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978-0-521-06353-1 - The Early T. S. Eliot and Western Philosophy
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Introduction

T. S. Eliot's philosophical, poetic and aesthetic development was crucially informed by his sustained reaction against the entire heritage of liberal-humanist thought and practice. In 1923 he stated:

> the middle classes are morally corrupt . . . nor have they any independent virtues which might give them as a conscious class any dignity. The middle classes, in England as elsewhere, under democracy, are morally dependent upon the aristocracy, and the aristocracy are subordinate to the middle class, which is gradually absorbing and destroying them . . . With the decay of the music-hall, with the encroachment of the cheap and rapid-breeding cinema, the lower classes will tend to drop into the same state of protoplasm as the bourgeoisie.[1]

This somewhat Arnoldian statement drastically condenses some of the most profound changes in modern history. In early twentieth century England a series of reforms had consolidated the transfer of power to the middle classes. These decades saw a visible decline in the popular appeal of the Conservative Party: power was wielded by either the Labour Party or the Liberal, 'Whig', Party which broadly represented bourgeois interests.

Eliot's statement highlights the circumstance that the final vestiges of the feudal order were on the verge of destruction, a process which attained systematic and deliberate organisation in the French Revolution of 1789, which had marked a watershed for the future of Europe. Not only did that revolution initiate the political ascendancy of the bourgeoisie, a struggle continued through the violent European revolutions of 1830 and 1848: but its dimensions were so momentous, overturning the centuries-old economic edifice of feudalism and its complements in classical Christian thought, that its imprint was indelibly impressed on all areas of life – literary, economic, religious, philosophical, and scientific.

The historian E. J. Hobsbawm succintly expresses the role of the

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French Revolution: 'If the economy of the nineteenth-century world was formed mainly under the influence of the British Industrial Revolution, its politics and ideology were formed mainly by the French.' Hobsbawm adds that nineteenth-century politics have been largely a struggle for or against the principles of 1789.[2] Indeed, the literary-critical notions of Eliot's ideological predecessors such as Irving Babbitt and Matthew Arnold were shaped by their antagonism toward French Revolutionary ideals; and Eliot's own severe condemnation in 1941 of the French Revolution[3] was not somehow external to his literary interests but was the formal articulation of impulses long latent in his poetry and aesthetics. Later, it will emerge that virtually all of the writers – including Burke, Kant, Hegel, the Hegelian idealists Royce and Bradley, Carlyle, Bergson, Maritain and Hulme – with whom Eliot engaged in working out his own ideological positions, inherited a problematic, a definition of the terms and scope of their inquiry, circumscribed by the principles of the French Revolution which embodied the ideals of bourgeois thought and economic practice.

Eliot's own insistence on linking political and artistic contexts obliges us to understand his aesthetics and poetry as part of a broader political and philosophical allegiance. It was not simply Georgian literature or romanticism against which he was reacting; it was an entire way of life, informed by Enlightenment ideals, of which later nineteenth- and early twentieth-century letters were an important but partial expression or deviation. This is clear from Eliot's review, in 1921, of Harold Monroe's anthology of Georgian poetry:

> The dulness of the Georgian Anthology is original, unique . . . This party represents . . . the insurgent middle class, Mr. Monroe's General Reading Public . . . the middle class . . . enjoys the triumph, in intellectual matters, of being able to respect no other standards than its own . . . if it rejects with contumely the independent man, the free man, all the individuals who do not conform to a world of mass production, the Middle Class finds itself on one side more and more approaching identity with what used to be called the Lower Class. Both middle and lower class are finding safety in Regular Hours, Regular Wages, Regular pensions, and Regular Ideas. In other words, there will soon be only one class, and the second Flood is here.[4]

Eliot adds that 'the General Reading Public knows no tradition, and loves staleness'. What is striking is the outright opposition Eliot sees between the artist, who is 'independent' and 'free', and the bour-

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geois world, which has lost its connections with the past and is imprisoned in a routine of mass production and numbing regularity which extends to its 'ideas'. The foregoing passages provide an important statement of the type of world Eliot saw himself as confronting, both as a philosopher and a poet. They suggest that behind the progress of science are ideological interests which use it to colonise even the deepest recesses of human subjectivity, resulting in the human individual itself as a mass product, conditioned into a docile, receptive mode.

Hence Eliot's intervention on the modern literary scene is founded on the intersection of themes whose import extends beyond any purely aesthetic realm: tradition, the connection between past and present, the nature of human subjectivity, the status of reason, and the exaltation of science in bourgeois society. All of these integrally inform Eliot's vision of the function, purpose and power of art. At the core of Eliot's thinking on these themes, which dominate his entire canon, was his antipathy to the entire thrust of modern liberal thought as archetypally expressed since the Enlightenment in the various forms of rationalism, empiricism, pragmatism and utilitarianism. These philosophies house the central liberal-bourgeois notions, articulated primarily by Descartes, Hobbes, Diderot and the Encyclopaedists, Locke, Hume, Rousseau, Bentham, J.S. Mill and adherents of various forms of positivism. These notions are: the primacy of reason, the viewing of the human being as an autonomous, stable and free agent, an epistemological dualism of subject and object, an emphasis on pluralism and the reality of particulars rather than universals, the exaltation of science, commitment to an ethic of work rather than contemplation, and an exclusive pragmatic focus on the present which parenthesises the past.

Eliot's opposition to bourgeois thought was expressed initially in philosophical terms, terms which continued to act as the shaping spirit and founding premise of his aesthetic formulations. Hence Eliot's ideological opposition to liberal thought, his philosophical views and his aesthetics cannot be adequately understood in isolation from one another. Premising itself on the vital connections between these three dimensions of Eliot's work, the present study aims to examine Eliot's philosophical output and its impact on his early poetry and criticism in the light of his persistent antagonism toward the liberal-humanist heritage which underlies and unifies these concurrent pursuits.

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Over the last twenty years Eliot's philosophical background has emerged as a vast, complex and fertile area of inquiry. The earlier work by critics such Kenner, Hillis-Miller, Bolgan and Freed has been refined and elaborated with an unprecedented richness and range by several recent critics, notably Kristian Smidt, Eric Sigg, John T. Mayer, Richard Shusterman, Jeffrey Perl, Jewel Spears-Brooker, Manju Jain, Paul Douglass and Michael North.[5] The virtuosity of critical work in this area obliges any new study to define all the more clearly its own position. The present book attempts to make a contribution in two ways: firstly, it offers a comprehensive examination of Eliot's most important philosophical writings, including his dissertation, situating these in the modern historical context of liberal-humanist thought as developed in the work of Locke, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Russell and Meinong. In doing this, it presents the first scholarly analysis of Eliot's three unpublished graduate papers on Kant and his manuscript paper on Bergson, attempting to provide accurate documentation of Eliot's numerous sources, which he himself usually omitted.

Secondly, this book argues that Eliot's reaction against the liberal-humanist heritage disposes him toward an ironic vision which is expressed not only in his poetry but in his philosophical work and literary criticism. While nearly all scholars of Eliot have stressed the role of irony in Eliot's verse, it is only over the last fifteen years or so that critics have begun to address this issue in its extensive philosophical, literary-critical and ideological implications.[6] I argue specifically that Eliot's deployment of irony was derived from certain thinkers in what has been termed a 'heterological' tradition of thought, which has emphatically opposed the liberal-bourgeois world-views descended from the mainstream Enlightenment. This line of thinkers includes Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bergson, Husserl, Bradley and the other neo-Hegelian idealists of the late nineteenth-century such as Royce and Bosanquet (and, more recently, Foucault and Derrida, whose thought was in some respects anticipated by Eliot). In terms of literary history, this tradition might be extended to include Coleridge, Shelley and many other romantics, Gautier and the Parnassians, Baudelaire, Laforgue and the French symbolists, humanists such as Babbitt and Arnold, as well as Rémy de Gourmont, Yeats and Pound – all figures who either influenced Eliot or were integral to the working out of his own thought and poetic practice.

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As recognised by nearly all theorists including Lukács, Booth, de Man, Rorty, Behler and Furst,[7] irony in modern literature is not a mere series of tropes or argumentative strategies as defined by classical rhetoricians. The history of irony yields a relatively straightforward narrative until the late eighteenth century. In classical Greek comedy, the *eiron* appears as a clever but deceitful and self-seeking hypocrite. In Plato's dialogues, Socratic irony is elevated into a dissimulative but selfless principle of inquiry, on which Aristotle retrospects favourably. Both Cicero and Quintilian followed the Greeks in defining irony as a form of dissemblance whereby a speaker's intention differed from his statements. This broad definition of irony remained in currency through late antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Neo-classical era. Both the French *Encyclopédie* of 1765 and Johnson's *Dictionary* reiterated the definition of irony as a figure of speech in which the meaning undermines or opposes the actual words used to express it.

It was only at the end of the eighteenth century that irony rose in status from a mere rhetorical device to an entire way of looking at the world, becoming, in the guise of romantic irony, an index of a broad philosophic vision. Most commentators date the emergence of this change to Schlegel's *Fragments* of 1797, which accords irony an epistemological and ontological function, seeing it as a mode of confronting and transcending the contradictions of the finite world. The theorising of irony in this direction was furthered by numerous writers including Heine, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. At the core of irony as formulated by most nineteenth-century thinkers was a romantic propensity to confront, rather than overlook, the obstinate disorder, contingency, flux and mystery of the world. In this sense, an ironic vision accepts that the world can be viewed from numerous irreconcilable perspectives, and rejects any providential, rational or logical foreclosure of the world's absurdity and contradictions into a spurious unity. Yet such romantic irony is not entirely negative: while it rejects the 'objective' order imposed upon experience or the world by religious or rational means, it seeks a higher transcendent unity and purpose, grounded ultimately in subjectivity. Modernist irony is seen by most theorists as a development of romantic irony and as entailing a dual posture: a negation of prevailing values and institutions, and a helpless complicity with them. However, it diverges from romantic irony in being more nihilistic, despairing over the possibility of transcending or changing the current state of affairs. As

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Charles Glicksberg states, it entails both a search for meaning and the failure of this.[8]

The metamorphosis of irony in the eighteenth century from a classical and mediaeval rhetorical device to an index of a metaphysical perspective was integrally tied to the broader social and political changes earlier invoked. The emergence and rapid theorising of irony as a metaphysical perspective coincided with the era in which the hegemony of bourgeois interests and values was establishing itself not only in political life and economic practice but in philosophy, literature and science. Irony was essentially an idealistic reaction against the mainstream tendencies of bourgeois thought which attempted to define the world in terms of its own clear-cut categories, founded on rationalism, pragmatic efficiency, and an atomistic and utilitarian commodification of all the elements of the world, including the human subject. Underlying these tendencies lay the conviction that, in principle, knowledge, reason and science could extend their control over all aspects of human life.

The 'heterological' thinkers who embraced an ironic vision reacted against the reductively mechanistic, utilitarian and commercial impetus of bourgeois thought. Irony was a means of reinvesting the world with mystery, of limiting the arrogant claims of reason, of denying the ideals of absolute clarity and definition, of reaffirming the profound interconnection of things, and of seeking for the human spirit higher and more spiritual forms of fulfilment than those available through material and commercial efficiency. Yet irony as a very mode of reaction bore the imprint of defeat: it could merely voice subjective protests against colossal historical movements which were already in process of realisation, protests which floated free of any viable basis of institutional change.

Hence, the reaction of the heterological thinkers against the foregoing tendencies of liberal bourgeois society was, like that of Eliot after them, deeply ironic. They were struggling hopelessly against a world whose materialistic, pragmatic, utilitarian and scientistic foundations had already been laid since the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Their only recourse was to an ironic vision which insisted that reality is not confined to the here and now but embraces the past or is located in a Platonic ideal realm. Such a vision was inevitably abstract, unable to be realised, and remained imprisoned in the status of negation. An ironic worldview is characteristically a recourse of thinkers unable to solve what

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Babbitt called the problem of connecting the One and the Many, of finding unity in the world of seemingly irreducible particulars. As such, the schemes of unification they proposed were inevitably abstract.

This book argues that the notions of irony developed by both the heterological thinkers and Eliot share certain specific features: firstly, a rejection of the atomistic self of bourgeois liberalism, or rather, the situation of this within a broader, dualistic version of the self. In this model of irony, which is articulated variously by Schopenhauer, Baudelaire, Laforgue and Bergson, the self is comprised of a superficial ego formed by convention, and a deeper authentic ego realisable only through disengagement from practical everyday needs and desires. The first self is empirical, intimately embroiled in the particularities of experience. The second, or transcendent, self overlooks in a detached fashion the activities of the first self. The connection between the two selves yields a condition of irony for the self as a whole: it is both detached and involved, it acts as subject contemplating itself as object. According to Kant (who does not belong to the heterological tradition but bears an ambivalent relationship to Enlightenment thought), the transcendental ego unifies the experiences of the empirical ego. Secondly, there is a consequent, ironic viewing of experience or the world through two viewpoints at once, as both unified and irreducibly fragmented, as both One and Many. I argue – to some extent following Lukács – that by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a coherent totalising account of the world was no longer possible. What occurred was a vacillation (often *within* the work of a given thinker such as Bradley) between positivistic views of the world as composed of irreducible particulars and abstract monistic schemes of unification. What was lost was the ability to articulate the connection between the two orders. Thirdly, there is a tendency to retract into the defining form of subjectivity itself what had been previously regarded as characteristics of an objective world. Hence unity or diversity are held to characterise not the world but the possible subjective viewpoints from which it might be viewed. Irony, of course, can mean many other things. But these are the specific and related senses informing its usage in this book.

Overall, then, what distinguishes the present account is its fundamental thesis that (a) Eliot's early exposure to the thought of his Harvard professors and Symons' work on French symbolism

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alerted him to the problem of the One and the Many and the need for an ironic confrontation of this problem; (b) he developed the notions of irony hitherto specified through the various stages of his philosophical reading as well as through his poetic practice, these two activities informing each other; (c) his ironic thinking lay behind his major critical principles as well as his complex reaction against realism; and (d) his ironic disposition at philosophical, poetic and aesthetic levels emerged in direct reaction against the archetypal categories and trends of liberal thought.

The first chapter of this book examines how Eliot's early intellectual and poetic background shaped his subsequent encounter with the philosophies of Bergson, Kant, Plato, Aristotle, Bradley and others. Henry Adams' autobiography is used as a starting point since it contextualises the intellectual and cultural dilemmas confronted by Eliot's Harvard mentors Irving Babbitt and George Santayana, as well as by Arthur Symons. The central problem underlying Adams' intellectual endeavours was articulated by Babbitt as the problem of connecting the One and the Many. A classical philosophical problem, this was seen by Babbitt as imbued with a new urgency in late bourgeois democracy which had advanced since the Reformation and French Revolution under the auspices of rationalism, individualism, and a 'scientific' stress on particulars and on literal language at the expense of unifying schemes. Babbitt's humanism invokes classical 'moderation' and the aristocratic values championed by Edmund Burke as against the bourgeois democratic ideals advanced by Rousseau.

Babbitt extends Burke's thinking to literary criticism, calling for comparative and historical methods. Inasmuch as the literary critic uses these methods, he is confronting the same problem – the connection of the One and the Many – as the philosopher. Santayana's work, which raises the One–Many problem in a combined literary and philosophical context, may also have deepened Eliot's awareness of the connections between poetry and philosophy. His insights into tradition, impersonality, symbolism and literal language, are echoed in Eliot's work.

A neglected feature of Arthur Symons' book on French symbolism is the way it presents this poetic movement as a concerted reaction against the pragmatic and materialistic tenor of bourgeois society, as well as against its literary obsession with representing external reality in literal language. Symons also discerns a need to unite poetic and

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philosophic habits of mind. Above all, he sees the artist's stance as intrinsically ironic, mediating between conventional 'objective' accounts of the world and imaginative subjective visions. Laforgue's irony is but one instance of such a dualistic imperative. This chapter concludes by analysing the Laforguian posture of some of Eliot's youthful poems in the light of Laforgue's own debt to Baudelaire and especially to Schopenhauer.

Chapter two conducts a detailed analysis of Eliot's unpublished paper on Bergson. Eliot's critique of Bergson's central ideas is ironic: he rejects various dualisms in Bergson's thought, seeing each term of these as the projection of a point of view. As in his estimate of Bradley, Eliot sees Bergson's philosophy as ironically torn between pluralism and monism. However, some of Bergson's ideas seem to have made an enduring impact on Eliot's work: his view of conventional language as 'spatialised' and irredeemably general; the complexity of connection between language and experience; the use of objects to represent subjective states; a scepticism toward pure intellect; and an ironic distinction between a profound temporal self and a conventional spatial self.

Chapter three aims to show how the various influences on Eliot's work hitherto encountered achieved integration. It argues (a) that Schopenhauer, who was a major influence on Laforgue, anticipates the critiques of Enlightenment thought offered by Adams, Babbitt, Santayana, Baudelaire, Laforgue and Symons, especially in his confrontation of the One–Many problem; (b) that Schopenhauer's philosophy anticipates Bergson's ironic view of the self as well as his theories of art and humour; and (c) that the accounts of irony and humour given by both philosophers yield a fertile perspective for examining the irony deployed by Laforgue and Eliot. Finally, this chapter analyses the complex irony of 'Prufrock' and 'Portrait' in the light of Eliot's exposure to the foregoing writers.

Chapter four concerns Eliot's study of Kant. It outlines the historical significance of Kant's philosophy and especially of his ironic bifurcation of the realms of both subject and object. It analyses in detail Eliot's three unpublished manuscripts on Kant. Eliot's comparison, in these papers, of the categories of Plato, Aristotle and Kant reveals a broadly ironic attitude: he sees Plato's worlds of being and becoming and Kant's noumenal and phenomenal realms as expressions of points of view. He characterises modern thought as marked irreversibly by a dualism of subject and

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object which generates the problem of the One and the Many. In these papers Eliot also addresses ethical issues and impugns various movements in liberal bourgeois thought such as positivism and agnosticism. The chapter concludes by suggesting how these manuscripts may shed light on some of the apparent contradictions in Eliot's work, which rest largely on a contradiction between classical and romantic tendencies.

Chapter five argues that Eliot's view of Bradley's system was fundamentally ironic. Eliot discerned in this system an unreconciled coexistence of conflicting tendencies: monistic and pluralist, idealist and empiricist. Bradley's work is placed in an historical context which includes the thought of Locke, Hume, Kant, Hegel and modern realists. There follows a close analysis of Eliot's dissertation. The possible influence of Nietzsche and Royce on Eliot's philosophical views is considered. The chapter then considers how Eliot's views of symbolism and language may have affected his literary notions such as the 'objective correlative' and 'impersonality of emotion'. This chapter concludes by exhibiting the philosophical dispositions of Eliot's poems written between 1914-1919, suggesting also how Gautier's influence was integrated into their ironic form.

The next two chapters are devoted to Eliot's early literary criticism. Chapter six examines the occurrence of both classical and romantic strains in Eliot's aesthetics. It explores how irony underlies his key critical notions: impersonality, tradition, the connection of emotion and object, and the distinction between 'ordinary' and artistic emotion. This chapter stresses the role not only of Eliot's philosophical reading but also of Pound, de Gourmont and some of the romantic poets in the formation of Eliot's views. Chapter seven traces Eliot's complex engagement with literary and philosophical realism. It opens with a general account of the historical significance of realism, its relation to classical and romantic thought, and its underlying philosophical assumptions. It argues that although Eliot rejected conventional realism, much of his own work aspires to a more refined realism, informed by more recent currents of thought. In his general critical position, Eliot saw himself as inheriting Arnold's struggle against the narrow categories of bourgeois thought, though in a philosophically informed manner.

The aim of the final chapter is to examine the philosophical dispositions underlying *The Waste Land* as embodied in its ironic form and in particular in the role of Tiresias. To this end, the

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