him away from idealism and eventually towards a historically based subjectivism. In such a view, Hegel's thought is to be repudiated from a modern point of view for its incapacity to register the role of contingency in defining the individual. Jewel Spears Brooker's somewhat more patient look at the philosophical context of Eliot's poetics in *Mastery and Escape* (1994) also places the poet's work in continuity with a modernism which she defines in terms of upward struggle through opposition, a process which begins with Hegel but is in Brooker's view incompletely described by him:

The movement of [Eliot's] mind—involving first surrender, then mastery, and finally transcendence—characterizes the mental dialectic of many of his brightest contemporaries. This pattern, the metamorphosis of Hegelian and Marxist dialectic, involves a play between opposites that moves forward by spiralling back (a return) and up (a transcendence). It goes beyond Hegel, however, in resisting linearity, eschewing mentalism, and evading synthesis. [3]

Brooker presents Eliot as seeking mastery in place of the less rigorous notion of "synthesis." In this respect it seems fair to say that her work is aligned with Morrison and Shusterman's, and typical of the established view of Hegel in critical works on Eliot, since it involves the assumption that Hegelian thought lacks terms by which the labor of negativity might claim integrity in a modern world whose hegemonic structures level meaningful differences. Joseph N. Riddel's argument in "Thresholds of the Sign" (1991) is also consonant with such a perspective, presenting Eliot's Hegel as the thinker who turns from the struggle of contemporary life toward an idealized realm of theology and aestheticism: "Eliot, of course, accepted what Spengler (in *Decline of the West*) described as decline and authored a move to redeem this plight of spiritual history; in this he repeats Hegel's ontotheology even as he rejects romanticism" [70]. Riddel charges that Eliot, in contrast with Hart Crane, is all too Hegelian precisely because he evades the endemic pressure of modernity to resolve the conflicting demands of individuality by turning to a post-historical religiosity which goes—at least before his conversion in 1927—under the name of romantic idealism.

The critics who took up the question of Eliot's relation to the philosopher in the 1980s, when the current view of Hegel as an enemy of negativity was less of a conventional wisdom, manage at times to register a recognition that the nature of the Hegelian dialectic requires, in Brooker's words, "resisting linearity, eschewing mentalism, and evading synthesis." William Skaff, in *The Philosophy of T.S. Eliot* (1986), makes the interesting argument that Eliot's thinking, between 1909 and 1927, moved from a late nineteenth-century Hegelianism which seeks unity beyond difference to an early twentieth-century dialectic in which metamorphosis supercedes symbolization. Though Hegel emerges in the course of the work as a figure who is not himself sufficiently dialectical, Skaff begins with an insight that much of the criticism on Eliot over the last decade has obscured: "Eliot was primarily a dialectical thinker" [8].

Andrew Ross likewise acknowledges how enduringly Eliot was

committed to a dialectical view of both individuality and history, particularly in the first chapter of *The Failure of Modernism* (1986). Citing Eliot's dissertation, Ross presents a version of the young Eliot, who has taken from the Hegelian tradition the capacity to recognize when the force of negativity has not been sufficiently addressed in a philosophical scheme:

Committed to the relational, however, Eliot is concerned with the practical application of idealist criteria like coherence, consistency, and inclusiveness inasmuch as they constitute lower entelechial levels of satisfaction. The resultant diet is hardly the ambrosial fare of Bradley's *contemptus mundi*: "the life of the soul does not consist in the contemplation of one consistent world but in the painful task of unifying (to a greater or lesser extent) jarring or incompatible ones, and passing, when possible, from two or more discordant viewpoints to a higher which will somehow include or transmute them" (*Knowledge & Experience* 147). In its appeal to the arduous elements of this process, Eliot's observation evokes the hard school of Hegel's dialectic, and its laborious movement through the contradictions of materiality in the realm of "unhappy consciousness." [11]

This same passage is cited by Gregory S. Jay in *T.S. Eliot and the Poetics of Literary History* (1982) as evidence of "the Hegelian inheritance with which Eliot is struggling" [36].

If we might think of the eighties and nineties as offering two generations of perspectives on Eliot's relation to Hegel, the first one registering the role of negativity in their confluence and the second missing this, all of the foregoing works owe a debt to Anne Bolgan's earlier, highly original study, written with the collaboration of Eliot himself, *What the Thunder Really Said* (1973). She summarizes her claims on the subject this way:

Inwardness as feeling expressed, or inwardness as outwardness absorbed—these seem to be the major ideological polarities dividing the post-Kantian German Absolute Idealism of Schlegel and Hegel from the post-Kantian English and American Absolute Idealism of Bradley and Bosanquet and, as a consequence, the romantic literary tradition from the modern.

It would not, I think, be inaccurate to say that the dialectical conception of "soul-making"—the conception, that is, of the *significant self-in-becoming* with which Eliot identifies his Quester Hero in *The Waste Land*—is the most seminal of all his critical concepts and provides the hidden root from which everything else proliferates [150].

Bolgan argues that Eliot is best understood as modern (or "post-Hegelian") and not romantic because his idea of selfhood is ultimately "adjectival or empirical" rather than, as her version of Hegel would have it, an "ontological rationalism" in which "the order of thought and the order of reality are one and the same" [143, 146]. In this respect, Bolgan is faithful to Bradley's complaint against Hegel in his own *Principles of Logic*, where the British philosopher objects that Hegel's conflation of experience and reality is a form of "the dreariest materialism" [590]. Eliot's dissertation takes a non-Hegelian route away from Kant's philosophy of mind, as Bolgan sees it, insofar as he rejects the idealist premise of Hegel's *Logic* in favor of a more

radical subjectivism.

As an attempt to give the conceptual thought of Eliot a fair, thorough presentation, Bolgan's study is exemplary. She identifies the significance of the dialectic as the crucial question around which discussions of Eliot's Hegelianism should revolve. And her narrative of the splintering of post-Kantian traditions into romantic and modernist positions comes out of a careful explication of Bradley's influential objection to Hegel. The most illuminating aspect of Bolgan's study, however, is that she calls into question one assumption common to all the accounts of Eliot's relation to Hegel, as well as the accounts of every thinker Eliot would have taken to stand between Hegel and himself—that *The Philosophy of History* and the *Logic* present the real version of the philosopher. Bolgan is the first of Eliot's critics to suggest that, in contrast with the Hegel that would have come to Eliot through his Harvard and Oxford teachers, a substantially different philosopher stands behind *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

With Hegel, however, a variety of readings is of course possible. Those who, for example, take their primary insights from the later works beginning with the *Logic* (1812-16)—and Bradley would seem to have been one of these—are inclined to emphasize Hegel's application of the dialectical method to objects of thought and to read it, therefore, primarily as a conceptual dialectic leading to the panlogism Bradley found so distasteful. More recently, however, there are those who argue that Hegel's earlier and much neglected *Phenomenology of Mind* (1807) reveals his true vision much more felicitously than does the *Logic* and that the dialectical method there is applied not, as Bradley would have it, to some 'unearthly ballet of bloodless categories' but to certain preeminent and very concrete types of human experience. [148]

Bolgan's recognition of Hegel's examination of "certain preeminent and very concrete types of human experience"—and their corresponding attitudes towards language—offers a place at which to begin a fundamental reassessment of the question of what remained Hegelian in Eliot's post-philosophical exploration of the self. For all the treatments of Eliot's relation to Hegel since Bolgan's seem in different ways to confront a central problem—that although the name of Hegel is inseparable from the dialectic, his notion of the absolute nevertheless leaves him seeming insufficiently sensitive to the force of negativity on which the dialectic depends. In this context the uniquely specific narrative of subjectivity in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* offers the best place in Hegel's corpus to recognize a description of what it means to have a self which can never be completely reconciled with the social ground of its construction.

The literary critic who sensed this possibility first was Lionel Trilling, although he did not make the point specifically with reference either to Eliot or to the competing views of Hegel available to the twentieth century. In the third of his 1970 Norton lectures, eventually published as *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Trilling begins with a summary of his previous lecture's account of a passage in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Along with a *précis* of the argument, he offers an assessment of its unacknowledged relevance to contemporary culture:

The account given by Hegel in the *Phenomenology* of the two historic

modes of the self, the “honest soul” and the “disintegrated consciousness,” though it bears upon our contemporary cultural situation with an appositeness which must be immediately and forcibly apparent, has had virtually no currency among students of modern culture who write in English. This curious state of intellectual affairs is probably to be explained by merely adventitious circumstances—by the proverbial difficulty of the *Phenomenology* as a whole and by the compromised repute of its author in British and American academic circles—rather than by any settled disposition to resist the substance of what Hegel says. [53]

Eliot’s earliest intellectual *milieu* offers a model of the “adventitious circumstances” for the evasion of Hegelian perspectives: quite apart from Santayana’s role in establishing Hegel’s reputation for impenetrability in turn-of-the-century American thought, F.H. Bradley, the subject of Eliot’s dissertation, was among the most efficient of Hegel’s detractors in British philosophy.⁶ So Trilling’s attempt to fill the gap of self-recognition in modernity’s view of the literary artist with the Hegelian account of Diderot’s *Rameau’s Nephew* can only be applied somewhat antithetically to Eliot’s own understanding of his intellectual tradition. Since he was unaware of the importance of the idea of spirit in Hegelian thought, Eliot surely would not accede to a description of his own poetics on these terms. And yet, it is this unknowing antagonism towards the social ground of selfhood, when it has been least sharpened and refined by negative self-assertions, that allows us to recognize how much Eliot’s poetics of impersonality and the Hegelian version of the nephew have in common. For the “disintegrated consciousness” in Diderot’s work, as Hegel views it, explicitly raises the question of language’s ability to mark modernist selfhood—the capacity of the self to re-conceptualize its relationship to language in a moment of radical negativity, the same project that animated Eliot’s own post-philosophical poetics.

Trilling claims that the modern writer’s self-conception can be said to begin with Hegel’s interpretation of Diderot’s fictive dialogue between himself and the composer’s nephew, in which the nephew’s obstinate refusal to act like a socialized self is seen as the first privileging of negativity, so crucial to the notion of personal identity. Trilling sees the nephew’s negativity as a profound gesture, one by which the opposing self is assured of both a deep alienation from his society and a measure of autonomy inside of it:

It is the nature of Spirit, Hegel tells us, to seek “existence on its own account”—that is, to free itself from limiting conditions, to press towards autonomy. In rendering “obedient service” to and in feeling “inner reverence” for anything except itself it consents to the denial of its own nature. If it is to fulfil its natural destiny as self-realization, it must bring to an end its accord with the external power of society. And in terminating this ‘noble’ relation the individual consciousness moves towards a relation with external power which Hegel calls “base.” [35]

⁶ It is interesting to note, however, that J.B. Baillie, the first translator of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* into English, acknowledges help from Harold Joachim, who was Eliot’s tutor at Oxford at the same time that the translation was published.

Baseness is the prerogative of the self which chooses to express its loathing of what Hegel calls the “honest soul” of nobility, the sort of consciousness Trilling characterizes as believing that “such moral virtue as may be attributed to it follows incidentally from its expressing the privilege and function of its social status in mien and deportment” [37]. Our sense of what it is to be an individual, Trilling argues, begins when the nephew’s base self, antipathetic to the values and identities that predominate in its society, chooses to turn away from his society and towards an independent realm of culture as its domain of satisfying self-expression:

The “honest soul” is rejected by Hegel because it is defined and limited by its “noble” relation to the external power of *society*, to the ethos which that power implies [...] And we of our time, at least as readers, are, as I say, in essential accord with Hegel’s judgment. We reject the archaic noble vision of life because we desire to escape the limiting conditions, which it imposes. Our commitment is to such freedom as is to be found in the exigent spiritual enterprise which, in the English translation of the *Phenomenology*, goes under the name of “*culture*.” [italics mine, 42]

Trilling seems to find this “exigent spiritual enterprise” of culture less heroic and yet more necessary in his lectures of the early 1970’s than he does in *The Opposing Self*, a work of the 1950’s. But of the price it exacts there is no question. The freedom from the constraints of society which culture can offer is paid for with the pain of having to discipline oneself to persist in an energetic refusal of a social role which would be confining but from which one suffers estrangement nevertheless.

Culture, as Hegel idiosyncratically defines it, is the characteristic experience of the base self; it proposes the activity by which the disintegrated, alienated, and distraught consciousness expresses its negative relation with the external power of society and thereby becomes “Spirit truly objective,” that is, self-determining. [...] This breaking up of everything real, although of definitive importance in the career of Spirit, is anything but a happy activity. The experience of the self in culture is fraught with pain; it entails “renunciation and sacrifice.” [...] Culture, as Hegel conceives it, is exactly a discipline in the sense of that word which means inflicted pain. [43-44]

The genesis of the modern artist begins and ends in freedom, Trilling argues, but only suffering nourishes this self: free to be base in the eyes of society, he endures the aspects of self-alienation which actively accepting his liberty requires, and eventually emerges into a more meaningful freedom in the realm of culture he has helped to create. In Trilling’s original reading, Hegel, following Rousseau, is an early theorist of an aesthetic sphere which is locked into perpetual antagonism with the social world.

In looking at how individual freedom grows in significance as it is tempered by negativity, Trilling has taken from Hegel what is perhaps the most substantial aspect of the dialectical view of the development of the self. But in an important sense, Trilling’s account of the genesis of a domain of culture as a rejection of society, though it concisely describes the link for modern art between the aesthetic sphere and a predominant negativity towards conventional forms of selfhood, crucially distorts the role that

Rameau's nephew has in Hegel's dialectic. For in Hegel's view, as I try to demonstrate in the next section, what most deeply motivates the conflict between the noble and the disrupted self is not the coercive power of society but rather the fact that individual negativity towards available identities is always circumscribed by the recognition that the self is a social construction. Hegel's overriding concern in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is not—like Trilling's—the question of how the artist wins autonomy from society, but rather how broadly representative an individual's negativity towards received modes of selfhood can become within a community for which the very experience of selfhood always already involves a measure of alienation.

Trilling's arguments, then, offer a pivotal place from which to reassess the aptness of Hegelian thought to current perspectives on Eliot's post-philosophical poetics. For if Trilling's claims demonstrate that there is more to the Hegelian account of negativity than most theoretical discussions of Eliot over the last two decades have acknowledged, he also expresses this recognition in terms of a problematic but widely influential definition of an autonomous cultural sphere.⁷ I want the rest of this essay to demonstrate that such an opposition between the conventions of selfhood in society and the disrupted selfhood of culture is, from Hegel's perspective, not so much a radical rupture into autonomous agency as it is a consequence of a community's conflict between a commitment to the uniqueness of the individual self and the recognition that selfhood is always social currency. And I want to use such a Hegelian perspective to show how Eliot's poetics of impersonality might be read as something more than the beginning of a revolution in poetics whereby the voice in poems must remain free from identities already marred by conventional hands. Rather, I will argue, Eliot's early modernist formulations about the importance of impersonality in poetry should be seen as the moment at which the two conflicting dimensions of Whitmanian thought discussed in the previous chapter—his recognition that selfhood is constructed rather than essential, and his commitment to make his poetry exemplify an original form of self-consciousness in spite of this—encounter the further complication of generational difference. So it is to Hegel's narration of the role of the autonomy of *Rameau's Nephew* in the context of this larger process of the construction of the self that I want to turn.

⁷ In "Hegel and American Historiography," Gregory S. Jay puts most concisely what is troubling about Trilling's lionization of an independent realm of culture through the Hegelian episode he discusses: "Trilling's *agon* with Hegel anguishes over the death of the subject of literary history, in every sense of the phrase. Efforts to move past the antinomies of his criticism, and of the tradition he belonged to, require a thinking of the dialectic and the historical that does not subordinate itself to either a deterministic narrative of the subject's subordination to Power or an idealistic tale of the achievement of an Absolute Freedom for Consciousness. It can only be historical, and political, if it remembers that history is a way of being that cannot simply be referred to. Our responsibility is rather to rewrite it, though it cost us our 'I's' in the process" [312]. Trilling's conception of the nephew's exemplary negativity as giving shape to an independent field of the "literary" does not sufficiently register the ways in which all experience, even the most aesthetic, is filtered through social constructions which can be called into question.

Part Three

In the preceding essay, I discussed the essential passage of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*: at the end of the fifth chapter and the beginning of the sixth, in his search for a principle with which to arbitrate human freedoms lawfully, Hegel abandons the hope that rational introspection can uncover such a source and argues that individual freedoms instead get their meaning through the ethical substance of a community, its field of possible selves. At this point, for Hegel, spirit becomes the name of the life of a community of individuals who acknowledge that they are constructed in their very essence, and spirit as a force replaces reason as the ground of the freedom of the individual. As he has at the beginning of previous chapters, Hegel then returns to Greek culture to work through a narrative of the development of this new idea. In this case, he has charged himself to interpret the conflict between private actions and collective notions of right and wrong in a way that will preserve the tensions between the individual and society which define the dynamic life of ethical substance.

To do this, he turns to Sophoclean tragedy. The significance of Antigone's transgressive burial of her brother Polynices, according to Hegel, is that the logic by which individuals have legal rights is founded on such a ritual:

The dead individual, by having liberated his *being* from his *action* or his negative unity, is an empty singular, merely a passive being-for-another, at the mercy of every lower irrational individuality and the forces of abstract material elements, all of which are not more powerful than himself: the former on account of the life they possess, the latter on account of their negative nature. The Family keeps away from the dead this dishonouring of him by unconscious appetites and abstract entities, and puts its own action in their place, and weds the blood-relation to the bosom of the earth, to the elemental imperishable individuality. The Family thereby makes him a member of a community, which prevails over and holds under control the forces of particular material elements and the lower forms of life, which sought to unloose themselves against him and to destroy him. This last duty thus constitutes the perfect *divine* law, or the positive *ethical* action towards the individual. [271]

As the ceremony through which a family member preserves the meaningfulness of an individuality that no longer has actual substance, burial in effect founds the idea of the legal realm. Both burial and a system of individual legal rights are designed to protect what Hegel calls the form of Polynices' individuality, as opposed to the content of his character. The full movement from the domain of the family to a system of laws is lengthy in Hegel's narration and it involves a dialectical conflict between human and divine law, which culminates in a purification of the ethical realm through war. But the nature of the process is to articulate a social realm in which the concept of the individual, apart from the content of who he or she actually is, becomes more and more empowered.

This articulation happens at the pinnacle of a social system which is profoundly individualistic, but in notion only—dominated by an exemplary individual who models an insistence on distinctive identity. It is this

absolute individual's refusal to acknowledge anyone else's identity which inaugurates the process by which the realm of law gives way to the realm of culture as the ground for recognizing the meaningfulness of individual negativity in shaping the experience of selfhood:

The free power of the content determines itself in such a way that the dispersion of the content into a sheer multiplicity of personal atoms is, by the nature of this determinateness, at the same time gathered into a single point, alien to them and soulless as well. This single point is, on the one hand, like the unyielding rigidity of their personality, a merely single personality; but in contrast to their empty singleness, it has at the same time the significance for them of the whole content, hence of real essence, and as against their presumably absolute, but intrinsically essenceless, reality it is absolute power and absolute actuality. This lord and master of the world holds himself in this way to be the absolute person, at the same time embracing within himself the whole of existence, the person for whom there exists no superior Spirit. He is a person, but the solitary person who stands over against all the rest. These constitute the real authoritative universality of that person; for the single individual as such is true only as a universal multiplicity of single individuals. [292]

Spirit, as the possibility of freedom for a constructed self, first achieves a socially recognizable form of individuality in a boundlessly presumptuous self, a "multiplicity of personal atoms" which argues at once for the sovereignty of the individual and the meaninglessness of difference.

In Hegel's reading of history, this phase represents an era of political tyranny; once such a "solitary person" has predominated long enough to give standing to the notion of personality, he must—precisely because of the forcefulness of his own way of being—be toppled by a community in which substantial differences between people can be recognized. As Hegel describes this culmination of the self of the legal realm before it gives way to the domain of culture,

The ethical Substance kept the antithesis confined within its simply unitary consciousness, and preserved this consciousness in an immediate unity with its essence. [...] Consciousness neither thinks of itself as *this particular exclusive self*, nor has substance the significance of an existence excluded from it. [294]

For the self-without-negativity that stands as the final product of spirit in the legal realm, there is no distinction between the representative self and the sum of the selves for which he stands—individuation is not meaningful to him. Only the processes of culture allow the idea of selfhood, which was important in the sphere of legal right to take on specificity within a community:

The non-spiritual universality of the sphere of legal right accepts every natural form of character as well as of existence and justifies them. The universality which counts here [in the realm of culture], however, is one that has made itself what it is and for that reason is *actual*. It is therefore through culture that the individual acquires standing and actuality. [297-298]

In the transition from law to culture, the solitary self's pretense of universality has given way, and in its place the opening through which begins to come the negative self-assertions that constitute the self of Rameau's nephew have appeared.

But the dialectical pressures are only beginning. As Hegel notes, culture is a historically compromised realm because it first grows under the sponsorship of sovereigns—a monarch and an aristocracy. The possibilities for individuation fostered by culture first develop within a society where the ideal of meaningful selfhood involves a subordination of individual desires to the aim of service to the king. The societal ground of the cultural realm therefore puts the self under the contradictory pressures of what Hegel calls being-for-self and the state power:

This contradiction which being-for-self must resolve, that of the disparity between its *being-for-self* and the state power, is at the same time present in the following form. That renunciation of existence, when it is complete, as it is in death, is simply a renunciation; it does not return into consciousness; consciousness does not survive the renunciation, is not *in and for itself*, but merely passes over into its unreconciled opposite. Consequently, the true sacrifice of *being-for-self* is solely that in which it surrenders itself as completely as in death, yet in this renunciation no less preserves itself. [308]

Since the United States exists as a nation in part because this arrangement seems so unacceptable to modern sensibilities, reading the development of American poetry through such an intermediate stage can of course seem like anachronism. But there is at this point more than a strain of prescience in Hegel's logic. For given the recognition of the social construction of selfhood within a community for which individuality is a paramount value, Hegel's dialectical history offers a quite specific and illuminating account of the pressures of negativity facing subsequent generations of selves. More concretely put, Hegel's theory offers a description of the very logic by which Eliot formulated his repudiation of Whitman—Eliot's problem of how to respond as an individual to the figure who has essentially invented the importance of reconstructing individuality expresses a version of the confluence of negativity and continuity within a tradition of ideas of the self that Hegel seeks to describe.

And the passage above in particular is one of the more remarkable moments at which the dialectic through which Hegel narrates the development of self-consciousness makes good on its capacity to revisit conceptual scenarios with a recognition of temporal difference. By returning to the way death occasions a shift in the societal view of the individual, as he did in his presentation of the burial of Polynices and the formation of the legal realm, Hegel demonstrates the crucial dissimilarity in the pressures facing the self there and in the realm of culture. In both cases, death is historically important because it is the process by which some new aspect of individuality survives the undoing of a particular self. But whereas in the legal realm merely the idea of the individual transcended burial by passing into a social structure of individual rights, in the realm of culture the idea of the particularity of the individual is what must be preserved. In order that selfhood be both unique and fully integrated into the hierarchies of the state,

the realm of culture must ritualize a death through which the individual is purged of mere selfishness and yet the form of individuality he exemplified can remain as part of the social world. I quote and explicate the passage in which Hegel names the vehicle of this enlargement of the reaches of self-consciousness at some length because of its quite obvious bearing on questions of poetics:

This alienation takes place solely in *language*, which here appears in its characteristic significance. In the world of ethical order, in *law* and *command*, and in the actual world, in *counsel* only, language has the *essence* of its content and is the form of that content; but here it has for its content the form itself, the form which language itself is, and is authoritative as *language*. It is the power of speech. [308]

In contrast with the language of a universal self—law—the language of the self in the domain of culture expresses the very substance of individuality. The realm of culture is, for Hegel, the first place in which a new idea of the self requires a new strategy for using language. Language first matters to the growth of the freedom of the constructed self, then, at a moment highly analogous to the burial of Polynices. It has the power of a ritual, which announces the passing of a particular kind of selfhood and thereby preserves the idea of that particularity within a new range of cultural possibilities.

Yet, as we have already seen, the self who speaks this way is the “noble self,” or what Trilling called the “honest soul,” one for whom flattery and self-respect are not in tension. Crucial to understanding Hegel’s analysis of the function of language in the realm of culture, as Trilling noted, is that he ultimately feels deeply antagonistic towards such a figure. For the noble self represents the paradigmatic mind not only of aristocratic societies but of any thinker—his deepest antipathy here is said to be towards Kant’s moral philosophy—who would claim to see a rational basis in the existing social order without accepting how important conflict is to making that collective rationality substantial.

As Trilling argued, Hegel’s dissatisfaction with the noble self is exemplary for modernity because the noble self is comfortable with a personality that he has not in fact made his own—he has no negativity towards the conventions of selfhood already available to him. Hegel claims that only a consciousness which has felt the disruption between the social role he has been given and his own, much more meager, self-possession is able to give real substance to individuality. The agent of this he calls not only the base self, as Trilling noted, but also, more revealingly, the “disrupted self”:

[The disrupted] self sees its self-certainty as such to be completely devoid of essence, sees that its pure personality is absolutely not a personality. The spirit of its gratitude is, therefore, the feeling of the most profound dejection as well as of extreme rebellion. When the pure ‘I’ beholds itself outside of itself and rent asunder, then everything that has continuity and universality, everything that is called law, good, and right, is at the same time rent asunder and is destroyed. All identity dissolves away, for the utmost disparity now occupies the scene; what is absolutely essential is now absolutely

unessential, being-for-self is now external to itself; the pure 'I' itself is absolutely disrupted. [314]

The spirit of gratitude, which animated the flattery of the noble self, is transformed into rebellion because the disrupted consciousness recognizes his alienation from the social roles that offer him the only identities from which to speak.

The consequence of this disruption of selfhood leads to what I can offer as the most concrete sense of the confluence of Eliot's poetics with this dimension of Hegel's work. Accepting the failure of identity between whom he may be acknowledged as and who he really is, Hegel says, this disrupted self re-invents his relationship to language. He determines to speak without the pretense of owning his identity, and so becomes the vehicle through which language cleanses itself of its confining transparency:

True spirit, however, is just this unity of the absolutely separate moments, and, indeed, it is just through the free actuality of these selfless extremes that, as their middle term, it achieves a concrete existence. It exists in the universal talk and destructive judgement which strips of their significance those moments which are supposed to count as the true being and as actual members of the whole, and is equally this nihilistic game which it plays with itself. [317]

Hegel is talking about the wit and insouciance of Rameau's nephew, who delights in the sudden reversals and pantomimes through which he can disavow the form of selfhood he has just been inhabiting. But his description of the strategic attitudes towards language that such an alienated search for freedom must use offers *in nuce* the first formulation of a poetics of impersonality.

The foregoing look at the Hegelian background of the disrupted self, which Trilling celebrates as the avatar of modernism, puts us in a position at this point to recognize that Eliot's attempt to evade conventional identities in his post-philosophical poetics might be read not so much as an attempt to create the authentic voice of the individual in a cultural rather than societal realm, but rather as the elaboration of a larger dialectic of representative selfhood, whose basic contours Hegel's logic describes. For the predominant interest Hegel has in the development he has described in the foregoing passages from *The Phenomenology of Spirit* is not the growth of the cultural sphere out of the social sphere, but rather the role that such a development has within the dialectical growth of the socially constructed self. In this sense, Trilling's account of *Rameau's Nephew* has in common with Eliot's disparagement of Whitman in favor of a poetics of impersonality a failure to note the ways in which those negatively-inflected attitudes towards the language of selfhood not only establish a new model of identity but also broaden the representative range of the constructed self. The nephew's and Eliot's strategies of expressive alienation, in other words, are in continuity with a tradition whose earlier exponents they are most keen to disavow. Underlying the binary opposition Trilling proposes between society and culture, or the antipodean relation between Whitman's permissiveness and Pound's mastery, is the dialectical connection that drives Hegel's presentation of the genesis of the disrupted self. The cultural self's alienation from the social, conventional ground of selfhood ultimately pushes him to

establish a strategy of negativity, which extends the range of constructions of selfhood available to the very tradition he would reject. According to Trilling's account, the work of the individual in the cultural realm begins and ends with a rejection of the external power of society, and it is through this refusal that what the individual says becomes of interest. Yet as Hegel narrates the growing freedom of the self through culture this movement involves not one negative moment but two. The first assertion of negativity, a blow against tyranny, introduces language as a vehicle of individuation and introduces the possibility of speaking as an individual self; only the second, against the coercive pressures of identity, affords the possibility of speaking as something other than an individual self. From Hegel's perspective, the disrupted self of *Rameau's Nephew* becomes meaningful at the second of these moments—not because he asserts the value of independent self-consciousness, but, on the contrary, because he finds no such subject position which could be distinctively his own. The nephew's negativity is not most important for its delineation of a cultural domain versus a societal one, but rather because of his discovery about how to put negativity, as the second generation of a constructed self, to exemplary use.

For it is the nephew's essential experience of belatedness, of coming upon an idea of individuality which seems from the start to leave one no room to be unlike, that makes the nephew's attitude toward language so fascinating to Hegel. By the time the nephew begins speaking, it has already been established that having a self involves taking on a social role, and that speaking always involves a surrender of one's sense of ultimate freedom. The heroism of the nephew is not, as Trilling would have it, that he invents a field of culture on which to redeem the possibility of autonomy that participating in society has robbed him of. Rather his strategy towards language is meaningful to Hegel because within a domain of culture, which was designed from the start to foster recognition of a wide range of forms of selfhood, he gives individual difference a new expressive depth. In its negativity, his disruption of the language of selfhood extends the range of self-consciousness available to his society to include a radical kind of individuation. His invention of a new language of difference from convention via the cultural sphere does not so much invent a binary opposition between culture and society as it re-defines the power of negativity for a community of alienated, constructed selves.

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