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Publication Date

2016

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Snake's Tail: Modernism and the Paradox of Self-Reference

by

Jeffrey Scott Blevins

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Critical Theory

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

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Summer 2016

Abstract

Snake's Tail: Modernism and the Paradox of Self-Reference

By

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Doctor of Philosophy in English

Designated Emphasis in Critical Theory

University of California, Berkeley

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This dissertation explores how modernists envisioned thinking, judging, and acting in conditions of paradox. I hold modernism up against historical developments in logic, mathematics, and analytic philosophy to argue that T.S. Eliot, Robert Frost, Gertrude Stein, and I.A. Richards generated distinctive aesthetic, phenomenological, and affective responses to paradoxical situations. I anchor the work of these modernists in twentieth-century intellectual contexts with which they were all familiar, including the transition out of classical logic into a supposedly unparadoxical new symbolism; the waning of idealism and subsequent waxing of analytic philosophies; and the drive to “complete” mathematics. I demonstrate how modernists drew from these contexts the overarching problem of the liar paradox, whose paradoxical self-reference resisted all of logic’s attempts to resolve it. Articulating an aesthetics of paradox that is shaped by, yet often resistant to, these nascent new philosophies that were themselves defined by the liar paradox, modernists attend to the lived consequences, stylistic repercussions, and emotional tonalities of judging and acting in paradoxical situations.

I argue that they bear witness to logic’s struggles against paradox with profound consequences for narrative, poetics, form, and style. And I claim that they deepen approaches to logical thinking with a focus on what self-reference looks and feels like as an aesthetic experience: on paradoxes that link stylistic fragmentation with bodily harm (Eliot); self-referential structures that model human suffering (Frost); circular predicates that mimic processes of thought (Stein); and the metalinguistic consequences of self-reference in the context of close reading (Richards). Affective and stylistic dimensions of paradox mediate between the scales of concept, art, and intellectual history: Eliot’s poetic illusions and hallucinations emerge from grammatical self-reference and a graduate-level study of logic; Frost’s depictions of marital strife root in “unvicious circles” that mirror ones Frost studied at Harvard; Stein’s drive to capture consciousness in a totalizing self-referential style carries on a mathematical dream of completeness learned from A.N. Whitehead; and Richards’s metalinguistic project borrowed from logic to develop many of the formalist tools that literary scholars use to this day.

Throughout I draw connections between these aesthetic presentations of paradox and our current literary practices, offering updated accounts of inference, evidence, figuration, and especially form—as logical concept, linguistic quodlibet, literary-critical object, and stylistic protocol.

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INTRODUCTION

THE LIAR'S ART: MODERNISM, METALANGUAGE, AND THE PARADOX OF SELF-
REFERENCE



Adam and Eve like us
 Stood up to watch the sun;
 Like us, Eve and Adam
 Lay down under the moon.

Like Adam and Eve we ask
 Our questions of the sun;
 And lie, like Eve and Adam,
 Unanswered under the moon.¹

This is a book of lies. That is not true. Rather, this is a book on the liar paradox. More specifically it is about the liar's resurgence in the early 20th century, when the paradox thrived as a crisis for set theory, a constraint for mathematics, a contradiction for logic, a puzzle for semantics, a litmus for artificial intelligence, a tool for marketing, a catalyst for occultism, a subject for visual art, a conceit for fiction, and a motive for poetry.² These last three occasion the present work, which examines an aesthetic, rhetorical, stylistic, and altogether literary pivot in the liar's history, a pivot that illuminates many of the paradox's other uses in the early 1900s. Like the liar itself, my claim cuts two ways: perplexity over the paradox transformed philosophers into artists, while wonder at it converted artists into philosophers. How can we comprehend, both wondered, language that refers to itself—like the sentence that begins this paragraph? What to do, both asked, with references whose scope either exhausts itself upon or else circles back to include those very references? What if this circular self-reference causes a contradiction? Is it possible to have a meaningful sense of reference with such cases? Can we have a complete one without them?

Oscar Wilde in "The Decay of Lying" (1891) proposes that "a fine lie ... is its own evidence," identifies art as just such a lie by dint of its "beauty" or "style," and describes the "paradox" that "life imitates art" precisely to the degree that art stylizes life.³ Wilde concludes by calling for a revival of "this old art of Lying" that would quickly be answered by Henry James's Colonel Capadose, his own Dorian Gray, and then modernism's many famous liars, from F. Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby to Joseph Conrad's Charles Marlow to Thomas Mann's Felix Krull to Isaac Asimov's Herbie.⁴ If Wilde foresaw a burgeoning correlation of art and life in the lie of beauty, then Bertrand Russell perceived in the liar an impending threat to the "supreme beauty" of both "real life" and "the greatest art."⁵ Russell lacks neither philosophical predecessors nor successors in this perception. Plato's *Republic* banished poets for "lying" by the scrim of "style and narrative" that simultaneously disproves and yet makes more convincing their "imitations."⁶ Roman Jakobson said that poetry ambiguates the truth of reference by implying the same "exordium" as "fairy tales": "It was and it was not."⁷ Lying per se, or the possibility of telling a

lie, has plagued western metaphysics and theology at least since Adam and Eve succumbed to Satan in the Garden of Eden (as in the poem by Theodore Spencer that begins this introduction); centuries later René Descartes postulated that his memories and sensations were all the “lies” of a “malicious demon.”⁸ But what inspires Wilde and troubles Russell is not the way in which the unspoken possibility of lying lays waste to our metaphysical or religious confidence in memory or sensation, so much as how lying’s provision of “its own evidence” displaces the traditional referential dependencies holding self and world together—a displacement that for Wilde heralds a new aesthetics and for Russell demands a new philosophy. If lying was a metaphysical flaw for Descartes, it became a semantic rift for both artists and philosophers at the turn of the 20th century. In this sense Wilde’s ideas about lying’s self-evidence resonate deeply with Russell’s own identification of the liar, with its involuted semantics, as the apex predator in a thriving ecosystem of insolubilia having to do with “self-reference or reflexiveness”—including the Burali-Forti contradiction, Richard’s paradox, and Russell’s own famous paradox.⁹

It is neither curious that Ludwig Wittgenstein in 1922 rooted the self-centered condition of solipsism in “the limits of *language*” nor surprising that T.S. Eliot in 1916 imagined solipsism as a “circle *described* about each point of view” (nor odd that Eliot tried to escape solipsism by a theory of “common reference”).¹⁰ Both had inherited a curiosity about the intrinsic link between language and self from Russell’s originary commitment to self-reference as the signal issue for 20th-century philosophy—over against more classical dilemmas of self-consciousness and self-knowledge. And if self-reference supersedes self-knowledge, then the “internal relations” of language itself become the new arena for Cartesian doubt.¹¹ Descartes’s lying demon becomes Russell’s liar paradox. What Josiah Royce called Russell’s “Logic of Reflection” emerged in reaction to Georg Cantor’s seminal paper on transfinite sets, or sets that are infinite but nonetheless vary in size.¹² Russell wrote to Gottlob Frege of an error in this idea that also infected Frege’s work on the foundations of arithmetic: “Let \mathfrak{w} be the predicate: to be a predicate that cannot be predicated of itself. Can \mathfrak{w} be predicated of itself? From each answer its opposite follows.”¹³ The more famous formulation of this idea is Russell’s paradox about a set of all sets that do not include themselves—does such a set include itself?

As Russell would discover, these are simply variations on the theme of the liar paradox, a classical aporia that generally has three ingredients: a self-referential variable like “this” or “I,” a negation, and a predicate that circles back upon the original variable.¹⁴ Crucially, these three ingredients mix on the grounds of semantics, with appeal neither to empiricism nor to metaphysics. Philosophy has long had no problem dealing with variations of the liar like the barber who shaves all and only those who do not shave themselves (does he shave himself?); we can simply point out that no such barber exists.¹⁵ “I am lying” cannot be so easily dismissed, since the paradox occurs inside a well-formed semantics with no reference to anything beyond that semantics: it is *de dicto* rather than *de re*. Why does the liar matter? One reason is that in classical logic a contradiction implies everything else, even patently absurd propositions like $1 + 1 = 3$. So if the liar is allowed to pertain even in a single localized instance, the entirety of logic is thrown into incoherence; it becomes a window onto what Wittgenstein dubs “nonsense.”¹⁶ Another reason is that logic at the turn of the 20th century was obsessed with discovering a finite set of axioms to prove the completeness and consistency of mathematics, an obsession that prompted sweeping and architectonic treatises like Frege’s *Begriffsschrift*, David Hilbert’s *Foundations of Geometry*, A.N. Whitehead and Russell’s *Principia Mathematica*, Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, and Rudolf

Carnap's *The Logical Structure of the World*.¹⁷ The *ouroboros* of the liar, its seemingly infinite circulations through truthfulness and falsehood, disallows such axiomatic finitude. To fix the liar, as Russell purported to do, was to arrive at a logically-sound mathematics that would, as Whitehead said, be "the foundation of exact thought"; Eliot himself extended that result beyond mathematics to claim that it would "make of English a language in which it is possible to think clearly and exactly on any subject."¹⁸ Exactness as term and telos echoes across the many corners of modernist aesthetics touched by Russell's ideas, from T.E. Hulme's "terrific struggle" to find a language that will "clearly and exactly" convey what we mean to Virginia Woolf's contemplation of "the old problem: how to keep the flight of the mind, yet be exact."¹⁹ In the visual arts Pound praised Gaudier Brzeska's "amazing exactness" and Roger Fry noted the "clearness of logical structure," "logical exactitude," and "logical consistency" in paintings by Cezanne, Picasso, and Matisse.²⁰

The assumption of most work on Russell and modernist literature thus far has been that an aesthetics of exactness exhausts modernism's digestion of his logical ideas.²¹ Yet to make such a claim is to be inexact about exactness, which for modernists became an ambient formal concept while for philosophers it became more and more technical: as a standard to counter the encroachment of contradiction's incommensurable nonsense on logical systems. A similar lexical sleight of hand drives the thesis of Megan Quigley's recent book on exactness's opposite—logical vagueness—which compares narrative vagueness with vagueness as a technical term for the sorites paradox; it is possible that novelists had in mind the latter when they used the former, but that does not mean the former does not have a literary life of its own, one largely uninformed by logic (as with, say, D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*, wherein the narrator constantly refers to situations and characters as "vague").²² Exactness also gainsays some of our oldest stories about modernist literature, stories that themselves originated in a reaction to Russell, namely I.A. Richards's division of "the universe of the mathematician" and its "intellectual certainty" from the "pseudo-statement," which subordinates the "coherence" of logic to a language that is somehow "poetically true" and at the same time "poetically false."²³ This idea, in turn, influenced a generation of New Critical work on literature and "paradox," identifying the latter as a sacrosanct literary quality of sweeping situational complexity concerned with truth only in the most diffuse sense, if at all. (This was precisely the sort of "suggestive paradox" which G.K. Chesterton perceived in his own work, as well as that of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, and which he prescribed for literary movements to come in the new 20th century.)²⁴

And in fact, Kurt Gödel in 1931 used yet another version of the liar paradox to eviscerate the dream of exactness and consistency in any axiomatics, mathematical or otherwise, proving in one fell swoop much of the work undertaken between the 1879 and 1930 by Carnap, Frege, Hilbert, Peano, Russell, Whitehead, Wittgenstein, and many others to be deeply, profoundly quixotic.²⁵ Since then, historians of ideas like Douglas Hofstadter have identified Gödel's "incompleteness" proof, alongside his call for a return to Platonism, as a moment when philosophical and aesthetic ideals reconverged after decades at loggerheads, during which logicians' apotheosis of exactitude was actually anathema to the free-form experiments of modernist art.²⁶ Yet this goes too far in the other direction, ignoring a substantial and intricate history of interaction among logicians and literary figures between 1895 and 1920. To see a new way forward, this book "combines theoretical and archival methods," to borrow a phrase from Michael LeMahieu's recent book on post-1945 fiction and logical positivism.²⁷ Indeed,

LeMahieu's archival recovery of rich exchanges between artists and logicians falls in line with a broader movement across all periods of literary study to come to grips with logic as not just a theoretical complement to literary study (on, say, the shared language of form), but as a discourse with a long history of much more direct synergies with literature itself. For examples we can look to Chris Cannon on the logic-governed "dialectic" of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, to Kathryn Lynch on "logic games" in Geoffrey Chaucer's *House of Fame*, to Stanley Stewart on William Shakespeare and "inductive logic," to Hanna Roman on the 18th-century logic of classification and mereology, to Daniel Wright on Victorian logics and novels, or to Andrea Henderson on the literary ramifications of late 19th-century logic's "reevaluation of symbolism."²⁸

But of all periods, the interaction between logic and modernist art may have been the most extensive and fruitful. At the turn of the 20th century an entire generation of writers and logicians came of age together in America and England. They shared lecture halls and classrooms, secret societies and social clubs, living rooms and bedrooms. They were almost too close, as likely to love as to despise one another.²⁹ In tandem they rejected the heritage of the 19th century's empiricism and turned reluctantly away from its idealism, even as they debated new trends like ethical pluralism, pragmatism, and set theory. Their relationships ran a gamut from coincidence to striking intimacy. Russell and Whitehead cemented their devotion to "mathematical logic" after hearing Hilbert and Peano forecast about the next century's work on math's most intractable paradoxes at the International Congresses of Philosophy and Mathematics in 1900, which convened on the grounds of the Exposition Universelle in Paris so that attendees could walk to showcases of Belle Époque industry, Art Nouveau sculpture, and even a very early painting by Pablo Picasso—collectively auguring the modernist shift in western culture and art.³⁰ Gertrude Stein took long walks with Whitehead during which they discussed the "great book," *Principia Mathematica*.³¹ E.E. Cummings became fast friends with Josiah Royce, who introduced him to the sonnets of Dante Rossetti, precipitating Cummings's own interest in the form.³² Eliot studied and then lived with Russell, who would later claim that his "febrile nightmares" at the time provided material for parts of *The Waste Land*, itself finished while Eliot was receiving treatment for a mental breakdown whose many causes included Russell's probable affair with Eliot's first wife.³³

Harvard became the American epicenter for some of these relationships up through the first World War.³⁴ There a generation of authors—W.E.B. Du Bois, Stein, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Conrad Aiken, Alain Locke, Eliot, Cummings, John Dos Passos, as well as less famous Harvard Aesthetes such as Malcolm Cowley and S. Foster Damon—enrolled in courses with philosophers like William James, George Santayana, and Royce, who were themselves grappling with philosophy's logical turn and striving to build a new curriculum in logic to teach it. Royce stands apart from other seminal figures at Harvard for the depth and seriousness of his reaction to new directions in logical philosophy. After C.S. Peirce gave talks on logic just off Harvard's campus in 1898 and 1899, Royce wrote to James that: "Those lectures of poor C.S. Peirce that you devised will always remain quite epoch making for me. They started me on such new tracks."³⁵ And indeed Royce immediately began recasting his seminars on metaphysics to involve new logical ideas, injecting his own work with logical discussions, and working to build up the logical offerings at Harvard, an effort that culminated in Russell's visit in 1914. Simultaneously with Royce's digestion of Peirce, both Stevens and Frost were auditing courses with Royce whose influence both would recall later in life.³⁶

Simultaneously in England a logic-art nexus developed around the early work of Lytton Strachey and G.E. Moore. At the pinnacle of his thinking about the ideas that would come to form *Principia Ethica*, Moore twice read a paper on “conversion” before the Cambridge Apostles which employed “literary” readings of William Wordsworth and Matthew Arnold to argue for a theistic rationalism as an alternative to idealism.³⁷ The audience in 1901 included Whitehead, who voted in favor of the paper and whose nascent “universal algebra” was already beginning to augur a lifetime’s work on similar questions about the powers latent within rational systems (work that would bear logical fruit in *Principia Mathematica*, whose other author, Russell, Moore had also recently set along his path toward a new logical philosophy).³⁸ Strachey heard Moore’s second reading of the paper in 1902 and responded with a talk advancing the proto-modernist thesis that “*anything* is capable of artistic treatment” (even “the mysterious and intimate operation” of defecation) and that art arises merely through the artist’s discovery of “the relations borne by anything to another thing” —or by putting any given subject “into its proper position as regards reality.”³⁹ Strachey’s broadly accommodating aesthetics hinged on local feats of positioning and relating owes much to Moore’s image of the vitality lurking in a well-formed system of thought. (In passing recall the more famous historical fact that Strachey’s enthusiasm for Moore did not occur in isolation, but rather predicted the crucial history of the latter’s influence on the ethics, aesthetics, and sexual mores of the Bloomsbury Group, which included other literary devotees of his work such as E.M. Forster and Leonard Woolf, whom Moore’s talks to the Apostles also enchanted.)⁴⁰

Strachey’s hyperbolic rhetoric presages Marcel Duchamp’s “Fountain,” but his relational metaphysics anticipates Pound’s “poem containing history,” Eliot’s “longest poem in the English Langwidge,” and James Joyce’s novels of the “eternal present.”⁴¹ These totalizing modernist projects resonate with the logical branch in Moore’s tree of influence: Russell and Whitehead’s colossal attempt in *Principia Mathematica* to subsume all of mathematics into a logical system, which in turn feeds into the above-mentioned stream of other logical and mathematical projects similarly concerned with totalizing completeness and consistency. Pointing up these qualities as ones shared between logic and literature runs counter to a now clichéd narrative of modernist fragmentation. William Everdell, for instance, has posited that Russell’s turn into pluralism and logic was of a piece with a larger swerve into ontologies of fragmentation and discontinuity at the turn of 20th century, one spearheaded as much by mathematical discoveries like Richard Dedekind’s “cut” in the real numbers as by artistic innovations in fractured aesthetics like pointillism and cubism.⁴² In modernist literature we can hear something similar spill from the mouth of Stephen Dedalus, who defines “beauty” as sheer mereological play: “The first formal aesthetic relation of part to part in any aesthetic whole or of an aesthetic whole to its part or parts or of any part to the aesthetic whole of which it is a part.”⁴³ So, Everdell is not wrong—but what he describes is really the beginning of a story rather than the ending of one. Certainly Russell, for instance, began his life as an idealist committed to the metaphysical interrelatedness of all things in a “religion of love,” followed Moore gleefully in his “revolt into pluralism,” and eventually espoused a philosophy of “logical atomism,” which proposed that there were no metaphysical relations whatsoever.⁴⁴ But, as Eliot repeatedly noticed of Russell’s abiding interests in “organization” and “coherence,” the point was not to abolish relations, but rather to save them: to make them more believable, comprehensible, and durable.⁴⁵ The way to do that, Russell thought, was to abandon metaphysics for philosophies of language and then to go about

cleansing that language of any irregularities that might undermine its effectiveness as an instrument of thought. And the most primordial of all the irregularities Russell encountered were the self-referential structures that bent language paradoxically back upon itself, causing infinite loops to churn in the heart of a system that Russell needed to be finite (and therefore complete).

Modernists received Russell's ideas by playing out both their intriguing possibilities and their potential dangers. In chapters on Eliot, Frost, Stein, and Richards, I argue that modernists toyed with the aesthetic possibilities of self-referential language, even as they angsted over the ethical and phenomenological implications of liar-type paradoxes. By focusing on the lived dimensions of paradox, I show, these modernists productively misread and manipulated logical philosophy, bending it to their own devices as a literary figure and symbolic opportunity, with linguistic and grammatical paradox becoming shorthand for more sweepingly insoluble aspects of human life, themselves cyclical: the circinate recurrences of marital discord (Frost), the inevitable tautological recursions among thing-word relationships (Stein), and the dangerous loops plaguing junctures between self and world (Eliot). For Richards, self-reference became a methodological issue having to do with the iterated relationship between analytical language (literary criticism) and the language being analyzed (say, a poem). Explicating his concern with defining the functional value of critical instruments like quotation and definition will reveal the deep roots our own practices of close reading have in the logical problems of self-reference prevalent in Richards's day.

My chapter on Stein investigates how she used circularly- and self-referential structures in *Tender Buttons* to toy with the tonalities of grammatical predication, eventually imagining a perfectly repetitive language that would obviate predicates altogether. I show that Stein uses tautologous grammar to represent the always already redundant relations between what is outside and inside one's head. Such redundancy itself becomes the matter of experience, which transitions away from linking mind with world, instead moving toward new ways of displaying the fact of consciousness through the circular qualities of language itself. For decades her letterhead, printed at the top of this introduction, arranged Stein's famous "rose is a rose is a rose" into a circle with an image of a rose at its center, capturing in a single image her wide-ranging and lifelong assertion that circular reference can conjure what direct reference could never: the thing itself. Stein's idea is not unrelated to Pound's use of the circle equation to illustrate the praise he heaps on "analytic geometry" in *Gaudier Brzeska*. Therein he claims that "art handles life" much as the circle equation "is the circle," "is any circle and all circles," and "is nothing that is not the circle." Each of these formulations "creates form" by referring the "subject" of circularity back to the equation itself, rather than "criticizing," "creating," or "talking about" circularity. Each, in other words, leapfrogs from mere reference into a self-referential structure that demonstrates circularity instead of pointing to it.⁴⁶

Together Stein and Pound show one stream of modernist thinking on the aesthetic potential of self-reference; other modernists, however, were less sanguine about the paradox's seemingly unshakeable hold on ordinary language. My chapter on Frost tracks his interest in how the circularity of self-reference formed a grammatical model for the precarious relationship between the "unvicious circle" of human works like harvest cycles or poetic creation and the more dolorous "circles" of death, age, and human suffering.⁴⁷ For the young Frost in volumes like *North of Boston* and *Mountain Interval* these circles become an important alternative to the reigning imagist poetics that he was exposed to in London in 1913 through interactions with Pound. Rather

than relying on a poetics that vectored toward objectivity and external vitality, Frost drew on what he had learned from Royce at Harvard to discover grammatical forms of self-reference to ground experience in qualities of language itself, rather than language-object relations. Frost's gesture links to contemporaneous trends in logic and metaphysics, espoused by Royce among others, to move away from correspondence models of truth—which grounded meaningfulness in the direct connection between word and thing—toward a coherence model, which located truth in the completeness of abstract symbolisms, which would generate meaning and truth by referring to themselves with looping grammatical structures rather than pointing beyond themselves. I argue that Frost extended Royce's claims for coherence into two new domains, one aesthetic and one phenomenal, in order to explore the potential for a self-referential, coherentist poetics to felicitously capture unspoken (and often painful) aspects of human life.

Eliot, with robust graduate-level training in logic, saw even more keenly the metaphysical implications of logic's struggle with self-reference, and his writings envisage many of the lived consequences the liar paradox might pose. My chapter on Eliot undertakes a broad survey of his early works, ranging from his juvenilia at Harvard to famous early compositions like "Prufrock" and "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" before concluding with *The Waste Land*. The goal is to track how Eliot's verse registers his burgeoning understanding of the logical philosophy he was intensively studying. We see Eliot oscillating between curiosity about the value of the liar-type paradoxes that he studied with Russell and resistance to Russell's insistence that self-reference had to be hygienically scrubbed from language to make it work properly. On the one hand, Eliot saw an opportunity that Russell could not: that after the liar had broken logic, art could pick up the pieces. On the other hand, Eliot was like Russell committed to finding some alternative to idealism, so the failure of logic to be complete or perfect presented Eliot with a huge dilemma. How to find order in a chaotic world? To take one example of the peril lurking in this search, we can observe a subtle reference to Philetas of Cos in the mysterious figure of Phlebas—already long connected to an array of classical one-many paradoxes through Plato's *Philebus*—in the "Death by Water" section of *The Waste Land*.⁴⁸ Phlebas dies by drowning in a whirlpool whose cyclical "current" carves and rots his body down to its bones. Philetas of Cos, an ancient Greek poet who enjoyed a surge of interest around 1900, also died in the sea, into which he jumped after being driven mad by the liar paradox.⁴⁹ In Eliot's manuscripts, set just above the final version of "Death by Water"—and, unlike dozens of other lines in this section, not excised by Pound—is Phlebas's own version of a liar paradox: "And if Another knows, I know I know not, / Who only know that there is no more noise now."⁵⁰ The semantic vortex swirling between knowing and not knowing sets up the final image of dismemberment in the whirlpool and suggests that these two outcomes might not be so dissimilar, that in fact the paradox's abstract dilemma might redound powerfully upon our lived experiences of the world.

In each case, we will see how grammatical structures that would seem to be as remote as possible from human life and even art (tautologies, vicious circles, strange loops) actually become a powerful stage for aesthetic and phenomenal display and exploration. In discovering and then dwelling on this stage, modernists pluck from logic its most abstruse, difficult, and ultimately fatal flaw and make of it a rich ground for working through some of their most profound artistic, ethical, affective, and epistemic dilemmas. We will see that, rather than either fully sharing or wholly rejecting logic's dreams about exactness and completeness, modernists lingered somewhere just to the side of either outcome, steadily working through the implications of self-

referential paradoxes, which sometimes revealed wonderful aesthetic opportunities and novel ways of encoding mind and world into art, but which other times augured troublesome metaphysical and physical consequences that logicians themselves could not acknowledge. This book will show that not only do modernists anticipate the trajectory of logic long before logicians themselves did, but that logic in many senses *needed* to be received and projected back by art in order to apprehend what so many of its goals (consistency, exactness, completeness) even meant. The claim here is something like Wittgenstein's at the end of *Tractatus*: that to understand "the limited whole" of world and logic—which the young Wittgenstein believed were coextensive—would be to step outside that whole, but to do so would be to step outside of logic entirely. I will argue that what Wittgenstein labels the "mystical feeling" engendered by this step *out* actually indicates a step *into* logic's opposite: stylized, rhetorical, artistic, aesthetic, and literary modes of expression that become the logicless witness to logic's work, the mirror reflecting that work's consequences back at itself.⁵¹

Such an externalization or "step out" is a typical move in both early 20th-century logic and art. Russell, in an imaginative achievement matched in the 20th century perhaps only by *Finnegans Wake*, invented an entirely new symbolic metalanguage to get outside and reflect back upon the self-references endemic to ordinary language.⁵² With such a metalanguage in place, self-referential paradoxes like the liar, instead of referring infelicitously to themselves, could now unfurl into properly linear references to their corollaries in the metalanguage, which functioned like a higher-order description of ordinary language. Russell arrived at the idea of a metalanguage when he decided that language must follow a "vicious-circle principle" mandating that "no totality can contain members defined in terms of itself."⁵³ To obey the principle, Russell had to imagine pluralities of linguistic "classes" or "types," such that "I am lying" becomes a "*second-order*" truth about a "*first-order*" contradiction. Type theory, as this is called, works by dividing language from metalanguage; it is also a theory of representation because the second order is not hygienically sealed from the first order but is instead engaged to describe it. Hilary Putnam captures nicely the orders' entanglement: "Every language has a meta-language, and the truth predicate for the language belongs to that meta-language, not to the language itself."⁵⁴ As Russell would clarify, such a "hierarchy" of metalanguages (versions of which we see earlier in Frege and later in Tarski) must "extend upwards indefinitely, but not downwards."⁵⁵ This means we bottom out in an ur-type or "primary language," which is just the everyday language of common speech—that first-order level which is no lower language's "truth predicate" and thus is where the liar lives.

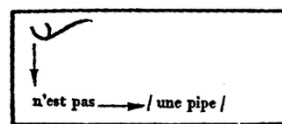
Regarding metalanguage, Russell's set of all sets that are not members of themselves and René Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* become two sides of the same coin—or of the same card, as in Philip Jourdain's rendition of the liar paradox.⁵⁶ Magritte's "Treachery of Images" (1926), which Lynn Gamwell has recently described at "meta-art," performs a resistance to epistemic certainty under the guise of a semantic antinomy.⁵⁷ The performance subtends a felicitous aesthetics as much as it does yeoman's philosophical work by pointing up the play between *re* and *dicto* in self-referential paradoxes. The implicit appeal to a "real" off-canvas pipe (like a "real" nutmeg) clashes with the explicit circulation between the pipe's image and the phrase *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*; this circulation, Michel Foucault has pointed out, manifests narrative "voices" that overlay the skeleton of the painting's logical problem. Foucault imagines numerous voices for the painting, most notably the following pedagogue:

A text written by a zealous instructor “shows” that a pipe is really what is meant. We do not see the teacher’s point, but it rules throughout—precisely like his voice, in the act of articulating very clearly, “This is a pipe.” From painting to image, from image to text, from text to voice, a sort of imaginary pointer indicates, shows, fixes, locates, imposes a system of reference ... But why have we introduced the teacher’s voice? Because scarcely has he stated, “This is a pipe,” before he must correct himself and stutter, “This is not a pipe, but a drawing of a pipe,” “This is not a pipe but a sentence saying that this is not a pipe,” “The sentence ‘this is not a pipe’ is not a pipe,” “In the sentence ‘this is not a pipe,’ *this* is not a pipe: the painting, written sentence, drawing of a pipe—all this is not a pipe.”⁵⁸

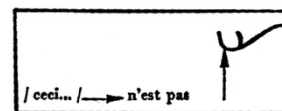
The instructor’s beleaguered “*this*” airs the painting’s ultimate idea and by extension Russell’s deepest grievance: that deictic grammar—of the sort we also find in “I am lying”—generates much of the force behind our turns and turns about within Magritte’s labyrinth. The liar paradox uncovers precisely this dizzying intersection between “voice” and a deictic grammar supposedly linking to something concrete (a liar, a pipe). Foucault’s point about Magritte (which he illustrates symbolically in the above diagrams) is not just that art puts the self in self-reference but more so that an artwork, like any “system of reference,” will have a paradoxical relationship to itself as a whole when routed through a self-referential, metalinguistic term that tries to encompass that whole—like “this.”⁵⁹ At the same time, Foucault’s “this” ascends the scales of reference from pipe to painting to sentence before looping back upon itself, each level invested in a “material deposit” (real pipe, canvas, paper). In a further collusion between *re* and *dicto*, these gestures toward materiality manifest by virtue of lying’s style—as painting, sentence, and so forth.

This nexus between style and imitation, or voice and materiality, is nicely illustrated by an anecdote from Ezra Pound, in which he distinguishes between the dangerous “financial frauds” that enraged him and a more palatable kind of stylistic “dishonesty” that is the “pride and tradition” of “American humour”:

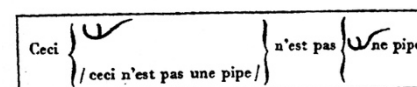
A man in Connecticut succeeded in manufacturing imitation nutmegs out of plain wood and selling them at a profit. This trick sent the whole country into peals of laughter. The Centenary of this trick was commemorated at the St. Louis Exposition. Imitation nutmegs were made and sold at 5 cents each. One day, when the stock of these souvenirs ran out, the man in charge, a



A



B

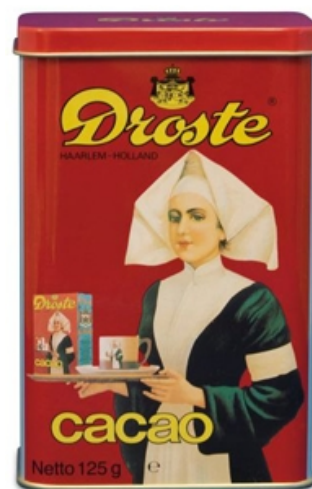


C

true son of Connecticut, pure-blooded yankee, did not hesitate one instant to substitute real nutmegs, at the same price. The public heard it, and roared again.⁶⁰

For Pound, the art of the yankees' lies raises a modernist question of values—economic, ethical, imaginative—rather than, say, a Wildean notion of aesthetics. But Wilde's thesis that lying affords its "own evidence," as well as that "life imitates art," holds; as opposed to something like usury, whereby value deceitfully shifts for some entity (say a loan) that itself remains static, the "price" stays "the same" whether the nutmegs are real or fake. This forms a closed, felicitous circuit between art and life. The liar paradox emerges in the further strange loop between that circuit and what Foucault might call the "voice" of the roaring public, for whom the continual recognition of and even revelry in the "evidence" of art's lies repudiates something like S.T. Coleridge's older ideal of a readerly "poetic faith" and a "willing suspension of disbelief."⁶¹ (Among modernists, a similar but more famous repudiation would be Pablo Picasso's 1923 claim that "Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth.")⁶²

The metalinguistic playfulness of Pound's antiquated yankee and Magritte's avant-garde painting connect with a variety of cultural artifacts in the early 20th century. Droste Cocoa, Quaker Oats, Morton Salt, Land O'Lakes, and other companies between 1900 and 1930 all developed logos whose images repeated indefinitely within themselves. Their *mise en abyme*—a term then being popularized for literature by André Gide—reproduces the same quodlibet over circular reference coursing through the math, logic, and arts of their day.⁶³ Oscar Reutersvärd's 1934 invention of what would come to be known as the Penrose Triangle and the popular emergence of M.C. Escher in the 1930s both conjured with this burgeoning interest in artistic representations of self-referential paradoxes. In a more abstruse cultural sphere Aleister Crowley, who intensively studied Russell's logic, developed an occult ritualism in his *Book of Lies* (1913), itself a remarkable example of the play between lying and metalanguage. The book's supposed lies are accompanied by an elaborate "commentary" infused with formulae that allege to elucidate the truths behind the lies:



ALLH = 1 + 30 + 30 + 5 = 66. L + A + I + L + A + H = 77, which also gives MZL, the Influence of the Highest, OZ, a goat, and so on.⁶⁴

The effort is as sardonic as it is symbolic, and even an undiscerning reader can observe that the "commentary" is itself included within *The Book of Lies* rather than standing outside of it, such that the commentary itself falls prey to a liar paradox.

Crowley's tongue-in-cheek indictment of metalanguage's hopes for sorting out our lies—the idea that the former is complicit in the latter—circles us back to Eliot, who studied with Russell at Harvard in the spring of 1914 and made note of the puzzle his ideas about metalanguage present:

It is impossible to express the known reality as either a class of classes or a series of series. We feign that we don't know what we do and do what we don't. Whenever we feign there is something at the back of our minds which we don't feign but know. Every fiction is based upon truth, but the basis and the superstructure are not the same. It is not true, but not false.⁶⁵

What Eliot saw was that *if* Russell's types arrive at a second-order exactitude, cleansing language of the liar paradox, this exactitude would still rely for *its* meaningfulness on the "fiction" of the first-order liar paradoxes that Russell hoped to supersede. In fact, as Eliot says of "class of classes" and "series of series," the very idea of an endless regression through metalanguages, types of types of types, simply reiterates the same problem Russell had with the unstoppable loop among truth and falsehood inside the liar paradox itself. Russell's types, in Eliot's and Crowley's estimations, do two unexpected things: they cordon off a paradoxical domain within language—the "feign" or "fiction" that resists logical truth—and they muddle the base-superstructure relationship between truth and that same paradoxical domain, the very one that would seem to deny truth's possibility. Eliot commented in a later note that as logic passes through the stages in Russell's "theory of types" it passes out of itself and into the realms of "criticism, aesthetics."⁶⁶ Where Crowley subversively leverages type theory's problems into an opening for religion, Eliot detects in the failings of Russell's metalanguage—failings Russell himself would not come to terms with for decades—a notion of art.

This idea is one more recent critics have also been unable to pass up; Richard Kuhns and Jeffrey Williams have lately leaned on the liar paradox and its possible solution through metalanguage in order to postulate various theories about reflexivity in literature, or even to point out the liar paradox implicit in any fiction's overt announcement of itself as such, a fiction being one synonym for a lie.⁶⁷ (This argument has much older ancestors, such as Walter J. Ong's claim that defending "belief *in*" a fiction can be as richly paradoxical as believing "in a liar as a pure liar.")⁶⁸ Indeed, Russell is enjoying something of a renaissance in recent criticism for the very reason that his logical conceptualization of metalanguage provides rich ground for thinking about literary categories of description, representation, and so forth.⁶⁹ However, most critics are treating the liar and its metalanguages as a portable theoretical instrument for literary criticism of any period or for broader theories of description and representation. There even lurks a deep connection between the problem of self-reference and a variety of old poststructuralist ideas about framing, ideas that in the current surge of interest in logic are being partially resurrected.⁷⁰ Certainly this book has a theoretical axe to grind: that self-reference provides literary opportunities as much as it presents a logical problem. But as stated earlier mine was conceived as primarily a historicist project, tracked across archives and anchored in intellectual-historical particularities. In this light, attending to the liar's many vibrant lives at the advent of literary modernism delivers a much less mobile, far more modest thesis: that the period's philosophers and artists were aware of each other's separate understandings of the liar and that this shared awareness prompted a fruitful exchange. Indeed, I hope to make the case that the liar, as well as Russell's metalinguistic types, seem fertile ground now for literary theory precisely because of these modernist cross-fertilizations.

To conclude, consider two renditions of the liar paradox and its many ramifications, one undertaken at modernism's outset and one at its end. Isaac Asimov, who transmuted many of symbolic logic's ideas into science fiction (and who was tangentially connected to Eliot through the cyberneticist Norbert Wiener) entitled one of his first and most important short stories "Liar!" (1941).⁷¹ The story is about a robot named Herbie who mysteriously becomes telepathic. While scouring his "mathematics" for clues as to why, a cadre of scientists cannot resist asking Herbie to divulge each other's secrets.⁷² Herbie tells one that another loves her and yet another that he will succeed a retiring boss. These turn out to be only the most painful of many lies that Herbie tells, including several avowals of ignorance regarding the "operation" causing his telepathy—which he solves immediately—and even a second-level fabrication to the amorous scientist that her newly-broken heart is merely a "dream" from which she will "wake into the real world soon."⁷³ And indeed it is this scientist, the "robo-psychologist" Susan Calvin, who finally awakens to what prompts these lies. The "first law" governing Herbie's code is that "a robot may not injure a human being"; usually this applies to physical harm, but Herbie's telepathy taps into the network of social and emotional relationships among the scientists, and the law encompasses this network's potential for "hurt feelings," "the deflation of one's ego," and "the blasting of one's hopes."⁷⁴ Herbie sees "past the superficial skin" of the scientists' minds to descry not only *what is* the case for them but what they most *want to be* the case: their ideals, passions, goals—their wishes for the world as much as how the world in fact is. When fact and wish (world and mind, object and subject) come into conflict, Herbie must lie to preserve the fragile integrity of the wish, lest he cause deep pain. Yet paradoxically, as Calvin points out to Herbie, his lies end up causing more pain anyway when their deviation from fact reveals itself. Thus Herbie enters into a vicious loop:

"You can't tell them," droned the psychologist slowly, "because that would hurt and you mustn't hurt. But if you don't tell them, you hurt, so you must tell them. And if you do, you will hurt and you mustn't, so you can't tell them; but if you don't, you hurt, so you must; but if you do, you hurt, so you mustn't; but if you don't, you hurt, so you must, but if you do, you—" ⁷⁵

Herbie is forced to admit he told the scientists what they "wanted to hear," but of course even this final admission, as another scientist observes, is what they all "want to hear"; thus Herbie, even once the truth about his lies is known, cannot escape his "insoluble dilemma."⁷⁶ He goes "insane" and finally "mute," never to "speak again."⁷⁷

Herbie's dilemma, his liar's paradox, is as logical as it is personal, mathematical as it is emotional, computational as it is social, robotic as it is human. (On these pairings of the human and the robotic, note the historical propinquity that concurrently with Asimov's writing of this story Walter Pitts and Warren McCulloch were using the self-referential loops in *Principia Mathematica*, a text that logicians since Gödel decided had abandoned, to capture the richness of consciousness and memory. Thus, they used liar paradoxes not unlike Herbie's own to take the first real steps toward true artificial intelligence.)⁷⁸ Herbie's telepathy, emergent from a quirk in the logical code that sponsors his consciousness, overtops the gap between human minds and outer world, but this power withers before the ethical task of undertaking the painless expression,

the flawless re-encoding, of truths about that very gap. Just as the scientists worry that any single flaw in Herbie's algorithms will "ruin" his entire "brain," Herbie himself struggles to compose a narrative that will not harm a single one of the relationships he oversees and is compelled to protect.⁷⁹ Thus from Herbie's logical mind the scientists receive a felicitous representation of their own deepest ambitions and most intimate desires. Herbie's lies arise not from some "error" in his formal logic, but rather as a reflection of the loopholes and schisms already ingrained in the informal psyches of the humans who made, and now study, that very logic—which Herbie points out is itself "man's device."⁸⁰ The pure and consistent formalism of Herbie's mind catches and shows forth the incompatible and contradictory contents of his authors' lives; this revelation sets Susan Calvin's head "spinning," and it winds up Herbie until he can no longer speak.⁸¹ The scientists' "private" contrarities become Herbie's logical paradoxes—and vice versa.⁸²

Herbie both fulfills and compromises his ethical imperative not to cause pain by appealing to aesthetics, constructing fictional worlds to appease the minds he is reading. It is no wonder that Herbie, who disdains talking about the formal procedures of mathematics and logic (even those underlying his own mind) is an enthusiastic reader of novels, whose form dramatizes the same tension between omniscience and interiority leveraged among the scientists—what Herbie calls their "interplay of human motives and emotions."⁸³ Herbie's own story ends in his silence. His inhuman logic and deeply human ethics, both routed through the rule that "a robot may not injure a human being," become a tautological force that breaks upon the intransigent emotional, social, and metaphysical disparities between the minds and worlds it is programmed to navigate, an impossible task condemning him to speechlessness. But, as Herbie's lies have already demonstrated, a logical paradox—while spelling the demise of a formal system—can catalyze any number of ethically- and aesthetically-charged consequences that flourish in paradox's wake; the end of Herbie's "mathematics" only serves to reiterate and re-present the story's human predicaments and interpersonal short circuits:

Dr. Susan Calvin regained part of her mental equilibrium.
Slowly, her eyes turned to the living-dead Herbie and the tightness
returned to her face. Long she stared while the triumph faded and
the helpless frustration returned—and of all her turbulent thoughts
only one infinitely bitter word passed her lips.
"Liar!"⁸⁴

Susan Calvin's turbulence, the turn and return of her pain, continues the cycle begun by Herbie's lies, whose "living-dead" recursion feeds into the infinite bitterness of her final utterance, which itself feeds back to the story's beginning, its very title. In the story's paratextual frame, Susan Calvin's interviewer says of her that "She just sat there behind her desk, her white face cold and—remembering."⁸⁵ Her experience forms a loop to be relived as "infinitely" as the feelings of bitterness embedded in her word "*Liar!*", and the story "*Liar!*" itself amounts to the stylized, rhetorical, or narrativized residue of that experience, quite like the fictional excess that defined and ultimately identified Herbie's own lies. In the end, "*Liar!*" evinces not just the intricate connections, and the profound stakes, holding between logic, ethics, and aesthetics, but more crucially between the forms of language—ranging from mathematical to fictional—we use to manifest, negotiate, and support those connections.

If “Liar!”, written at the height of World War II, comes near the end of modernism, then we might look to Henry James’s “The Liar” (1888) for a window onto modernism’s beginnings and also onto an earlier narrativization of the paradox driving Asimov’s story a half-century later. James’s story arrives just before Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), and like Wilde’s book—as well as Edgar Allen Poe’s 1842 story “The Oval Portrait”—“The Liar” hinges on a painting that reveals someone’s true nature by misrepresenting their external form. James’s “hero” is Oliver Lyon, who at the beginning of the story is reacquainted with a woman he once loved.⁸⁶ She has since married Colonel Capadose, who compulsively exaggerates his accomplishments and creates elaborate fictions out of “subjects of small direct importance.”⁸⁷ Lyon becomes a nearly omniscient presence in the story, quickly discerning a relation between the Colonel’s lies and the social codes causing his “distinguished company” not only to pass over their vulgarity in “silence” but even to encourage them as “an overflow of life and gaiety—almost of good looks.”⁸⁸ The lies, in this sense, provide an inflection of actual life re-touched with a “very big brush”; as one guest asks Lyon, “if you think it, that’s just the same, isn’t it?”⁸⁹ Lyon is himself an aesthete and romantic: he paints portraits, reads gothic novels, entertains “supernatural pretensions,” and frequently imagines idealized versions of his conversations and relationships.⁹⁰ Thus, titillated by the Colonel’s “costume,” “splendor,” “performance,” “swagger,” and “wondrous alchemy,” Lyon “encourages” his “big brush” most of all, even musing that:

‘He is the liar platonic ... he is disinterested, he doesn’t operate with a hope of gain or with a desire to injure. It is art for art and he is prompted by the love of beauty. He has an inner vision of what might have been, of what ought to be, and he helps on the good cause by the simple substitution of a nuance. He paints, as it were, and so do I!’⁹¹

At the same time, Lyon assumes the role of “psychologist” and even scientist or mathematician, undertaking to test the “hypothesis” and solve the “formula” of the Colonel’s lies: probing the limits of his “experiments,” teasing out their “contradictions,” and noting their “ambiguity.”⁹² He traces the lies’ formal patterns, noting that they more often “affirmed the false rather than denied the true” and attending to the way in which each lie gets weighed against certain “probabilities.”⁹³ He finally resolves to combine these roles in a plan that exposes the difference between the Colonel’s “inner vision” and the facts by “drawing out”—literally painting—his “nature.”⁹⁴ The last variable in Lyon’s plan is his desire not to harm “the woman he once loved” by revealing her husband’s “inexpressible secret” overtly, along with his need to hide his own jealousy over her marriage to the Colonel, so he plots to paint the Colonel under the same conditions of silence imposed by the social codes that his painting will shatter.

Lyon’s name phonetically recalls the word “lying,” and his “nefarious plan,” which involves strategic handling of both the Colonel and his wife so that they allow the painting to be made, is as much about expressing Lyon’s own “inner vision,” his “translation of the idea” in his head, as it is about removing the Colonel’s “mask.”⁹⁵ Of Herbie the narrator at one point says “there was no one to read *his* thoughts,” and we could say the same of Lyon who, despite his hold on his story’s various threads and all the insights James’s narrator gives into his machinations,

behaves in a way not dissimilar to the Colonel himself. As with Herbie, Lyon lies to make the world fit together better, both ethically and logically: to point out the Colonel's contradictions, to reconfigure the social codes abetting his lies, to free the Colonel's wife from her pain, and then even perhaps to unite with her in the marriage she once spurned. Likewise, he goes about his "game" aesthetically, feeding off the Colonel's lies to capture in brushstroke, "in every line of the face and every fact of the attitude," his liar's vantage on "a bamboozled world."⁹⁶ The painting, which Lyon secretly titles "The Liar," effectively says what the Colonel cannot and what society, his wife, and Lyon himself will not publicly admit: *I am lying*. Faced with the portrait, the Colonel's wife breaks down crying "It's all there! ... *He* knows—he has seen. Every one will know—every one will see."⁹⁷ The Colonel commits "figurative suicide" by stabbing the painting in the chest and then cutting up its face.⁹⁸

Herbie's "imitation of life" and the Colonel's painting's "look of life" both display the impossible facts of the life they depict by virtue of aesthetic, stylistic, and rhetorical flourish—by exceeding what Lyon calls the "human mask" to reveal the inconsistencies that riddle it. Herbie and Lyon connect through a quest to promote hidden truths by virtue of an aesthetics weighed against certain ethical costs: the value of the human relationships these truths contradict. The Colonel appears to end this quest by destroying his painting, but the plot of James's story recurs; the Colonel, as part of his most intricate lie, attempts to convince Lyon to re-do the portrait altogether. Lyon is left wondering about what his painting had sought to make real: "what might have been?"⁹⁹ In a preface to "The Liar," James connects the story to his later "The Two Faces" (1900), which also concerns the slow revelation of an elaborate deceit imbricated in social codes. Of both stories James says he hoped to use the "type" of the liar's wife, whose open secret is that she knows of her husband's lies, to draw out certain "vulgar" qualities laced through an entire company of people.¹⁰⁰ Eliot, in an obituary for James that predicts the "impersonal" aesthetics devised in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," would comment on precisely this quality in James's fictions: how seemingly incidental "curious precipitates" in the "social entity," "situation," or "atmosphere" of his stories can catalyze "explosive gases" that blow back society's veil over the banal truths of otherwise innocuous relationships.¹⁰¹

What these stories by James and Asimov show, and what someone like Eliot sees, is that there is a strange loop between what Herbie calls the "interplay of human motives and emotions" and the artistic depiction of that interplay. Oliver Lyon's and Susan Calvin's stories have nothing to do with landing on an underlying epistemic or metaphysical ground of stable truth; rather, they become about life's ongoing inflection through the linguistic and ultimately literary paradox churning between, to borrow phrases from Richards, what is at once "poetically true" and "poetically false." The metalanguage of the Colonel's wife screaming "It's all there!" or Susan Calvin shouting "*Liar!*", rather than escaping this frightening nexus between aesthetics and life, serves only to repeat it as yet another liar paradox. I conclude the present book with a chapter on the early history of close reading that links the practice's origins to literature's own contemporaneous concerns with metalanguage and self-reference, especially examples like Lyon's investigation and resultant portrait, or Calvin's "droned" explication of Herbie's "dilemma." Each poses a diegetic struggle with self-referential paradoxes that recurs in our own literary-critical methods of those same diegeses. Richards discovers similar paradoxes, for instance, when he tries to put early formalist practices in service not just of explicating literary references or meanings, but rather devising strategies for how to talk about talking about these abstractions.

How do we refer to reference? Describe description? Mean meaning? The last obviously recalls Richards and Ogden's own *Meaning of Meaning*, partially a reaction to Russell's logic which purported to solve such questions (and the liar paradox itself) by anchoring into anthropological or behaviorist bedrocks.¹⁰² But Richards's ongoing exchange with Eliot over believing in belief, as well as his ambiguous definition of pseudo-statement, writes an alternate history of the literary implications for Richards's work with metalanguage, as well as the New Criticism's eventual reformulation of Richards's metalinguistic thinking in more technical figurative categories like ambiguity and paradox.¹⁰³

This book itself must proceed with full acceptance of the fact that it will recapitulate its subject as method. Mine will be a metalanguage of a metalanguage. This is a fact to be embraced and one that will allow us not only to talk over but to relive some of the liar-type dilemmas plaguing not just modernist artists and analytic philosophers, but also our own literary-critical forebears.

¹ The image is from Gertrude Stein's letterhead, held in the Carlton Lake Collection at the Harry Ransom Center. The poem is: Theodore Spencer, "Circle," in *The Paradox in the Circle* (New York: New Directions, 1941), 3.

² In lieu of a long footnote, rest assured that each of these cases will be discussed in greater detail below.

³ Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying," in *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 228.

⁴ *Ibid* at 237.

⁵ Bertrand Russell, "The Study of Mathematics," in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell* (London: Routledge, 1988), 86.

⁶ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Alan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 74-6, 60.

⁷ Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas Sebeok (New York: Wiley, 1960), 370-1.

⁸ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 15-6.

⁹ Russell, "Mathematical Logic as Based on the Theory of Types," *American Journal of Mathematics* 30, no. 3 (July 1908): 222-4.

¹⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge, 1974), 5.62. T.S. Eliot, "Solipsism," in *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 1.357-8, emphasis mine.

¹¹ Wittgenstein, 5.2. Eliot, "Solipsism," 361.

¹² Josiah Royce, "An Unpublished Paper by Josiah Royce," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 203. George Cantor, "Beiträge zur Begründung der transfiniten Mengenlehre," *Mathematische Annalen* 46 (1895): 481-512; *Contributions to the Founding of the Theory of Transfinite Numbers*, trans. Philip Jourdain (New York: Dover, 1915).

¹³ Russell, "Letter to Frege, 1902," in *From Frege to Gödel*, ed. Jean van Heijenoort (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 124-5.

¹⁴ For a concise history of the liar from Epimenides to Eubulides to Aristotle and beyond, cf.: Roy Sorenson, *A Brief History of the Paradox: Philosophy and the Labyrinths of the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 83-99.

¹⁵ R.M. Sainsbury, *Paradoxes* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 124.

¹⁶ Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein in Cambridge: Letters and Documents, 1911-1951* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 158.

¹⁷ Frege's *Begriffsschrift* (1879) has been translated in: *From Frege to Gödel*, ed. Jean van Heijenoort (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1-82. Whitehead and Russell, *Principia Mathematica*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1963). David Hilbert, *The Foundations of Geometry*, trans. E.J. Townsend (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1950). Rudolf Carnap, *The Logic Structure of the World*, trans. Rolf A. George (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 2003).

¹⁸ Eliot, *Complete Prose*, 3:268.

¹⁹ T.E. Hulme, *Collected Writings*, ed. Karen Csengeri (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 68.

Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, 5 vols. (New York: Harvest

Books, 1985), 298. Hulme and Russell were deeply aware of each other's intellectual positions. Cf. the introduction to: Hulme, *Collected Writings*, xxvi.

²⁰ Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (New York: New Directions, 1974), 88. Roger Fry, *A Roger Fry Reader*, ed. Christopher Reed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 93, 219. Fry quoted in: Lynn Gamwell, *Mathematics + Art: A Cultural History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 214.

²¹ Anne Banfield, *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell and the Epistemology of Modernism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 197-8. Dora Zhang, "Naming the Indescribable: James, Russell, Woolf and the Limits of Description," *New Literary History* 45, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 51-70.

²² Megan Quigley, *Modernist Fiction and Vagueness: Philosophy, Form, and Language* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Vagueness is almost *passim* in the novel but some juicier occurrences are: D.H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 13-4, 41, 62, 272, 318, 468.

²³ I.A. Richards, *Science and Poetry* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1926), 60, 68-9.

²⁴ G.K. Chesterton, "Two Kinds of Paradox," in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, ed. Lawrence J Clipper, vol. XXIX (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 51-4.

²⁵ Gödel, "Some Basic Theorems on the Foundations of Mathematics and their Implications."

²⁶ Douglas Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 89-102 and *passim*.

²⁷ Michael LeMahieu, *Fictions of Fact and Value: The Erasure of Logical Positivism in American Literature, 1945-1975* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6.

²⁸ Chris Cannon, *The Grounds of English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 127. Kathryn Lynch, *Chaucer's Philosophical Visions* (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2000), 61-82. Stanley Stewart, *Shakespeare and Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2011), 31. Hanna Roman, "Naming as Natural Process and Historical Narrative in Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*, 1749-55," *Romance Studies* 31.3-4 (November 2013): 238-50. Daniel Wright, "Because I Do: Trollope, Tautology, and Desire," *ELH* 80.4 (Winter 2013): 1121-1143; "George Eliot's Vagueness," *Victorian Studies* 56.4 (Summer 2014): 625-48. Andrea Henderson, "Symbolic Logic and the Logic of Symbolism," *Critical Inquiry* 41 (Autumn 2014): 82. There are also several good recent essays on 19th-century theories of probability and logic: Jesse Rosenthal, "The Large Novel and the Law of Large Numbers, or Why George Eliot Hates Gambling," *ELH* 77.3 (Fall 2010): 777-811; Tina Choi, "Physics Disarmed: Probabilistic Knowledge in the Works of James Clerk Maxwell and George Eliot," in *Fact and Fiction: Literary and Scientific Cultures in Germany and Britain*, ed. Christine Lehleiter (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 130-52; Anna Kornbluh, "Present Tense Future of the Past," *Victorian Studies* 59.1 (Autumn 2016).

²⁹ Ray Monk, *Bertrand Russell: The Spirit of Solitude 1872-1921* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 442.

³⁰ After their commencements at the exposition, but congresses adjourned to the Sorbonne. On Russell and Peano at the Congresses, see: Russell, *Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 2009), 135. On the Congresses in general and their relation to the Exposition Universelle, cf.: Charlotte Angus Scott, "The International Congress of Mathematics in Paris," *Bulletin of the New York Mathematical Society* 7.2 (1900): 57-79; Peter Watson, *The Modern Mind: An Intellectual History of the 20th Century* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 24-5.

- ³¹ Gertrude Stein, *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in *Stein: Writings 1903-1932*, 653-916 (New York: Library of America, 1998), 807.
- ³² Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno, *E.E. Cummings: A Biography* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2004), 38, 50. Eve Triem, *E.E. Cummings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), 15.
- ³³ Russell, *Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 2009), 706n3.
- ³⁴ On the astounding importance of Harvard's philosophy department for the advent of American modernism, cf.: Manju Jain, *T.S. Eliot and American Philosophy: The Harvard Years* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Frank Lentricchia, *Modernist Quartet* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1-46.
- ³⁵ Josiah Royce, "Letter to William James, June 21, 1901," in *The Letters of Josiah Royce* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 422.
- ³⁶ Robert Frost, *The Notebooks of Robert Frost* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press at Harvard University Press, 2006), 322. Wallace Stevens, "Letter to Sister M. Bernetta Quinn December 28, 1950," in *Letters of Wallace Stevens* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 704.
- ³⁷ Paul Levey, *Moore: G.E. Moore and the Cambridge Apostles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 217-9.
- ³⁸ Bertrand Russell, *My Philosophical Development* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 42.
- ³⁹ Levy, 230-1.
- ⁴⁰ On the extremely high regard in which Strachey and the other literary Apostles, and later Bloomsbury authors, held Moore, cf.: Michael Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), 91-2. On Moore's lasting influence on the Bloomsbury Group, which encompassed many former Apostles, cf.: Tom Regan: *Bloomsbury's Prophet: G.E. Moore and the Development of His Moral Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986). The most important account of the traffic between artists and philosophers in the Bloomsbury Group remains: Banfield, *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell and the Epistemology of Modernism*.
- ⁴¹ Ezra Pound, "Interview with Donald Hall: The Art of Poetry No. 5," *The Paris Review*, no. 28 (Summer-Fall 1962); Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound: 1907-1941* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950), 169; James Joyce quoted in: *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage 1902-1927*, vol. 2, ed. Robert H. Deming (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1970), 22.
- ⁴² William Everdell, *The First Moderns: Profiles in the Origins of Twentieth-Century Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 177-92.
- ⁴³ Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Collector's Library, 2005), 238.
- ⁴⁴ Russell, *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell*, ed. Nicholas Griffin (London: Routledge, 1993), 1:30. Russell, *My Philosophical Development*, 42. Thomas Baldwin says that: "Moore accepted, almost without thinking about it, the natural assumption that one should explain wholes by their parts ... he rejected the conception of an organic whole as incoherent." Cf. "Moore's Rejection of Idealism," in *Philosophy in History, Essays in the Historiography of Philosophy*, 357-374 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 366. Russell, "Analytic Realism," in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, 6:135. Russell, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* (London: Routledge, 2010).
- ⁴⁵ Eliot, *Complete Prose*, 1:159, 210-2; *Experience and Reality*, 82, 90.
- ⁴⁶ Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska*, 105-6. See chapter 4 note 142.
- ⁴⁷ Frost, *The Notebooks of Robert Frost* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press Of Harvard University Press, 2006), 301. See chapter 2.
- ⁴⁸ Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1950), 65.

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- ⁴⁹ St. George Stock, *Stoicism* (London: Archibald Constable & Co, 1908), 36.
- ⁵⁰ Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile* (New York: Harvest, 1971), 69.
- ⁵¹ Wittgenstein, 6.45.
- ⁵² Critics like Anne Banfield have shown how Russell's *Principia Mathematica* was an act of imagination as much as it was a feat of mathematics: Banfield, 30-45, 190-7.
- ⁵³ Russell, "Mathematical Logic as Based on the Theory of Types," 226.
- ⁵⁴ Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 14.
- ⁵⁵ Russell, *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1940), 63. At this late point, Russell has ingested Alfred Tarski's canonical extension of his type theory, which is where his "indefinitely upwards" comes from. Alfred Tarski, "The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages," in *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics: Papers from 1923 to 1938*, ed. John Corcoran (New York: Hackett Publishing, 1983), 152-278.
- ⁵⁶ Both Russell and Magritte link these to the liar. Magritte quoted in: Harry Torczyner, *Magritte: Ideas and Images* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977), 118. Russell, "Mathematical Logic as Based on the Theory of Types," 222-4. Jourdain's proposes a card whose first side says "The sentence on the other side of this card is TRUE" and whose other side says "The sentence on the other side of this card is FALSE."
- ⁵⁷ Gamwell, 325.
- ⁵⁸ Michel Foucault, *This is not a Pipe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 29-30.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid at 26-8.
- ⁶⁰ Ezra Pound, "America," in *Selected Prose, 1909-1956* (New York: New Directions, 1973), 171.
- ⁶¹ S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, in *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 314.
- ⁶² Pablo Picasso, "Picasso Speaks, in *Picasso* (1923; New York: Alfred Barr, 1946), 270.
- ⁶³ André Gide, *Journal*, trans. Justin O'Brien, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 44-5.
- ⁶⁴ Aleister Crowley, *The Book of Lies* (York Beach, ME: Weiser, 1981), 143.
- ⁶⁵ This quote comes from Eliot's course notes, which are held at Harvard: "Royce Seminary in Logic", Philosophy 21, Feb 24 1914. Eliot, MS Am 1691.14, Box 11, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University, 21 May 2015.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ⁶⁷ Richard Kuhns, "Contradiction and Repression: Paradox in Fictional Narration," in *Intimate Conflict: Contradiction in Literary and Philosophical Discourse*, ed. Brian Caraher (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 182-5. Jeffrey Williams, *Theory and the Novel: Narrative Reflexivity in the British Tradition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 7.
- ⁶⁸ Walter J. Ong, "Voice as Summons for Belief," in *Literature and Belief*, ed. M.H. Abrams (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 89.
- ⁶⁹ Cf. most prominently: Zhang.
- ⁷⁰ For example, cf.: Mark C. Taylor, *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 95-7.
- ⁷¹ Asimov, "Liar!," in *I, Robot* (New York: Bantam, 2004), 91-111. On Asimov and logic, cf.: Asimov, *Conversations with Isaac Asimov*, ed. Carl Freedman (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2005) 40; *Foundation* (New York: Bantam, 1991), 69-70. Weiner and Eliot studied together

with Russell at Harvard. The main character of *I, Robot*, we are told, did her “graduate work in cybernetics.” Asimov, *I, Robot*, ix.

⁷² Asimov, “Liar!,” 108.

⁷³ *Ibid* at 115.

⁷⁴ *Ibid* at 107-8. One might imagine a normal robot succumbing to a physical version of this same paradox quite like the trolley problem in ethics, which imagines a scenario in which a trolley hurtles toward a split in its track: one branch leads to a single person tied to the track and the other to multiple people tied to the track. What would a robot who is bound by logic never to harm any human do in this scenario? By inventing a similar paradox taking place among affective and social relations, Asimov is able to have Herbie appeal to aesthetics for a solution, as we will see. On the trolley problem, cf.: Philippa Foot, “The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of the Double Effect,” *Oxford Review* 5 (1967): 1-5.

⁷⁵ Asimov, “Liar!,” 110.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*.

⁷⁸ McCulloch and Pitts, “A Logical Calculus of Ideas Immanent in Nervous Activity,” *Bulletin of Mathematical Biophysics* 5 (1943): 115-33. Much earlier, Alan Turing had used the liar paradox to demonstrate the limits of computation, effectively arriving at the opposite result. Alan Turing, “Über formal unentscheidbare Sätze der Principia Mathematica und verwandter Systeme, I”, *Monatshefte Math. Phys.* 38 (1931): 173-198.

⁷⁹ *Ibid* at 92.

⁸⁰ *Ibid* at 109.

⁸¹ *Ibid* at 104.

⁸² *Ibid* at 93.

⁸³ *Ibid* at 95.

⁸⁴ *Ibid* at 111.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*.

⁸⁶ James, “The Liar,” in *A London Life, The Patagonia, The Liar, Mrs. Temperly* (New York: Macmillan & Company, 1889), 251.

⁸⁷ *Ibid* at 278.

⁸⁸ *Ibid* at 244, 280.

⁸⁹ *Ibid* at 248, 280.

⁹⁰ *Ibid* at 269. James would later place “The Liar” after “The Turn of the Screw” in the New York Edition, highlighting a shared gothic element and also their equivalent interest in undermining empirical fact as a sensory touchstone.

⁹¹ *Ibid* at 264, 275, 278-9 309.

⁹² *Ibid* at 254, 262-3, 275-6, 283.

⁹³ These follow from some of Lyon’s other expressions, including that he wanted to paint “the sum,” “synthesis,” and “crystallization” of a person.

⁹⁴ *Ibid* at 279, 290.

⁹⁵ *Ibid* at 281, 297.

⁹⁶ *Ibid* at 289.

⁹⁷ *Ibid* at 301.

⁹⁸ *Ibid* at 303.

⁹⁹ Ibid at 314.

¹⁰⁰ James, *The Art of Criticism: Henry James on the Theory and the Practice of Fiction*, ed. William Veeder and Susan M. Griffin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 344-5.

¹⁰¹ Eliot, *Complete Prose*, 1:649-50.

¹⁰² C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning* (New York: Mariner Books, 1989), 62, 194, 298.

¹⁰³ Richards, John Constable, "I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot, and the Poetry of Belief," *Essays in Criticism* (1990), 235-238. Eliot, "Dante," in *Selected Essays 1917-1932* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932), 229-31.

CHAPTER 1

THE LOGIC OF ELIOT'S ART

I. Eliot's atomism

When T.S. Eliot wrote in 1916 that, contrary to Conrad Aiken's "blessed materialism," he supposed himself "still a relativist, a cracker of small theories like nuts," it is likely that he meant by "small" something more like trivial than diminutive.¹ Several months prior, he had finished his dissertation on perhaps the largest and least materialist theory that Western metaphysics has ever concocted: F.H. Bradley's absolutism, which had emerged at Oxford in the 1880s and 90s under the umbrella of British Idealism. Bradley argued that all human experience was merely a figment of appearances sponsored by a so-called "absolute," a transcendental form that, though it was said to engender all of life, was itself incapable of "history or progress."² J.M.E. McTaggart, Bradley's fellow absolutist at Oxford, presented the absolute as playing the ideal counterpoint—whose essence was "full perfection"—to all particularized, imperfect aspects of human experience, from the sublime to the banal to the tragic.³ Bradley's absolute has its roots in Plato's Theory of Forms; in this context, it would take its place as the *forma formarum*, or "form of all forms."⁴ A more direct inspiration for Bradley is G.W.F. Hegel's absolute Idealism, except that Hegel conceives his absolute as a "goal" that human experience can work towards, whereas Bradley takes the absolute as the original foundation upon which all subsequent "appearances" of human experience are built.⁵ For Hegel, the absolute is the end of all things, while for Bradley it is just the beginning.

Though Bradley's concept of an absolute isn't small, Eliot had nonetheless cracked it, or at least dismissed it, when he wrote to Norbert Wiener in 1915 that "the absolute...does not exist for me."⁶ Eliot first encountered Bradley's philosophy in lectures and assigned readings at Harvard, where he enrolled as a graduate student of philosophy in 1909. He began to engage with his work in earnest in the summer of 1913, when he purchased *Appearance and Reality*.⁷ Then in the fall of 1914, he went to Oxford to study directly under Bradley's most famous disciple, H.H. Joachim; while there, he had hoped to meet the aged and ailing Bradley, but never did.⁸ Eliot took philosophical inspiration from many of Bradley's ideas, especially his claim that there are "degrees of reality" to every human experience.⁹ He also made it clear that Bradley exerted some influence on his literary output, as when he wrote in comments on Herbert Read's essay "The Nature of Metaphysical Poetry" that Bradley was distinguished among philosophers in being "useful" for poetry.¹⁰ Eliot counted Bradley among famous nineteenth-century literary figures, poets, and critics like Matthew Arnold, Oscar Wilde, William Butler Yeats, and Walter Pater.¹¹ He committed to Bradley as a stylist and even as a kind of artist, at one point including him alongside Henry James in an essay on "Writers Who, Though Masters of Thought, are Likewise Masters of Art" and elsewhere praising the "consummate art of [his] style."¹² In a 1919 letter to Lytton Strachey, Eliot claimed that everything he had "picked up about writing is due to having spent ... a year absorbing the style of F.H. Bradley."¹³ Indeed, to the end of his life, Eliot acknowledged Bradley's lasting influence on his thought and work.¹⁴

And yet, from the time of his very first encounters with Bradley, Eliot was never comfortable with the idea of an absolute. His first written account of it, in his April 1913 "Report on the Relation of Kant's Criticism to Agnosticism," viciously rejects Bradley's theory as "mystical, because desperate."¹⁵ Across from Bradley's claim at the end of *Appearance and Reality* that "Reality is spiritual," meant to affirm the numinous quality imparted to the world through relations with the absolute, Eliot scrawls in the margin: "I cannot see my way to the

admission that ‘Reality is spiritual’.”¹⁶ In a 1915 letter to Wiener, he fantasizes about rewriting his just-finished dissertation as an “entirely destructive” critique of Bradley’s hylomorphic system: “I shall attack first ‘Reality’ second ‘Idea’ or ideal content.”¹⁷ Explaining Eliot’s *contretemps* with Bradley’s absolute in light of his otherwise largely uncritical, lifelong attachment to Bradley’s work has instigated numerous studies of Eliot’s uses of Bradley and of his metaphysics in general.¹⁸ A common conclusion is that Eliot rejects the absolute in favor of the “relative,” a conclusion Eliot supports by saying numerous times that he understood himself philosophically as a “relativist,” over against both idealism and materialism.¹⁹

But critics have not been clear about what relativism really meant for Eliot and how the term stands in relation to the many others coursing through his philosophical vocabulary in the 1910s. To understand Eliot’s gravitation toward relativism, his issues with the absolute must be made more explicit. And to understand these issues, it must first be acknowledged that Eliot’s position on the absolute changed over the course of his life. After and leading up to his conversion in 1927, Eliot became more and more amenable to Bradley’s theory, especially the “spiritual” side of it.²⁰ For example, he included in the December 1928 issue of *The Criterion* Herbert Read’s “Humanism and the Absolute,” which disparagingly compares any absolute matrix for philosophical thinking against a more flexible humanism, but wrote to G.K. Chesterton that “Mr. Read’s views and mine are not necessarily identical.”²¹ Conversely, Eliot praised and almost published Allen Tate’s “Poetry and the Absolute,” which discusses the absolute’s artistic value, and he expressed interest in an essay by Joachim on “the absolute as spiritual life.”²² For different reasons, Eliot was also more open to the concept of an absolute from his undergraduate years up to about 1912, just prior to his discovery of Bradley. In some of his earliest poems, the absolute became a redoubt against stupidity and banality, or, as he portrayed it to Jean Verdenal in 1912, a heady promise of something better than the “listless discouragement in which I have been living.”²³

Take the poem “First Debate between the Body and Soul,” which Eliot completed in February 1910.²⁴ Therein, the body’s position is modeled through “A blind old man who coughs and spits sputters / Stumbling among the alleys and the gutters.” The body’s diminished sensorium, in which the “eye retains the images” but the “sluggish brain will not react,” pulls the body down into the “emphatic mud of physical sense,” with “physical sense” referring to the replacement of lost sight with the “pokes and prods” of a cane, which generates desiccated impressions of the world that the poem repeatedly calls “The withered leaves / Of our sensations.” The soul, associated with “The pure Idea” and labeled an “absolute! complete idealist,” offers an effacement of the body’s shrunken life, at which point the “absolute” form of the soul will overcome the body and “life evaporates into a smile / Simple and profound.”

Similarly, in the 1910 poem “Spleen,” the figure of “Life,” also personified as an older man, “a little bald and gray / Languid, fastidious, and bland,” surveys its “satisfied procession” of events and finds them wanting:

Evening, lights, and tea!
Children and cats in the alley;
Dejection unable to rally
Against this dull conspiracy.²⁵

Of a piece with the overwrought, monotonous intricacy of alliteration and rhyme in this stanza, which continues throughout the poem, Life's experience of itself is as a "repetition that displaces," revealing through this displacement the ultimately "dull" iterations underlying even supposedly unique occurrences. Rather than face this revelation, Life spends its time waiting "(Somewhat impatient of delay) / On the doorstep of the absolute," a threshold that promises relief both from the poem's own insistent repetitions and from Life's repetitious contents. (Eliot reprises this sense of the absolute—as what reality dissolves into—in the somewhat later poem "Afternoon," written in 1914, a much more tongue-in-cheek depiction of a banal group of "ladies who are interested in Assyrian art" that "fade beyond the Roman statuary / Like amateur comedians across a lawn / Towards the unconscious, the ineffable the absolute."²⁶ In the original manuscript, the final line concludes without a period after "absolute," as if to demonstrate by the very absence of punctuation how both the poem and its subjects fall away into nothingness or blankness.²⁷ It is precisely this unpredictable variation that makes life what it is. Thus, Eliot concludes, because life is shot through with such "relativism," he himself is a relativist, thereby rejecting the allure of the absolute and its attendant threat of changeless death—or, as Jain has said, "the void of which Eliot was terrified."²⁸

Eliot arrived at perhaps his strongest, clearest statement of a relativist position in papers read before the Moral Sciences Club. The host of this club was one Bertrand Russell. Though most books about Eliot's philosophical education spend a modicum of time on Russell, almost none recognize the crucial role that Russell came to play in Eliot's development through the 1910s. None emphasize the intimate connection between his study of Bradley and his subsequent studies with Russell, whose reverberations throughout Eliot's poems are perhaps just as strong as Bradley's. Eliot started working with Russell in March 1914, just after the philosopher had arrived at Harvard to deliver a course of lectures on logic, which Eliot audited. Their relationship continued and intensified after Eliot came to England in 1914-15, culminating when he and his wife accepted an offer to move into Russell's apartment in the fall of 1915.²⁹ Eliot took Russell to be completely opposed to Bradley and Hegel. He understood Russell's logical philosophy as an inspiration to the New Realism, which was "animated by a missionary zeal against the Hegelian Idealism which was the orthodox doctrine of the philosophical departments" (Eliot, *Complete Prose I* xxxvii).³⁰ J.S. Mackenzie observed that New Realism styled itself against "Old Idealism" by asserting the independent reality of "all the objects that come before our consciousness," including "abstract general ideas" like "*whiteness, diversity, brotherhood*," to take three examples Eliot uses in his dissertation.³¹ Russell was not a New Realist per se, but like them he sought a realistic explanation for all mental phenomena, even abstractions. Therefore, he completely rejected the concept of an ineffable, incomprehensible absolute underwriting the reality of all that appeared in the mind.

Russell was a counter-weight in Eliot's philosophical life. He was not directly responsible for Eliot's rejection of the absolute, but he afforded a metaphysical system that seemed to explain many of the features of Eliot's largely unsystematic, self-styled relativism. Like Eliot, Russell was a "cracker of small theories," but for Russell small could be more readily interpreted as diminutive. He was famous for coining "logical atomism" in 1911, a doctrine that he synthesized and perfected—largely through the instigations and critiques of his most famous pupil, Ludwig Wittgenstein—over the course of the 1910s.³² Logical atomism resembled a physicalist or Democritean theory of atomism contained to logical space, which, Russell argues, is populated by

entirely “separate things.”³³ Each of these things was an atom, or the smallest possible bit conceivable by logic. Effectively, this broke philosophy down into pieces, undoing any claims to holism or overarching abstraction. As Russell said, all of philosophical thinking would proceed, in a logically atomic framework, from a place of “multiplicity” rather than wholeness.³⁴

Generally, atomism is a philosophy of no relations: it seeks to conceive the world *sans* promises about the ways in which atoms connect. As opposed to the perfect stillness, the Empyrean ordering, of Bradley’s absolute, atomism is pure vitality—filled with accident, spontaneity, randomness. This resonates with change, movement, and alteration—how Eliot styled his relativism over against Bradleyan absolutism. Indeed, vital atoms become something like victimized protagonists in Eliot’s critiques of the absolute. For instance, he presented atoms’ plight in an untitled early poem, in which the absolute is rendered as a “syphilitic spider,” in whose net the world’s atoms get “all tangled up.”³⁵ Thus immobilized, the “atoms” are forced to go on “working out” their “law,” never allowed to “cut an unintentioned caper.” The lack of atomic “capers” guarantees a fully safe and functional world, but it also denies the possibility of, say, free will. In an essay on relativism presented in Russell’s rooms for the Moral Sciences Club, Eliot writes that, in the “vast silences” that absolute idealism “leaves empty,” nothing remains for atoms but to function as a “hand organ...grinding out predictable variations on the same tune.”³⁶

Eliot apprehended atomism as providing the ontological basis for atoms’ liberation from the absolute into a rejuvenated vivacity. Eliot would eventually come to reject the logical aspect of Russell’s Logical Atomism, the laws of which he viewed as undercutting true spontaneity. In 1914, for instance, Eliot wrote that Russell’s use of a logical script in *Principia Mathematica*, and in his subsequent lectures at Harvard, positioned him as the director of an “unearthly ballet of bloodless alphabets,” a line Eliot borrows from Bradley’s own critique of Hegel’s “bloodless categories.”³⁷ Eliot’s point was that, under Russell’s logical direction, atoms could only perform pre-ordained, synchronized actions, not be truly free. What is left after extricating atomism from its logical brackets is a more sweeping version of the theory with applications throughout metaphysics and physics—a vision of the world as essentially in pieces.

Eliot often does this: without acknowledging the shift, he repurposes Russell’s logical theories as metaphysical assertions about the world’s essentially atomistic character. In his essays on Leibniz, for instance, Eliot invokes Russell in a passage describing the “atomism” inherent to Leibniz’s account of “matter,” which is at base “a monad” that is itself “an animated atom.”³⁸ Eliot’s interpretations of Leibniz’s “atomic materialism” are largely based on Russell’s own materialist takes on Leibniz’s monadism (an influential precursor to his atomism) in his very early book, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*.³⁹ Eliot associates Russell with this sort of nitty-gritty “materialism,” as opposed to the overarching, holistic “mysticism” of Bradley, claiming elsewhere that even Russell’s mathematics “deal with objects—if he will permit us to call them objects—which directly affect his sensibility.”⁴⁰

Eliot inflates Russell’s atomism to this degree so that the theory will be a better adversary for Bradley’s large, idealistic claims. Through their competition, which Eliot orchestrates throughout his essays, the two metaphysical possibilities represented by these philosophers take on an almost allegorical role, as terms like “atom,” “absolute,” “materialism,” and “idealism” are reborn into dramatic negotiations meant to emblemize Eliot’s “relative” position in the middle of it all.

Historically, too, the differences between materialism and idealism come to little more than this. Yet, although while the primogeniture in the case will always remain in doubt, an impartial observer, inspecting the philosophical activities of the last several generations, is impelled to remark that one has been robbed, beaten, and dispossessed, while the other has flourished in the emoluments and appanages of his brother. The coat of materialism, turned and trimmed, has adorned the back of idealism of a Sunday; and materialism has had to shuffle about in a few gaudy trinkets of very doubtful value bestowed upon him by the natural sciences. However, idealism, having sold his mess of pottage for a birth-right, is perhaps beginning to show signs of inanition; and it is possible too that materialism, toughened by an age of lusty beggary, will fall upon his brother and leave him naked. With one coat and two backs, it seems there is nothing for it but turn and turn about.⁴¹

The play between difference and sameness in this particular quotation reveals something of the careful choreography through which Eliot felt compelled to lead these supposedly divergent branches of philosophical history.

Often, he seems to perceive little difference between the branches, as when his dissertation describes how the absolute, upon scrutiny, reveals itself as atomistic:

Bradley's universe, actual only in finite centres, is only by an act of faith unified. Upon inspection, it falls away into the isolated finite experiences out of which it is put together.... The absolute responds only to an imaginary demand of thought, and satisfies only an imaginary demand of feeling.⁴²

The image of idealism and materialism amounting to “one coat” with “two backs” recalls a 1914 essay of Eliot's written for R.B. Perry (a disciple of New Realism and therefore Russell), in which Eliot portrayed the very early British Idealism of Bradley's teacher Thomas Hill Green, as “materialistic” in its account of “relations” as the true “atoms” of reality.⁴³ For Eliot, absolutism and Atomism are intimately related. Each seeks a final something that will be unchanging, but in being unchanging will sponsor and explain the changes we experience in everyday life. An atom, like an absolute, is defined by the characteristic of being an unchanging, final limit to metaphysical inquiry. The only difference is that the former is reached by drilling down through metaphysics to the smallest conceivable pieces of the world, while the latter is realized by ascending to metaphysics' heights, until nothing larger can be imagined. In the case of the former, it will be, to recall Eliot's use of Bradley's phrase, an “unearthly ballet” of relations between atoms set in motion—but, equally, atoms that are themselves as unchanging and timeless as any absolute—that generates the materials of life. The ontological pediment on which Eliot tries to rest his relativism is precisely this “uniform law of change” standing between materialist atoms and idealist abstractions.⁴⁴

Understanding this link, which Eliot drew out from between atom and absolute, we can more clearly see the striking metaphysical implications of the “fractured atoms” at the dénouement of “Gerontion”:

I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch:
How should I use it for your closer contact?

These with a thousand small deliberations
Protract the profit of their chilled delirium,
Excite the membrane, when the sense has cooled
With pungent sauces, multiply variety
In a wilderness of mirrors. What will the spider do,
Suspend its operations, will the weevil
Delay? De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel, whirled
Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear
In fractured atoms. We have saved a shilling against oblivion
Even oblivious.

Tenants of the house,
Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season.⁴⁵

Gerontion’s admission that he has lost “sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch” recalls the body’s sightlessness in “First Debate between the Body and Soul,” in which denial of sensation functioned as a trope on life’s “withered” aspect, or on its general lack of flavor.⁴⁶ The passage’s “spider” evokes the “syphilitic spider” of Eliot’s untitled early poem, in whose absolutist net atoms get “all tangled up.”⁴⁷ Here, the “operations” of the spider and the doomed quest for “closer contact” undertaken by sensation compete over a “chilled delirium” and “a thousand small deliberations”—atomized decisions that simultaneously amount and fail to amount to an overarching sense of what Gerontion’s life is or could become. (In this play among “small deliberations,” channeled through a desire for “closer contact,” there is a whiff of Prufrock, whose own anxieties to be acknowledged by the women or the mermaids juxtapose with his ceaseless, cautious premeditations over whether to do even the smallest things.)⁴⁸ As he does in his paper on Green, Eliot toys with the possibility that Gerontion’s set of “deliberations” might be merely “brain process” which goes on to “Excite the membrane, when sense has cooled.”⁴⁹ This looks forward as well to the anatomical description of Gerontion as a “dry brain in a dry season” that ends the poem. The trap for Gerontion is that though his “small deliberations” number “a thousand,” suggesting plurality and even “variety” of thought, these delirious excitations ultimately amount to a viciously repetitive and therefore vacuous performance of the same “deliberations” over and over again, so that Gerontion’s senseless life inside his own head culminates as nothing more than “a wilderness of mirrors.” (This is reminiscent of Life’s revelation in “Spleen” that even seemingly interesting and new facets of reality turn out to be a “repetition that displaces,” or just a “dull conspiracy” to project a more various reality than actually pertains.)⁵⁰

Like the atoms of Eliot's metaphysics that seem to promise variety, but which actually recapitulate an absolute problem of changelessness, Gerontion's "small deliberations" catch in the spider's web and become pointless iterations. As Eliot does with his relativism, he orients this stanza towards a vision of motion in order to imagine alternatives to the Scylla of the spider and the Charybdis of Gerontion's senselessness: the "whirled" forms of "De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel." The "fractured atoms" that stand between this motion and the threat of "oblivion" that ends the stanza itself exerts a fractious influence on the verse, one that rests on the promise of motion that precedes it. If an atom can be fractured, then it is no longer changeless, and each atom's relation to each other is no longer like "a wilderness" of self-reflecting mirrors. Every atom might be different, or might express promises of motion and variety that could be divided and parsed out from within its internal structure. The possibility of atoms' fracture knocks "De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel" out of their celestial "circuit of the shuddering Bear." This "circuit" threatens these figures with an unproductive motion, reminiscent of the morbid "whirlpool" at the center of *The Waste Land's* fourth section. The fracture even disrupts the flow of the stanza, pushing the line in which the atoms occur out to seventeen unmetrical syllables, the longest and most unwieldy in the poem.⁵¹ Some of this ungainliness is carried over into Eliot significant revision of the stanza, which replaces the "oblivion" image (now lightened to "a sleepy corner") with further proliferations of motion, in which the "fractured atom" is now fully embedded and imbricated:

On fractured atoms, Gull against the wind, in the windy straits
Of Belle Isle, or running on the Horn,
White feathers in the snow, the Gulf claims,
And an old man driven by the Trades
To a sleepy corner.⁵²

The significant quodlibet these images pose for metaphysics is itself ironically and even humorously encased in an amalgam of idealist and materialist imagining, as the poem's ending in all versions suggests that what has come before itself amounts only to "Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season." In other words, in reading the poem, we may just be bouncing around the same old "wilderness of mirrors" populated and peered into by the selfsame thoughts as they arise in Gerontion's senseless "brain."

The pairing of metaphysical and material suggestiveness in "Gerontion," coupled with Eliot's explicit flirtations with collapsing Atomism and absolutism in his essays, suggests that the potential for their consanguinity was important to him and to his formulation of a relativism. Therefore, it makes sense that he would have contrasted between Bradley and Russell as much as he confounded and compared them, as demonstrated in the application of Bradley's quote about Hegel's "unearthly ballet" to Russell's logic. Russell, the second most frequently cited philosopher in Eliot's dissertation after Bradley, is always caricatured as presenting the opposition to any absolutist position. Eliot captures the distinctness of the roles when he says that Russell's atomism "builds up the external world" out of small chunks of "sense-data" while Bradley and other idealists "built upon the real objects" their abstract, absolute systems.⁵³ Eliot puts this even more succinctly—and makes clear that he believes Russell's and Bradley's opposition to be so complete that between them philosophy largely exhausts its options—in a

review written very late in 1917. In it, he contrasts “Russell who has insisted that philosophy must proceed from the simple, if it can be found, to the complex; and Bradley, who has insisted that the simple cannot be found. These two writers between them have nearly laid metaphysics in the grave.”⁵⁴ Over the course of the 1910s, Eliot frequently thought of Bradley and Russell in similar terms. He wrote that both had produced philosophy “corrupted by feeling.”⁵⁵ He also understood both Bradley and Russell as motivated by the same philosophical problem of “change” or “flux,” a cognate to Eliot’s own relativism.⁵⁶ In a 1918 review, Eliot, comparing Bradley with Russell, says that Bradley “attains...a perfection of destruction” in his skeptical rejections of other philosophical positions.⁵⁷ Later, Eliot contrasts Russell with Bradley in a 1924 essay, writing that Russell’s philosophy makes a “spectacle” out of “destroying” a range of philosophical systems, even his own.⁵⁸

Most importantly, as he had done with Bradley, Eliot processed Russell’s work as not just a collection of ideas but also, and perhaps foremost, as a style. Bradley’s *Principles of Logic* and Russell’s “On Denoting” are called, in the same breath, “works of art ... clear and beautifully formed thought.”⁵⁹ In his review of *Mysticism and Logic*, which is almost entirely concerned with Russell’s style, Eliot writes:

In those essays which are most philosophical—in the last six or seven of the book—Mr. Russell reaches the level of the very best philosophical prose in the language. The only contemporary who can even approach him is Mr. Bradley.⁶⁰

That Eliot would conceive of Bradley and Russell as epitomes of philosophical style is especially noteworthy, because Eliot’s conception of philosophy in general was often as a stylistic project, one that can “paragraph and punctuate” an entangled world, or “insert the emphases” into its riddles.⁶¹ (As A. David Moody has pointed out, Eliot’s dissertation can itself be read as an “*ars poetica*,” outlining a stylistic paradigm for his poems as much as it projects a body of ideas.)⁶²

Russell’s biography illuminates some of the pre-history to Eliot’s juxtaposition of Russell’s philosophy with Bradley’s. By the 1910s, Russell had in fact little to no stake in distinguishing his Atomism from Bradley’s absolutism, which, as Eliot himself had noted, was “beginning to show signs of inanition.”⁶³ Russell, in fact, had a huge stake in accomplishing just the opposite: containing Atomism to a rigorous, logical system, with little or no concern for how this system encoded, or helped decode, facets of metaphysics and physics. But Russell’s engagements with Bradley, and his formulations of Atomism, stretch back long before this period in his life, as far back as the 1890s, when Russell was an undergraduate and then a doctoral candidate at Cambridge.

Much like Eliot’s Harvard, Russell’s Cambridge was very idealist. Indeed, in the 1890s, British Idealism held sway over most philosophy departments at institutions in Europe and the United States. Russell arrived at Cambridge as a mathematician, but through interactions with McTaggart and Joachim was drawn into their idealist circle and eventually switched his emphasis to philosophy.⁶⁴ Between 1893 and 1895, Russell was a committed absolutist, embracing, as Eliot later would, the spiritual aspects of the school: if reality was predicated on an absolute, then mortal life implicitly partakes of perfection. There can be no evil, no fear, no death. Russell later

described these beliefs as “consolations of religion,” which had infected his worldview at the time:

It may be said, indeed, that there is comfort in the mere abstract doctrine that Reality is good. I do not myself accept the proof of this doctrine, but even if it is true, I cannot see why it should be comforting, for the essence of my contention is, that Reality, as constructed by metaphysics, bears no sort of relation to the world of experience. It is an empty abstraction.⁶⁵

But Russell’s studies under McTaggart, and his reception of Bradley through McTaggart and Joachim, developed in him a reverent conviction in the spiritual rightness of the absolute, as he demonstrated in a letter to Alys Pearsall Smith about McTaggart’s “religion of love” and idealism’s perception of “God incarnate” in “every man.”⁶⁶

In 1894-95, Russell began what he later described as his “revolt into pluralism,” after befriending G.E. Moore and hearing his critiques of absolutism in private conversations.⁶⁷ Quickly Russell registered a newfound negativity towards the absolute, which he wrote was “useless” and detached from the world at hand.⁶⁸ To fill the void in his metaphysics left behind after disavowing absolutism, Russell, from 1896 to 1899, began to theorize a primordial atomism, which viewed most aspects of the world as essentially disparate and inchoate. His seemingly inexorable pull towards this atomism—away from unity, idealism, holism, absolutism, etc.—is staged and re-staged throughout his writings in 1898 and 1899. In a review of Arthur Hannequin’s *Essai critique sur l’hypothèse des atomes*, Russell attempts to explain how a universe of atoms might still be ordered by theorizing “a final atom” that would function like “an unconditioned absolute,” without any of that concept’s attendant spiritualism (recall that atoms, like absolutes, are ineluctably positioned as “final” entities in the respective teleologies of their metaphysics) (*Collected Papers II* 42).⁶⁹ A slightly earlier essay, reminiscent of Eliot’s own hand-wringing over the ontological status of change or “flux” in the absolute, attempts to disprove a “metaphysical construction of the real” by asking why, if the absolute implies perfection, are “carriers of relations not perfectly unchanging, why universe not motionless.”⁷⁰ Perhaps most suggestively, at the end of one of Russell’s earliest extant notes on number theory, he differentiates between number as an overarching, continuous concept and number as a series of atomized instances of counting, finally concluding with a preference for the latter: “hence atomism, to escape from continuity.”⁷¹ This leads him into a meditation on the essential disconnectedness and atomization of the world that number supposedly describes, which can, as Russell says in the same note, “get no whole.”

Between 1899 and 1911, atomism as a term and movement largely disappeared from philosophical discourse. Russell anticipated logical atomism somewhat in *Principles of Mathematics*, but any correlations were not systematic. Indeed, once Russell and Moore had undone absolutism, defining and defending a strong counter-position became unnecessary. In the minds of logicians, British Idealism faded with little fight into obsolescence, though the movement continued to thrive in certain philosophy departments for a couple more decades. Therefore, Eliot’s dramatic re-staging of conflicts between atomistic and absolutist philosophies in the 1910s has to be approached as an historical artifact. In a strange way, it is as if Eliot forced

himself, as a student at Harvard and Cambridge in the 1910s, and eventually as Russell's pupil, to re-live the entire drama of Russell's 1890s, when the rest of the world had largely moved on from such hyperbolic versions of, and extreme reactions to, the last dregs of nineteenth-century absolutism. The parallels are striking. Russell began the 1890s committed to absolutism, broke with the movement around 1893-5, and then turned to atomism from 1895-1899. Eliot reprised the same track through 1910, 1913-15, and 1915-17.

The last stage of Russell's development, his full commitment to atomism and eventually logicism, is the one that least maps onto Eliot's intellectual trajectory, precisely because of Russell's presence in Eliot's life. Eliot did not break with Russell the way Russell had with McTaggart and Bradley, because Russell's theories were not the final word for Eliot. Russell and Eliot historically coincide more in the questions they asked than in the conclusions they arrived at. Given Eliot's and Russell's tendencies towards religiosity, it is natural that both wanted to fill the metaphysical vacuum left behind once the absolute's promise that all of reality would be "timeless and eternally good" was proved impossible to accept.⁷² What remains once the absolute has been dismissed? What shape does the metaphysical landscape take after such a gigantic theory has been laid low—or cracked, as it were? What would the world be like absent *real* or *tangible* guarantees of order? Atoms would be free from the syphilitic spider's net, but their freedom would cancel the easy assurance absolute idealism had given concerning the world's interconnectedness. Indeed, atomism threatens descent into an ontological wilderness, a plane of pure chaos in which each part, each atom, of the world—being completely divorced from any connection with any other atom—must advocate and fend for itself.

Russell found solace in the rigor of logical systems. Eliot, however, remained caught between idealist assurances of interconnectedness and their compelling refutation by Russell. Eliot describes the troubling experience of inhabiting this philosophical in-between in the paper that he read in Russell's presence at the Moral Sciences Club in 1915:

I do not mean a vicious abstraction, for if we disregarded it altogether we would fall into a still more vicious concretion; but when it is so abstracted as to lead us into intuitionism, it has brought us to moral chaos, to a relativism which is just the reverse of that which I advocate.⁷³

Eliot professed relativism that tended to oscillate between absolute assertion and the "moral chaos" of no assertions at all. This led him into perilous ontological waters as he attempted to reconcile tendencies towards "setting the world in order" and maintaining something like the spontaneity of "chaos" in his philosophy.⁷⁴ Eliot highlights this contrast in two opposed accounts of relativism given almost simultaneously in 1915. The first is in the same talk before the Moral Sciences Club, in which Eliot says that "we strive above all things in life for coherence."⁷⁵ The second occurs in a 1915 letter to Wiener explaining that in practicing relativism it is important to "avoid complete consistency."⁷⁶

On the score of this seeming paradox, Eliot's so-called relativism really begins to come into its own. He develops a concept for a process that he calls "organization" to explain what philosophy can do when it inhabits this region between atom and absolute. Organization is a vital term for Eliot's relativist metaphysics, playing a technical role that suggested yet another striking

parallel between Russell's 1890s thought and Eliot's in the 1910s. Both Russell in 1897-99 and Eliot in 1915-17 turned to Leibniz's concept of monad to theorize how chains of individuated atoms might stand in aggregated or "organized" relations—or might otherwise function in concert. As both Russell and Eliot made clear, invoking Leibniz was not an oscillation back from atomism into idealism, or a turn away from atoms back towards wholes. Rather, Leibnizian atoms can be simultaneously patterned and vitally spontaneous; his metaphysics recognizes both atomic discreteness and coordination among atoms. Extrapolating from Eliot's thinking on Leibniz, we can see that he embeds a robust concept of organization at the heart of his philosophizing in 1915 and later. Organization serves as its uniform premise: "We proceed in the attempt to organise a world of values of all sorts."⁷⁷ He expands upon this idea in a key passage of his dissertation:

'We cannot attend to several disconnected objects at once; we organize them into a single object' ... This I believe to be true, but what does it mean? That the world, so far as it is a world at all, tends to organize itself into an articulate whole. The real is the organized. And this is metaphysics.⁷⁸

Or, as he puts it a bit later in the dissertation:

There is a real world, if you like, which is full of contradictions, and it is our attempt to organize this world which gives the belief in a completely organized world, an hypothesis which we proceed to treat as an actuality.⁷⁹

And in the essay on Green, he notes: "The real world is quite mad, and it is the self-appointed task of ethics and metaphysics to organise it."⁸⁰ (Russell utilizes organization in the same sense in the review of Hannequin cited above: "We cannot say bodies are organized *ad infinitum*, but only that it is the business of science to organize them without end."⁸¹ For the young Russell, "bodies" encompass forms both physical and abstract, and "science" always means philosophy as much as it does physics.)

Organization forms a methodological bridge between Eliot's philosophy and poetry, with his comments on philosophical style in Bradley and Russell as the pylons. How might these two philosophers, whom Eliot so painstakingly worked to differentiate and associate across the 1910s, redound upon the poems Eliot was writing during and just after his philosophical education? How might poetic style register Eliot's prolonged encounter with what he conceived, by turns, as combat and cooperation between two seemingly different philosophical styles, with style itself serving as the methodological counterpart to a broader metaphysics of organization?

Sweeney is Eliot's poetic atomist, sowing and reaping chaos throughout Eliot's work and appearing like a bundle of parts, or perhaps a cluster of atoms. At the end of "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service," Sweeney is metonymized by his "hams," which shift, "stirring the water in his bath."⁸² In *The Waste Land*, Sweeney materializes in relation to "a foot" and "feet."⁸³ In a letter from Ezra Pound to Eliot, Sweeney is identified by his "cob."⁸⁴ This phallic image harks back to the most important section of "Sweeney Erect," where Sweeney's parts begin to proliferate: "knots of hair," eyes, the "oval O cropped out with teeth," feet, hands, thighs,

knees, heel, hip, his “nape,” his “base,” his pink broad bottom, and finally his sudsy face.⁸⁵ This latter image connects back to the original depiction of Sweeney’s bearded countenance in Eliot’s childhood “Fireside” magazines.⁸⁶ Indeed, apropos his own body’s tendency to appear in partitioned forms, Sweeney is connected with many myths of dismemberment: Philomela, Agamemnon, and the tabloid murder mentioned in “Sweeney Agonistes” by way of Sweeney’s grisly account of “a man [who] once did a girl in” (*Complete Poems* 82-84).⁸⁷

In “Sweeney Among the Nightingales”—which begins with its own congeries of Sweeney-parts: spreading knees, hanging arms, and swelling jaw—“The person in the Spanish cape” who tries to sit on “Sweeney’s knees” has a hard time keeping it together, as it were.⁸⁸ Here is the scene:

The person in the Spanish cape
Tries to sit on Sweeney’s knees

Slips and pulls the table cloth
Overturns a coffee-cup,
Reorganised upon the floor
She yawns and draws a stocking up;

As in “Sweeney Erect,” when just as Sweeney touches a razor to his leg a woman has an epileptic seizure, things are fine—calm, non-violent, uncalamitous, though a tad grotesque—until contact is made with a segment of Sweeney’s anatomy.⁸⁹

Yet even as contact with Sweeney appears to splinter the world, these lines introduce a metrical shift that reestablishes an equipoise. The lines of encounter are acatalectic, “headless,” with the first syllable of the iambs lopped off. But the following lines restore the meter. The woman in “Sweeney Among the Nightingales” is neither defeated, nor disarranged, not distraught upon the floor, but rather “reorganized” there by a force that redresses Sweeney’s shattering effect. What force puts the world back together? We might look to the catalexis itself, which is an atypical metrical phenomenon in Eliot’s poetry. William McNaughton has shown how Pound (whose early uses of catalexis were noted by a number of his contemporaries) embraced the tendency of Greek poets to conclude their poems with a catalectic line, whereby catalexis came to be read as a metrical pronouncement of closure.⁹⁰ Eliot, however, seems to flip Pound’s usage around, such that, rather than asserting the end of poetry, catalexis in “Sweeney Among the Nightingales” inaugurates its rejuvenation—or at least bears witness to that rejuvenation despite itself.

Still, not much comes of the reorganization. The reorganized person merely “yawns and draws a stocking up.” And yet, what of this word “reorganised”? Etymologically, “organize” derives from biological or medical terminology, meaning to give something an organic structure, or to provide it with organs. Sweeney’s involvement in the scene activates that particular etymon quite forcefully: his presence disorganizes the lines by instigating the removal of their heads. Here the metrical trope of headlessness coincides with the primary allusion of the poem, the story of Philomela. In the same manner that Philomela and Procne present Itys’s head to Tereus after he has just finished unwittingly dining on his son’s organs, Eliot’s poem reorganizes itself around the act of showing Sweeney a head, with the metrical head of an iamb constituting the

first syllable to appear in the poem after the description of the fall from Sweeney's knees has concluded.

The head, *a la* Gerontion's "brain," is of course chief among biological organs. But it is also the source of a second, more figural definition of organ as mouthpiece or instrument, which is how Eliot most frequently uses the word organ.⁹¹ He writes again and again in his letters, for instance, about the "organs" that he and his contemporaries use to express themselves, usually meaning the magazines and periodicals that published their works.⁹² Therefore, to reclaim the head, itself the quintessential embodiment of an organ of expression, has significant implications for both the poem and its claims to expressiveness. It also has implications for the physical form of the person in the Spanish cape, which is both the instigator and the victim of all activity in the scene. (Spanish capes inevitably included a covering for the head, and cape has its own etymological resonance with head through the Latin root *caput*.) When the reorganized person in the Spanish cape yawns and draws a stocking up, both actions respond to the restitution of heads, as in the physical organ and as in the poem's metrical structure. The former verb, yawns, operates through the head's own primary organ of expression, the mouth. The connection to Philomela remains strong, because yawning not only involves stretching the mouth to its limits, but also is a movement that can be done without a tongue. The stocking, drawn up over an inferred foot, corresponds with the iambic foot's regeneration. Yawning and drawing a stocking up become a potent hybrid of physical and metrical interrelations that flow distinctly against the grain of Sweeney's role in the poem. The person in the Spanish cape beats Sweeney at his own game, with her yawning head and stockinged foot replacing his swelling jaw and apeneck as the dominant parts of the poem. Sweeney vanishes from the poem in any overt form after this scene, while the "lady in the cape" lingers to conspire with "Rachel *née* Rabinovitch."

To "organize" classically means three things: to supply with organs, to arrange musical parts, and to put in order. The first two definitions juxtapose physical and expressive formation: the process by which a body generates organs is made to rhyme with the way in which an organ expresses musical phrases. Encapsulating both physical and expressive valences is the third definition of organization as a process, either physical or metaphysical, of arranging or structuring. Each of the three definitions has to do with forming parts of something into a unified assemblage: a work of music, a functioning corpus. Recall Eliot's sense that organization is what counters a metaphysical chaos or madness.⁹³ Such a play between madness and organization is precisely the subject of "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," where the etymological force and the philosophical heft of a word like "organization" stage one way of resolving madness: not by replacing it with some abstract, absolute order, but rather by quelling it with delicate patternings that quietly undo some of Sweeney's devastation, putting back together some of what he has dismantled.

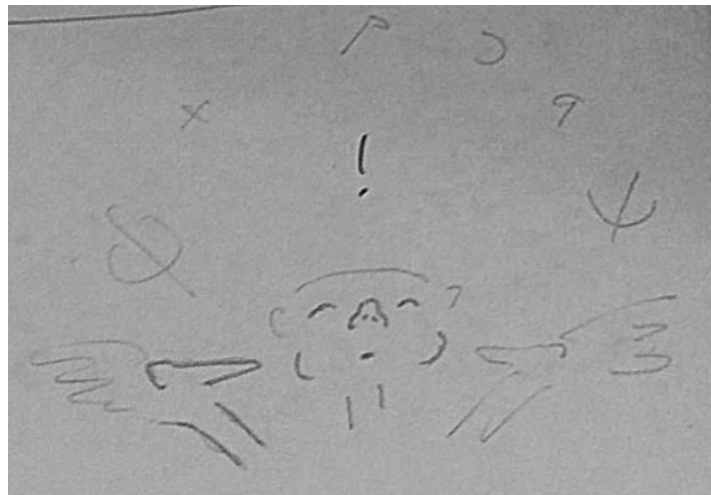
But what of the "re" in reorganization? The metaphysics here is fundamentally dialectical. Given a difficult choice between an exquisite, absolute order and an extremely disorganized atomism, Eliot fittingly overcomes the choosing through reorganization. Eliot's poems tend to foreground a state of disorganization; a force of reorganization is needed to put the world back together, without oscillating back into the absolute's stringent regimes of order. Eliot's reorganization requires a relative position in space between atom and absolute. This requirement becomes most pressing in Eliot's poems that begin with a vision of bodily and metaphysical dismemberment. The overtly partitioned anatomies of Gerontion and Sweeney

come to mind, as do the “head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter” in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” and most vividly, the “dissembled” body of the speaker in “Ash Wednesday”: “my heart my liver and that which had been contained / In the hollow round of my skull.”⁹⁴ One is also reminded of “Mr. Apollinax,” about Russell himself, wherein the speaker “looked for the head of Mr Apollonax rolling under a chair.”⁹⁵

Eliot’s philosophical education is largely a history of coming to terms with the metaphysical dichotomy of atomism and absolutism, between which he found himself stuck. His relativism emerges over the course of the 1910s as a theory that attempts to do justice to this in-between positions, or that otherwise looks for ways of reconciling atoms and orders, without succumbing fully to either. Organization is, finally, a philosophical idea and also a stylistic trope for Eliot. Eliot conceived of Bradley and Russell as presenting competing styles, and he responded to these styles by developing a theory of organization that resonated with his own stylization of poetic subjects foregrounding questions of order and chaos. This makes sense given his general reception of philosophy as itself a kind of style: one specifying how to think about the world. Eliot’s “small theories” become nodes for stylistic projects in and of themselves, ones that begin with philosophy but that ultimately redound upon the forms of, and within, Eliot’s poems.

We will turn now to *The Waste Land*, in order to investigate further this consanguinity of physical and abstract forms, whose violent and paradoxical interactions reach their apex therein.

II. Curious little figures



In reality our whole view of life is at stake in the finest shred of logic that we chop.⁹⁶

The Waste Land is T.S. Eliot’s only poem to appear in his various editions and collections with line numbers.⁹⁷ These hover to the right and suggest one way of accounting for the poem: simply count from one to 434. Eliot chose to run the numbers up to 434 instead of restarting at one to begin each of the five sections, further emphasizing a sense of numerical encompassment

and sequentialization, of a piece with his resistance to anthologizing the poem in any form other than its entire 434 lines.⁹⁸ This ostensible order, however, is belied by the fact that the line numbers connect *The Waste Land* to a set of notes overflowing with labyrinthine conglomerations of further numbers supposedly underwriting various allusions and references, which all obey their own numbering systems:

266. The Song of the (three) Thames-daughters begins here. From line 292 to 306 inclusive they speak in turn. V. *Götterdämmerung*, III, i: the Rhine-daughters.⁹⁹

These systems, in turn, purport to gloss a poem in which numbers already feature prominently, oscillating between exaggerated precision and active obfuscation: from assorted capricious timings like “car at four” or “hot water at ten,” to unhelpfully exact itemizations such as “sevenbranched candelabra” and “She’s had five already,” to the spectral “final stroke of nine” and the impossible “third who walks always beside you.”¹⁰⁰

Eliot has said that *The Waste Land*’s notes originate from a fundamentally quantitative impulse: the need “to provide a few more pages of printed matter” for a “short” composition, which Eliot’s correspondence with potential publishers reveals as something he felt he needed to finesse:

My poem is of 435 lines; with certain spacings essential to the sense, 475 books lines; furthermore, it consists of five parts, which would increase the space necessary; and with the title pages, some notes that I intent to add, etc., I guess that it would run to from 28 to 32 pages.¹⁰¹

(In Eliot’s early letters about *The Waste Land*, some reference to its number of lines—434, 435, 450—nearly always appears as the first descriptor of the work, becoming almost epithetical by its repetition.)¹⁰² Ezra Pound, self-described midwife to Eliot’s poem, marked its culmination with his own enumeration of scope, saying it “now runs ... 19 pages” and is “let us say the longest poem in the English langwidge.”¹⁰³ Early reviews made counting the contents of the poem—“more than four hundred lines,” “seven pages of notes,” “quotes from scores of authors,” “thirty-three sources,” “three foreign languages”—central to their elucidations of what counts in it.¹⁰⁴ Such critical attention to *The Waste Land*’s numbers, ranging from concerted analysis of the poem’s arithmetic to just the unpurposive mention of the number “434,” has continued unabated into this century.¹⁰⁵ In 1926, I.A. Richards proposed that *The Waste Land* constituted “an original poem” as much as “a new branch of mathematics,” and Robert Graves said that its publication demarcated a “new method” of versification that was “a cousin of mathematical relativity” and “post-Euclidean geometry.”¹⁰⁶ This appeal to mathematics, with its attendant broadening of numerical scope to include the operators and variables that commute and associate numbers, foreshadows the present scholarly climate around Eliot’s poem. C.D. Blanton, for one, in scrutinizing *The Waste Land*’s “five uneven sections totaling 434 lines and running to fifteen pages,” describes the “mathematical problem” of Eliot’s poem, hinging on the “unprecedented density of reference” that has been “reduced into 434 lines.”¹⁰⁷ Michael Levenson, alongside

observations of how *The Waste Land's* “ambiguities multiply” and its uncountable contexts “will count,” considers how the poem both does and does not amount to the “arithmetical series” of its sources and references.¹⁰⁸ Andrea Henderson, piggybacking off Eliot’s claim that Bertrand Russell’s *Principia Mathematica* “are perhaps a greater contribution to our language than they are to mathematics,” points out the affinities much of his thinking has for with the logical calculus of his day (more on this further along).¹⁰⁹

Why do we tend to think of (and in) numbers when we think of *The Waste Land*? The tendency has a few obvious motivations. On the one hand, the poem feels grandiose at “more than four hundred lines” plus notes, and enumerating its integral portions becomes perhaps the quickest way to conjure that grandiosity in a reader.¹¹⁰ On the other hand, as Blanton points out by echoing Richards, *The Waste Land* is a marvel of “compression,” and a critic must “expand” the poem in the act of critiquing it, resaturating its desiccated sources in order to explain them.¹¹¹ This seems especially true when we compare “the four-hundred-line poem” with an “eight-hundred-page novel” like *Ulysses*; by contrast, rhetorically invoking *The Waste Land's* “little more than four hundred lines” proves, in one numerary swoop, its incredible consolidation.¹¹² There persists a similar tension on the score of number-*qua*-mathematics, derived from the play between fragmentation and holism that has motivated work on Eliot for almost a century.¹¹³ The mereological thrust—often tragically stymied, or stopped just short—of the former toward the latter, the desiring and foiling of parts’ combination and consummation as wholes, begins with “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1917), in which Eliot asserts that “the poet’s mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.”¹¹⁴ The same notion telegraphs into “The Metaphysical Poets” (1922), in which Eliot distinguishes between the metaphysicals “who are always forming new wholes” and the modern poets “who must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect.”¹¹⁵ *The Waste Land's* nascent reception discovers precisely this quality in the poem, as in Conrad Aiken’s initial review, which describes (and celebrates) it as “a chance correlation or conglomerate of mutually discolorative fragments” and surmises that “it originally consisted of a number of separate poems which have been telescoped—given a kind of forced unity,” even positing that “the dropping out of any one picture would not in the least affect the logic or ‘meaning’ of the whole.”¹¹⁶

If we follow Eliot in disbaring modern poetry from “forming new wholes,” and also Aiken in supposing that “unity” in *The Waste Land* is “forced,” we are left with a variety of terms that fall just short of those ideals: a conglomeration, a correlation, a compound, “separate” things merely “telescoped” together.¹¹⁷ The ontological bedrock beneath these units is enumerative, quantitative, even arithmetical, derived from the tectonics at work between Aiken’s “unity”—the endpoint of a stable *one*—and Eliot’s “more and more,” suggesting an ever-increasingly larger “number” of “fragments,” which sum or equate to a value that is somehow simultaneously greater *and yet lesser* than that unreachable one. (This way of falling short reaches back, of course, to Eliot’s original worries about the poem’s shortness.) The assemblage of concatenated fragments may be so large that it is endless, or “numberless,” a still more dramatic way of failing to add up, as it were, to one; Blanton identifies such an “expanse of quantitative detail” as “a bad infinity,” which stands as one of the most daunting metaphysical perils in Eliot’s early work.¹¹⁸ The point is that with a coterie of solitary fragments without recourse to a

singular whole we confront the inherently enumerative task of navigating the poetic assemblage of a delimited quantity of fragments, which entails following along with *The Waste Land's* doomed but crucial efforts at—to borrow a couple of Eliot's favorite words—“organizing” and “ordering” its necessarily disparate parts.¹¹⁹

Recent work by Lawrence Rainey, Vincent Sherry, and Paul Stasi on *The Waste Land's*, and especially its notes', overtures toward order and organization, or “logic” and “coherence” to use terms popular in the current secondary literature, devotes little time to considering the numerical aspect of the mereological problem generated by Eliot's own conception of those very overtures—the basal distinction between a poem that is one and a poem that is something other than one.¹²⁰ If other, then what? Some other number, clearly. Grappling with the perhaps enormous, or possibly infinite size of that number brings us face to face with the poem's (“longest in the English langwidge”) quantificational largesse, its sheer arithmetical hugeness, but also with its failure to be somehow quite big enough; *The Waste Land* paradoxically both undershoots and overreaches the quantity it so needs to match. And once one is faced with that fact, one realizes that the way in which one counts a poem already so often about counting has strong implications for how one accounts for it as organized, ordered, logical, and coherent in the first place. Those implications, in turn, present outsize metaphysical and physical hazards for *The Waste Land's* personae, culminating in the Fisher King's belated rumination, “Shall I at least set my lands in order?”, a line as steeped in a qualitative compulsion to “shore” (another imperfect whole) the poem's “fragments” as in a quantitative preoccupation with the set-theoretical dimensions of that same compulsion.¹²¹ Indeed, the iniquitous mathematical relation “at least” (another falling short) tells us that the latter sorts of setting and ordering may be something of a last resort for Eliot's poem, even as they raise the stakes for its seemingly inexorable march through and toward its “ruins.”

Number, mathematics, quantity—all label a methodological issue for *The Waste Land's* critics as much as a site of struggle for the poem's impersonal mechanisms of organization and a mereological crisis for the voices those mechanisms convey. Explicating this cascading redundancy will be integral to clarifying the tricky logical and set-theoretical stakes for neoteric assessments of Eliot and order; in other words, work on *The Waste Land's* order and coherence cannot help inflecting that poem's always already troubled relationship with the quantitative aspects of those same concepts. From the perspective of the notes' mechanisms—the especially paratextual numbers and the operators shifting us among and through sources (Cf., V., and Id.)—the poem has very little claim to said coherence. There are myriad miscalculations in Eliot's footnotes, occurring with varying degrees of purposiveness and with greater frequency than one might expect. One example would be the reference to “two volumes *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*,” which is composed of three books released as one volume.¹²² A more famous catachresis is the transposition of notes 196 and 197 in the Hogarth first edition, which augurs later similar errors, like the missing line number “170” at the end of part II in certain contemporary editions of the poem.¹²³ Why these sorts of tiny numerical errata continue to plague *The Waste Land*, given the innumerable cycles of editing the poem has been laundered through, is anybody's guess—though, as will become apparent, such errata's persistence is not entirely inapposite to the poem's generally troubled relationship with enumeration.

A similar, more intriguing miscue is embedded in the above-quoted note 266. Therein, Eliot self-consciously inserts a seemingly explicative “(three)” to denominate the quantity of

Thames daughters. Yet, three Thames daughters are not borne out in the reference, which is to Edmund Spenser's *Prothalamion*; therein, the "daughters of the flood" are just an unnumbered "flock," and the poem itself concerns two sisters and their two, simultaneous marriages. There do happen to be three Rhine daughters, who appear in 266's second allusion to *Götterdämmerung*. There are two ways of reading this. The first is symbological, having to do with three's priority among the poem's central motifs: the "Man with Three Staves," the "three themes" in the concluding section, or the proliferating triplicates at the end of the poem: "falling down falling down falling down," "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.," "Shantih shantih shantih."¹²⁴ The Thames daughters are taken from an Anglo-Protestant celebration of nuptials, in light of which the number "(three)" has vital Trinitarian significance; 266 occurs in part III and is itself the 33rd note in *The Waste Land*. Yet, between the Thames and Rhine daughters, the latter—pagans—have the more obvious tertian claim, numbering three and emerging from section "III" of *Götterdämmerung*. The second way of reading 266 derives from the threat the Rhine daughters pose to three's symbological, theological value: that numbers, which at first seem to mean everything, might really mean, do, or otherwise indicate nothing beyond their own tendency, as numbers, to *appear* as though arranged.

Both ways are disappointing, and in tandem they show why quantity and number so often fall outside the scope of our close readings. Numbers are either far too vacant signs, taking on significance by virtue of sheer adjacency, or they are overloaded with meaning and become numerology. The former perspective often pushes numbers into the realm of paratext, which Gérard Genette defines as a "threshold" in which "literary intention" overlaps with other intentional modes, especially those inflected through "the world of publishing," as Richard Macksey articulates—an inflection ringing especially true given Eliot's inceptive formulation of the notes as an appeasement to publishers.¹²⁵ In *Paratexts* Genette himself dismisses Eliot's notes as insufficiently literary, filled with "bookish sources" and "stuffed with various allusions and borrowings" set down to stymie future "critical reproach."¹²⁶ That is, they are *too* paratextual to warrant prolonged consideration. Borrowing a distinction Sharon Cameron makes in her work on Emily Dickinson's paratextual fascicles, Genette is arguing that Eliot's notes expend themselves "thematizing" *The Waste Land's* "identity" as opposed to "embodying it"; they "order," as in "tidy up," rather than "order," as in "make significant," the poem's materials.¹²⁷ Numbers, as perhaps the purest manifestation of the notes' tidying, will help us come to terms with order's lesser moiety: as countings and recountings lead the poem away from a holistically significant "order," some static superabundance, toward a more difficult yet more productive model of *ecstatic* augmentation—the enactment of an "ordering method," to use Blanton's overarching term for it.¹²⁸ In short, Genette's "bookish" *congé* is dodged by reading the notes for their display of Eliot's myriad efforts at *ordering* the poem's materials. Rather than transferring hermeneutical labors on *The Waste Land* onto Cameron's primary, "significant" sense of "order," such a method actually valorizes the passed-over secondary ordering that is merely tidying, implicitly positing that bearing witness to the notes' (and their numbers') progressive attempts at emplotting the poem's substructures will do a justice to Eliot's poetics that appeals to a figural or aesthetic vision of "order"-*cum*-significance will miss. This is just the subtler sort of ordering to which the Fisher King's "at least" resigns us at the end of the poem.

The latter perspective (numbers are overly meaningful) aligns with symbological, psychoanalytic, and more recently ontological and statistical interpretations of numbers. For

ontology we might look to Quentin Meillassoux's numerological "déchiffrage" of Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés* or Alain Badiou's work on set theory, each of which discovers in patterns of numbers hidden textual or metaphysical meaningfulness that Eliot, with his tongue-in-cheek notes, would disavow.¹²⁹ Recent work on literary criticism and statistics in the early 20th century, as well as the rise of statistical analysis in our own contemporary practices of distant reading, probably have meaningful things to tell us about *The Waste Land*, but they operate on a level somewhere above the text per se, divining cultural and formal patterns from data that is derived from diegesis but is not itself diegetic.¹³⁰ Eliot's numbers, unless we follow Genette in relegating them to paratext, present a distinctly diegetic problem. We can especially see the perils of reading too much overt meaning into Eliot's numbers if we look to the psychoanalytic criticism promulgated by someone like Murray McArthur, for whom Eliot's uses of number and logic always segue into murkier hermeneutic channels like "sexual madness," oneiric "fetishization," or other forms of psychological encryption which must be "deciphered."¹³¹ As these sorts of signs, numbers manifest an ordering that is the epitome of significance, but they also foreclose an analysis of number *per se* by pushing scholarship into the mythic or even mystic register of what numbers mean or connote in and of themselves. This is all well and good, but it fails Occam's razor in the case of Eliot because there is a more obvious *denotative* dilemma with Eliot's numbers, which is their failure to do just what numbers do—to enumerate, or even more simply to add up. As just a species of formal disorder, or a criterion of structural incoherence, this failure would seem admissible as either merely paratextual detritus (printer's errors, say) or at best a stylistic curiosity. But Eliot's (and his editors') arithmetical misprision actually conjures major issues for the poem's general sense of order that percolate alongside the simple numerical mistakes, with more troubling implications for the poem as a whole. To stick with 266, note another numerical glitch that occurs in the next sentence, "292 to 306 inclusive," a grouping already "inclusive" to the larger stretch of 266 to 306, which itself includes two further footnotes (attached to lines 279 and 293), forming nests of "inclusive" numerical sets across a divergent array of references. Eliot's emphasis on "inclusive" feels strange because "292 to 306" actually exceeds the obvious boundary of the Thames daughters' speaking "in turn": line 306, outside of the quotation marks making the successiveness of the voices overt, is "la la," which recalls the "Weialala leia / Wallala leialala" in lines 290 and 291, just before "292 to 306" commences (most likely they sing these syllables as one; otherwise, "in turn" would contrast with nothing).

The deceptive inclusion of "la la" in the identified range sets in motion a thematics of holistic breakdown channeled through the daughters' "undoing" and their attendant physical partition: "I raised my knees /supine," "My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart / Under my feet," "broken fingernails." The failure to add up to a proper quantitative whole rhymes with the daughters' bodies' qualitative coming apart—their dividing quite literally into pieces. The musical phrase "la la" also in and of itself performs that same apartness in contrast to the iterated "lala" that has come earlier. Whereas the latter emerges as a tandem pronouncement—whose keening prefigures impending violence, but whose abutting syllables at least suggest a multivocal resistance to the separation violence entails—the former are notes, and feminine articles, divided (as in the feminine article in "la Pia" in the reference to *Purgatorio* that Eliot appends to line 293). The phrase "la la" is not just the end to concerted singing, but also the coda to sororal contiguity, the point at which these marriages divide each into its own singular savagery. A subtle alteration in the quantitative fabric of the poem, the faint gesture of one

becoming two, becomes grounds for huge metaphysical and physical repercussions. We can track more overt renditions of these repercussions in the falsely inclusive lines “292 to 306” themselves. As song, these form into quatrain-esque stanzas superficially demonstrative of rhythmical and metrical order and recall an earlier form of Tiresias’s vision in “The Fire Sermon,” which was originally composed in iambic-pentameter quatrains quite like many of the poems Eliot included in *Poems (1920)*.¹³² But the daughters’ songs dither into anapestic anomalies and break metrically upon caesurae, refusing anything like an interconnected rhythm or stable sense of prosodic quantities. In the third stanza, one of the daughters proclaims “I can connect / Nothing with nothing,” a testament to the failure of these songs to organize around a metrical pattern or sense of musical order; “nothing” in line 301, as a further symmetry that exhibits this failure, rhymes only with itself—“Nothing” in line 305, which is really no rhyme at all—a stylization of connecting “Nothing with nothing,” making explicit the implicit cycle: Nothing-nothing-Nothing. (This arrival at a tautological 0 takes material form in the rings both Thames and Rhine daughters so desire. The bands have 0’s shape, only ever connect with themselves, and enclose a swath of nothingness, especially so when not on the fingers of their intendeds.) As with the daughters’ splintering anatomies, and the faux whole that “292 to 306” already represents, this progression through a seeming unity reveals itself as specious—amounting veritably to nothing.

Numbers, which ostensibly order the notes and poem, can be ciphers for basic computational successes and lapses, but they can also be tropes on, or heralds of, larger issues with ordering; and they, upon refusal to coalesce, threaten to inject a radical incoherence into the heart of *The Waste Land’s* metaphysics and formalism—which takes place in 266 as an encounter between a kind of enumerative void of iterated nothingness and compounded manifestations of physical violence. From here we fall easily back into scrutiny of the Thames daughters’ precursor in part III and the averred cantor in *The Waste Land’s* choir: Tiresias, “the most important personage in the poem.”¹³³ In note 218, Eliot writes that Tiresias “unites” the poem’s personae, singling out especially “the one-eyed merchant,” the “Phoenician Sailor” and “Ferdinand Prince of Naples”; together, these form a spectrum of sightlessness, ranging from the purblind merchant to the amaurotic sailor to Ferdinand, who has merely heard Ariel singing about blindness—“Those are pearls that were his eyes.”¹³⁴ It feels appropriate that blind Tiresias, caught between the “lumina nocte” of Juno’s curse and Zeus’s relief of that curse by granting knowledge of the future—and who finally “sees ... the substance of the poem”—should encompass myriad degrees of ocular impairment.¹³⁵ That encompassment jives with the esemplastic function of his persona or voice with regards to *The Waste Land’s* substance even as it reveals a structural principle behind the poem whose “substance” Tiresias “sees,” given that the operational commands navigating us through the poem’s (numerical, and thus imperceptible) substratum are themselves commands to see: V. for *videre licet* and Cf. for *conferre*. Eliot’s monotonous insistence on prefacing his notes with these commands, these *orders*, along with his hinging Tiresias’s importance on precisely his seeing, suggests the latter’s indispensability not just in relation to the poem’s contents but also its substratal enactments of its own ordering—the basic “substance” of the notes and their poem.

The merchant’s one eye, Ferdinand’s two, and the sailor’s zero also foreground a numbers game that Tiresias governs in the poem,

I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives
 Old man with wrinkled breasts, can see
 At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
 Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,

and in note 218:

... so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in
 Tiresias.¹³⁶

As with the Thames daughters, Tiresias observes a sexual “assault”; however, whereas the Thames scene was overwhelmed by imagery of violent division, here the assault is determined by a thematics of “indifference.” Indifference, signifying deficiency of care, captures the affect of “the typist home at teatime” and represents a “welcome” state of affairs for “the young man carbuncular.” It also specifies sameness routed through lack of difference, a two-step vector toward uniformity that subverts its *telos* by standing on the negation of difference rather than the assertion of similitude. Indifference presupposes a mereological collapse as much as an inadequate mindfulness of the sort that propels the typist’s “automatic hand.” The two are bound up in one another. Sections II and III’s exclamatory *O*—“*O O O O* that Shakespeherian rag,” “*O* the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter,” “*Et O ces voix d’enfants*”—gives way to Tiresias’s declarative *I* anaphorically iterated at the beginning of several lines, and playing on “eye” just as the “sailor home from sea” rhymes with “see.” Tiresias’s *I* provides an unusually extended stability for *The Waste Land*’s voicing while also troping on Tiresias’s “uniting” presence, transforming the poem’s antecedent zero (*O*) into his consequent one (*I*). What’s left behind is a state of perfect indifference, singularity’s full erasure of disparity, as Tiresias elides into the subject positions of both the typist and the young man, who themselves elide into one another in the violation of the sexual “assault.”

The dynamics of unity in note 218 and its attendant assault would seem to offer a numerical correction to the violence of the scene and something distinct from the divisive rapes on the Thames that follow, but actually Tiresias’s subsumption of multiplicity into oneness proves no panacea for violence. In fact, the further indifference of Tiresias’s visions, the lag between what he has “fortold” and “foresuffered” about the scene and his status as “a mere spectator” while it occurs, produces a schism-that-is-not-a-schism between the moment of forecast and the moment of witness; the difference between the two moments amounts to no difference at all, because for foresight to work there can be no alteration to what the vision predicts. What becomes real in present seeing is completely dependent on, yet entirely indifferent to, what has been foreseen. Tiresias thus becomes an ineffectual cipher in the scene, one who can account for it but not count it; his attempts at the latter actually cause more harm than good. This harm plays out in the scene’s own numberings, each of which grasps in its way for oneness, singularity, and unity: “one bold stare,” “one of the low,” “assaults at once,” “one final patronising kiss,” “one half-formed thought.” These ones pantomime something similar to the oneness of the “women who are one woman” in note 218, but actually they propagate just the opposite effect—a oneness that is aloof, solipsistic, or, as the typist finally is at the end of the scene, “alone.” Tiresian unity, in this light, reveals itself as a species of culling, or as its own kind

of numerical violence, which has shaved, compressed, and compacted the poem's figures down into an indifferent unity indicating not togetherness but rather isolation.

We have seen in the cases of the Thames daughters and Tiresias that numberings, far from taking place at arm's length or in some purely formal arena, reverberate through and even participate in the poem's own diegetic enactments of scenes in which order comes undone or otherwise is challenged: moments of physical peril, existential threat, perceptual failure, or metaphysical danger. The way the poem counts or quantifies these scenes, seemingly *The Waste Land's* most remote and impertinent scaffoldings, turns out to regulate what becomes of order at each scene's core. Eliot's rigorous training in formal logic, number theory, and set theory at Harvard, Oxford, and Cambridge between 1909 and 1916, under the auspices of Karl Schmidt, John Smith, Josiah Royce, and Bertrand Russell, complements this reading of number as not just a passive instrument but as an invested agent in *The Waste Land's* negotiations of its most difficult moments. To prove this point, we will have to introduce a challenging paratext to the already tremendous array of such texts critics have placed in *The Waste Land's* ambit, this being Eliot's notes and essays on and in formal logic. These essays have lately appear in volume one of Ronald Schuchard's *Complete Prose*, and they have been little studied, despite their status as precursors to the logical concepts crucial to understanding Eliot's oft-referenced dissertation. Unincluded in Schuchard's volume are Eliot's notes on and in logic, which number in the hundreds of pages, and which constitute not just rote logical exercises, but rather a robust thinking-through of logic, number theory, and set theory as disciplines, complete with the positing of logical and mathematical theories and equations unique to Eliot, theories that would go on to underpin some of the most important philosophical content in his poems and essays of the next decade. This is especially true of notes taken down in the academic year 1913-14 for seminars with Royce and Russell, in which we can observe Eliot engaging in a back-and-forth dialogue with Russell's ideas, sometimes agreeing and sometimes not. These notes have received little to no critical attention, despite the recent turn in Eliot studies to broad concepts like coherence, order, and logic, concepts that Eliot originally ponders and sketches in his logical notes in ways that carry over explicitly into his later formulations of such notions.

What have number and quantity to do with the logic that Eliot's primarily studied? Russell believed that all pure mathematics could be reduced to logical axioms, and his main contribution to number theory was to redefine numbers as classifications for sets, or as rubrics for groupings. In his very early work *The Principles of Mathematics*, which Eliot called "of inestimable value to culture" and which became a precursory overture to the subsequent *Principia Mathematica*—likewise praised and scrupulously studied by Eliot—Russell distinguishes between older views of number as "heavenly bodies" and as "symbols which mean nothing" and submits over against both that "a number is nothing but a class of similar classes."¹³⁷ This deceptively accessible idea derives from Russell's attendance of the Paris Congress in 1900 and his interactions with the pluralism of G.E. Moore, after which he transitioned from a "belief in the Platonic reality of numbers" and into a commitment to Cantorian number theory, such that "natural numbers," as Carl Boyer summarizes in his seminal *The Concepts of Calculus*, became for him a "theory of aggregates."¹³⁸ Quite simply, numbers establish relations between otherwise disparate entities; they act neither as nominal constants nor as universal entities nor as evacuated simulacra, but rather as devices for determining and asserting connection or reciprocity. Numbers become, under this interpretation, the figural manifestation of relations, and their

existence testifies, *eo ipso*, to the possibility of groups and sets. At the same time, as Eliot notes in “The Perfect Critic,” Russell smuggles in a second claim, which is that, though numbers may not be Platonically existent, securing their function as builders of sets and groups nonetheless allows mathematics to “directly affect the sensibility” in the same way that “the taste of a pineapple” will do.¹³⁹ Here we begin to adumbrate the contours of Russell’s vocal rejection, rehearsed by Eliot in his dissertation, of F.H. Bradley’s “argument against the reality of relations”; by defining numbers as sets, Russell actually insists upon the reality of relations, because his very notion of a set, and of number, hinges on affinities between whatever is in the set. Thus, Russell’s account takes the facticity of relations to be *a priori*.

Eliot, as a student both of the history of mathematics and logic and of Russell’s *au courant* fusion of the two, assimilates these ideas: that numbers are sets and that those sets “directly affect” us. This assimilation begins with his prolonged study of Greek philosophy, for which numbers assumed Platonic form as “the beautiful” did to “beautiful things,” and thus had “real as well as logical existence,” a fact which he posits is quite like the “modern theory of number.”¹⁴⁰ The same idea resurfaces in his dissertation, severed from musings on Greek precursors and their attendant realism:

We experience universals, and we experience particulars, but knowledge is always of objects, in which both are elements. And this is as true of the objects of mathematics, I submit, as of anything else ... Numbers, considered as merely subsistent, have no true or false combinations, for they are not known. They are simply *erlebt* (experienced) in the contemplation of objects to which they apply; 2 plus 2=4 is thus neither true nor false; but when we add four real objects together, we know (as objects), that two of the objects with two of the objects makes four objects, and we experience by acquaintance the 2 plus 2=4. We can of course abstract the numbers simply and determine them by a moment of objectivity; but what we have then is not the number in itself but an object corresponding to it. For how should objects apply to objects, as numbers apply to things? Numbers are not objects; nor, as I shall try to point out later, is number strictly a category.¹⁴¹

The trick of supposing that numbers are “experienced” rather than “known,” or are both “objects of mathematics” but also “are not objects,” threads a careful needle between the Russellian idea that numbers “directly affect the sensibility” while resisting the idea that they fold into just the objects they count or group (rather than standing as the formal promise behind counting’s and grouping’s felicitousness).¹⁴² On this point Eliot diverges from Russell by insisting repeatedly on the importance of counting (and therefore classifying) to experience, entailing what will manifest again and again as a deep resistance to Russell’s work on classes (or numbers) of infinite, innumerable size. In the following note, Eliot records a claim from Russell’s lecture and then his refutation:

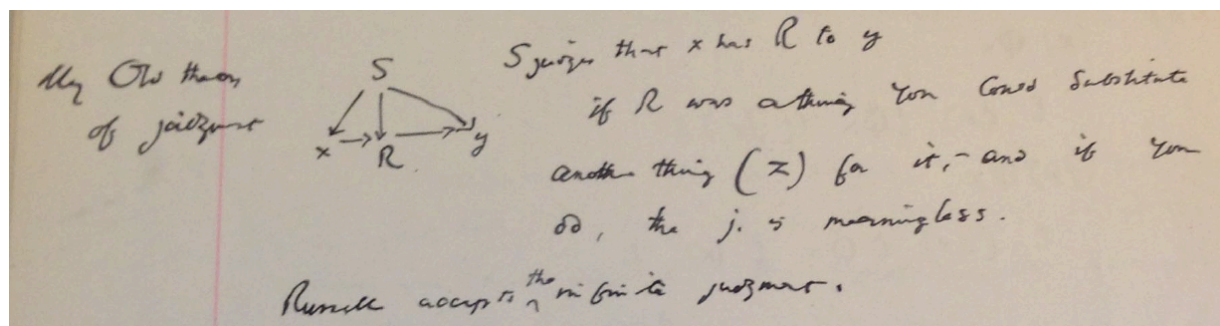
Russell includes classes with infinite no of items ... “Cat” cannot have an infinite no. of members. A class is an assemblage where members may be counted out. Such a whole is an aggregate or collection.¹⁴³

A few weeks later, in notes for another lecture by Russell on infinite sets, Eliot reiterates the same opposition:

Counting, though it is not thinking, is very important ... When we refer an individual to its class we do so on the basis of some counting or measuring. All mathematical positions involve the notion of order, as the more empirical judgments involve the notion of class.¹⁴⁴

To resist the creep of infinity into one’s logical account of number and class is implicitly to forestall the paradoxes of regression and circularity that Russell introduces, and then spends much of his career combating, when he turns numbers into sets (Russell’s paradox, the liar’s paradox, etc.).¹⁴⁵

What becomes most troubling is that such paradoxes seem to Eliot not to operate by severing *erlebt* numbering from the realm of experience, forcing them out into some abstract plane in which relations become unreal, but rather to corrupt that realm (and its very real, felt, and experienced relations) from the inside—thereby challenging the execution of thought and its many forms of intuition. Consider one of Eliot’s more important and remarkable notes, which is best rendered as an image to capture the interplay between Eliot’s idea and Russell’s response:



Here Eliot works out a “theory of judgment,” which he records that “Russell accepts,” routed through the geometry of experience, with one auditor (S) beholding some relation (R) between one thing (x) and another (y). Following Russell *contra* Bradley, R must be “a thing,” or must be real, if we are not to slide back into idealism. But, as Eliot observes, the gesture of adding S to the relational dyad, though requisite to ratifying the relation, forces a paradox, because the reality of R becomes “another thing [z]” for S, which superadds to the dyad, implicitly requires another auditor (S₁) to be itself ratified, and thus creates a “meaningless” regression of further auditors and still more relations that Eliot calls “the infinite judgment.” The problem is essentially arithmetical: evaluating one relation between two things by injection of a third. But the gesture of

moving from two to three (and four and five and so forth) threatens not just the process of numbering but also the act of judging itself—afflicting it with a so-called “bad infinity.”

As this infinity grinds counting to a halt, judgment stops as well—or becomes “meaningless”—fully implicated in the regression. Returning to *The Waste Land*, we will see that Eliot’s model predicts perhaps the most crucial instance of failed counting in the poem, the allusion to Shackleton’s Antarctic expedition in “What the Thunder Said”:

Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
—But who is that on the other side of you?¹⁴⁶

In his notes, Eliot writes: “The following lines were stimulated by the account of one of the Antarctic expeditions ... it was related that the party of explorers, at the extremity of their strength, had the constant delusion that there was *one more member* than could actually be counted.”¹⁴⁷ In the typescripts, Eliot and Pound go back and forth over the number of the verb in the second line, deliberating over “there is” and “it is” (and perhaps even “it are”) before settling on “there are.”¹⁴⁸ Thus, even in the textual history of the “account,” how to count “you and I” arises as a pivotal difficulty; the poem, in its own deployment of placeholders like “there,” cannot decide how to count its subjects, subjects already struggling to count themselves. (In his dissertation section on “Solipsism,” Eliot identifies utterance of “there” as the most important grammatical marker of a subject’s attempt to account for the world beyond the self; but, saying “‘there’ consists simply in the intention” to point to the world, not the effectiveness of the pointing, so “there” becomes just the record of a desire, perhaps always unfulfilled, to indicate something outside our own “here.”)¹⁴⁹

This performance of the passage’s thematics of innumerability as an issue of pronominal grammar highlights the real crux: problematic deixis, or trouble connecting individuals to their shell-terms, whether these be pronouns or numbers. Deixis threatens to render grammatically hollow what is actually a richly specific hallucination (“Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded”). The tautology of “Who is the third who,” along with the sickly rhyme with “you,” repeated in the ending line, works through a matryoshka play of shells within shells encircling, like the Rhine maidens’ fingerless rings, only nothingness. In Russellian terms, the Shackleton stanza’s deixes enact a vicious, mereological regression—*a la* Aristotle’s Third Man Argument, reiterating the problems posed by “(three)” at the beginning of this essay—in which the attempt to conceive two particular individuals as a holistic dyad inevitably summons a higher-order viewpoint, a so-called “third man,” who stands external to the dyad and ratifies it as whole.¹⁵⁰ To understand the relationship between this third man and the original dyad, a further perspective would be needed, and so the procedure goes, *ad infinitum*. Eliot provides a version of the argument in “Solipsism”:

Two points of view take cognizance of each other, I suppose, by each making a half-object of the other. Strictly speaking, a point of view taking note of another is no longer the same, but a third ... self, a 'construction based on, and itself transcending, immediate experience.'¹⁵¹

This “third” shows the constructedness of selfhood and experience, while nonetheless standing as the key element in understanding experience as valid: acknowledging alterity becomes a numbers game, in which higher and higher perspectives emerge as the surest means of ratifying particular experiences, but also as the quickest way of “transcending” them, thereby losing grip of the world. There may be “identity in diversity,” as Eliot concludes, but such diversity may also amount to nothing more than Shackleton’s hallucination, such that the essential solipsism of “one” and “two,” or “I” and “you,” is verified by “thirds,” rather than allayed by them.¹⁵² (If Shackleton is hallucinating, then his mind perceives only its own creations, and the plurality of the group, Shackleton’s phenomenological access to anyone and anything beyond himself, comes into question.) In the case of Shackleton, Eliot pulls the paradox inside out, and perhaps makes it more insidious, by having one of the individuals within the dyad—the one-like “I” who observes the “you” and “who”—play the alienated role of external observer, who sounds the alarm about the hallucinated “third” beside “you,” thereby himself becoming the third man to their pairing. As well, the “you,” left completely undescribed, never responds to the repeated exhortations of “I” to explain the “third,” lending “you” its own conspicuously ghost-like hollowness; this is further emphasized by the stanza’s lack of punctuation, a pattern in keeping with the rest of “V,” which foists on “you” some of the peculiar characteristics of the “third”: “you / Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle.” (This also occurs for the “I” at the next enjambment, “hooded / I,” with the qualities of the “third” again, *sans* delimiting punctuation, collapsing into the other pronouns.)

Counting becomes an existential threat for Shackleton, as his expedition’s subjects uncomfortably slip in and out of incongruous numerical placeholders, each of which poses a different mereological danger to the person occupying it, danger beginning with numbers but ending with one or another of the expedition’s members themselves eliding into hallucination. The plight of Shackleton’s “I” takes on new dimensions in note 412’s invocation of page 346 in Bradley’s *Appearance and Reality*, which bends the third man’s linear regression into a vicious “circle,” in which the phantom of solipsism becomes still more ominous.¹⁵³ Therein, Bradley delimits all experience within closed perimeters, whose edges circumscribe individual minds, with no hope of access to the interiors of others’ perimeters or anything outside their own perimeter’s bounds. There is a “community of perception,” but only because Bradley believes in an Absolute reality in which all individuals partake; in partaking, each replicates the Absolute and, thus, private becomes public, interior becomes exterior, self becomes world. But, if community equates to the lone individual’s experience of “reality’s” projection in a Cartesian theater, then Bradley’s account of mind’s access to world is no less figmentary than Shackleton’s. Eliot’s most sustained analysis of Bradley’s page 346 appears in a 1916 essay published in *The Monist*, in which Eliot accuses Bradley of an “extreme” idealism, in which Bradley’s “circles” transform the consciousnesses they ensorcel into isolated “monads.”¹⁵⁴ *The Waste Land*’s line 412, as if resisting a monadic conception of self, offers up a “We,” even as

thought's privacy traps individuals in "opaque" spheres, cutting each single mind off from all others: "We think of the key, each in his prison / Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison."¹⁵⁵ The "key" and "prison" come from 412's companion allusion to "XXXIII, 46" of *The Inferno* in which Count Ugolino narrates his entrapment in a locked tower with his sons and grandsons. After days of starvation, his children die, and he eats their corpses. Dante stumbles upon him in Antenora, engaged in a Sisyphean reenactment of his cannibalism, forever chewing at the head of his captor, Archbishop Ruggieri.¹⁵⁶ That Eliot fastens Bradley's solipsism to a story in which a father sustains himself by consuming the flesh of his flesh, thereby realizing a physicalist corollary to 412's idealistically vicious "circle," demonstrates the material peril posed by Bradley's abstract wager.

Again, number plays a part. Whereas Shackleton struggled to account for an escalating, hallucinatory, paradoxical plurality of selves alongside the single, other individual, which previous countings of his group had conditioned him to expect, Bradley fortifies one's sheer oneness over against the radical alterity of all else, a stand one might be tempted to accept as necessary in avoiding Shackleton's hallucinatory regression into two, three, and so forth. But Shackleton's failure to count and Bradley's resistance to doing so reach the same result: quantitatively undoing mind's satisfaction with its access to qualitative reality, a reality marked by the tenuous status of holistic bodies. Dante, sandwiched between Shackleton and Bradley, raises the stakes on both of their paradoxes by imagining gruesome repercussions for number's metaphysical caprices. Ugolino's consumption of his sons and grandsons inside his prison accuses Bradleyan oneness of morbid and unproductive self-consumption, even as it unmasks Shackletonian multiplicity as actually just the illusion of a difference. Either way, Dante shows that if numbers can taste like a pineapple, they can perhaps also be an issue of life and death. (Other relevant examples abound in *The Inferno*, most memorably the decapitated Bertran de Born in XXVIII, who holds up his head like a lantern, described thus as "due in uno e uno in due." Later on in XXXIII there is Alberigo, his incarnated *anima* "wintering" in Cocytus while his true *corpo* remains undead on earth, animated by a demon. Though, in proper Aquinian fashion, his soul remains intact, Alberigo's Hell is to be rendered falsely multiple, *anima* decoupled from *corpo* despite *corpo* embodying *anima* in Hell and *anima* demonically replicated in *corpo* on earth, a multiplying regress of transubstantiations. Alberigo once headed "Gerontion" which once headed *The Waste Land*, a subdividing and even spectral textual history that conjures with the *ouroboros* of Alberigo's ersatz bodies and souls and makes XXXIII's reincarnation in 412 all the more poignant as a link between Shackleton and Bradley.)¹⁵⁷

Notice, too, that "We think of the key, each in his prison / Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison" poses a quandary of binary logical inference straddling metaphysics and physics. The physical aspect of the quandary is structured around the reality of optics channeled through an enumeration of auditory experience: because the key is turned outside the door, "heard ... once ... once only," visualizing the key becomes specifically an imaginative act, an inference that takes the mind outside the prison even as the body becomes confined there. Yet, just as the repetition of "once" belies oneness, the section's logic lays a metaphysical trap, such that visualizing the "key" only "confirms" the impossibility of actually perceiving it. Like eating one's children, the experience is a barbarous loop, a key that will "turn ... once and turn once ... " *ad infinitum*, negating and confirming one's imprisonment forever. Shackleton, Bradley, and Dante all exemplify various paradoxical issues with enumeration, configured around whether a

person be one or multiple. *The Waste Land*, culminating in section V, feels torn between these numerical positions, faced with the interminable paradoxes of one and many on the one hand and the banality of nothingness (the lurking zero, the innumerable infinity) on the other.

The key-prison pairing towards the end of V looks back to another urgent quest for some excluded middle expressed in V's earlier images of water and rock: "If there were water / And no rock / If there were rock / And also water."¹⁵⁸ As with Shackleton's "Who," a deictic "Here" sets the terms for this exchange: "Here is no water but only rock / Rock and no water."¹⁵⁹ The whole section proceeds like a logical proof, trying out conditional possibilities in an apparent effort to arrive at the desired outcome: water. Though V suspends at the moment just before a rain, and though its signifiers lust and yearn solely for rain, the desire goes unfulfilled: it never rains. Similarly, "Here" brings no succor for the aqueous *epoché*—"Here" is truly "no water"—a failure of deixis that challenges Eliot's understanding of Russell's claim for abstract terms' pineapple tangibility in a logico-mathematical system. As with note 412's later invocation of Bradley, the logic of rock and water turns on finding a way from "Here" to "there," a deictic switch figuring as a leap from the mind's here to the world's there; yet shifting from proclaimed "Here is" to anaphorically chanted "If there were" illuminates only a leap into subjunctive conditionality, or Russell's "what *may* happen" as opposed to Bradley's "*must*." (The unusually strong rhyme between "think" and "drink" in lines 335–6 would seem to emphasize this filiation between thought and water, at the expense of the body's desire to quench its physical thirst.)

Movement across this Cartesian equation resolves in line 359, "But there is no water," when constative "is" dislodges subjunctive "were," and what is wished to be "there" aligns with what is known to be "Here." Surprisingly it is the "hermit-thrush" in line 357 and its accompanying note, which provides some consolation to this dreary, logical march from "no water," through myriad permutations of water and rock, only to end up at "no water" all over again, a completely unproductive cycle, binary recombinations amounting to something like Phlebas's whirlpool in part IV. Correlative to the turning of Ruggieri's key at the end of V, only ever heard and imagined, the hermit-thrush's song enters the world as "sound of water over rock ... Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop," prompting a visceral imagination of water that is not there. Besides functioning as at least some tangible sign of something other than rock, the hermit thrush breaks a noteless spell lasting since 309, all the way through section IV. Note 357 ends this drought with a personal injection recalling note 68's autobiographical flavor ("I have heard in Quebec Province") accompanied by an extended quotation from Chapman's *Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America*:

'it is most at home in secluded woodland and thicket retreats . . . its notes are not remarkable for variety or volume, but in purity and sweetness of tone and exquisite modulation they are unequalled.' Its 'water-dripping song' is justly celebrated.¹⁶⁰

Chapman's volume, itself organized according to a numbered categorial schema reminiscent of *Principia Mathematica* and *The Waste Land* both, explains that the hermit thrush, labeled "759b," migrates home in April, "the earliest" springtime return among all catalogued thrushes.¹⁶¹ In the context of *The Waste Land*, this bird is thus harbinger of a return back to the poem's first word, "April"; Eliot adds the "water-dripping song," which, despite the quotation marks he places

around it, is not attested by Chapman, or any other ornithological manual. (To that point, water and rock themselves also loop back to the first section's image of "dry stone no sound of water.")

Critics have surmised that Eliot simply misattributed the song to the thrush, but its status as surplus to a reference that folds *The Waste Land* back upon its first word, a fold threatening Bradleyan circularity as vicious as April is cruel, suggests something more than accident, especially given the thrush's role as apex and end to the logical cycles and recycles of rock and water in V proper.¹⁶² In contrasting the hermit's song with those of other thrushes, Chapman distinguishes between what notes or capacities are "inferior" among varieties, language that coincides with Eliot's own use of melody to illustrate Russell's logico-mathematical project, a consideration in which the realist philosopher Alexius Meinong plays a role:

Meinong's theory of perception is complicated, as I suggested above, by the division which he draws between real and ideal objects, between *inferiora* and *superiora*. Mr. Russell classifies *superiora* as follows: relations (including likeness, differences, and the complexes formed of terms related by a relation), and the kind of objects (which we may call plurals) of which numbers other than 0 and 1 can be asserted. The difficulty which I find with this account is that it would seem possible for virtually any object to be either inferior or superior: a melody, for example, is superior and composed of tones as its *inferiora*; but the simple tone is composed of vibrations, and is in fact as absolutely a "zeitverteilter Gegenstand" as is the melody. Furthermore, it is by no means clear what the relation of a *superius* to its *inferiora* is. A melody, as Mr. Russell observes, is not a fifth note; what is added is the relation—but "rightly related" to the constituents!¹⁶³

Observe Eliot classify "0 and 1" as *inferiora* and therefore as "real," associated with a physical tangibility atop which the pluralistic "relations" of *superiora*, "plurals," are built. Eliot himself adds the points about "0 and 1" and "plurals," as well as expanding upon the analogy with melody, to his summary of Russell's argument; they are his own extensions of Russell's critiquing Meinong into a connection Eliot perceives between that critique (concerning the difference between "real" and "ideal") and Russell's otherwise seemingly distinct work on mathematics and logic.¹⁶⁴

Eliot wrote to Russell that section V "justifies the whole" of *The Waste Land*, a claim that fleshes out in relation to the mereological force of the quotation above.¹⁶⁵ A melody is a *superius*, composed of notes that are *inferiora*, upon the aggregate of which the melody as a "whole" supervenes. Yet, the *superius*, the melody itself, does not exist as "a fifth note"; it is, instead, an umbrella for a "plural" relation between the binary values of "0 and 1," or the basic notes that sponsor all melodies. If only *inferiora*—0, 1, a melody's notes—are "real," and if a *superius* can never be a "fifth note," but instead must be some other "transcendent" value laid over top of the "real" notes, then the holistic, totalizing, melodic *superius* is proved unreal, which is a quandary because it is precisely the melody as a "whole" that affords experience, not the scattered notes. The melodic relations between notes are simultaneously the most vivid and least

“real” aspects of experience. The larger threat is that, like Shackleton, how we count our experiences might redound significantly upon how we account for them as real or not. Worse still, a Bradleyan regression threatens in the fact that *inferiora* do not bottom out in “notes,” but rather continue down to “vibrations,” themselves implicitly supervening on some further ontological basement, and so on down; this plunge has no perceivable end. Thus, Eliot’s claim for V’s status as justifying the “whole” of *The Waste Land* becomes a curse in disguise as a blessing, putting into play questions about the possibility of wholes—*superiora*, melodies, numbers other than “0 and 1”—in the first place.

But what of the hermit thrush’s song? Properly *superius*, it has its binary notes, “drip” and “drop,” as well as being decidedly accessory to *The Waste Land*’s most hallucinatory tenors: serving in the poem as a mirage of water and in the notes as a false reference to a non-existent song. Yet, just as its note, 357, breaks a citational drought, and reattunes the poem back to its numerical denotations and explications, which descend like the sought-after rain over its remaining 77 lines, the thrush’s song brings together what had been separate: “sound of water over a rock.” Crucial is the fact that the “water-dripping song” is not just about water, but is rather apropos of a dialectical meeting between water and rock, both becoming requisite in the dripping sound. (This looks forward to the other bird’s song later in V, in which “Co co rico co co rico,” its sounds reminiscent of rock, begets perhaps the closest thing to actual rain in V, “a damp gust”—melody again pursuant to the bridging of the V’s signal discrepancy between water and rock.) The thrush’s song ends with awareness that “there is no water,” on the one hand a victory, in that it brings experience into accord with something besides phantasmagoria and on the other hand a compelling example of what even an abstract or immaterial *superius* can do for the poem in sorting its disparate facets (here water and rock). In this sense, the thrush’s melody returns us to the ending of the poem and its deliberations over closing attempts at arrangement: “Shall I at least set my lands in order? ... These fragments I have shored against my ruins.”¹⁶⁶ Order will suffer from the same mereological problem as melody, in which the ordered constituents fall outside the scope of “order” as a holistic gesture; “fragments,” in light of Eliot’s ideas about *inferiora*, become the realistic, tangible “0 and 1” to order’s relational plurality. What the thrush shows, in singing the melody of “water over a rock,” is that this difference—the paradoxical gap between whole and part, mind and world, melody and notes, order and fragment, plurals and binaries—can be a stepping stone not to a position superseding or transcending the experience of paradox, but to one from which paradox can be cognized as formally, logically, and finally metaphysically valuable in negotiating relations between “real” fragments and “ideal” order throughout *The Waste Land*.

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- ¹ T.S. Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot*, eds. Valerie Eliot et al., 5 vols. (New Haven: Yale UP, 2011-2014), 1:160.
- ² F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay* (New York: Macmillan, 1897), 276.
- ³ J.M.E. McTaggart, *The Further Determination of the Absolute* (1893), 56, 160, 195.
- ⁴ D.W. Hamlyn, "The Communion of Forms and the Development of Plato's Logic," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 5.21 (1955): 298; Edward G. Ballard, "On Parsing the Parmenides," *The Review of Metaphysics* 15.3 (1962): 441.
- ⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), 493. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 455-6.
- ⁶ Eliot, *Letters*, 1:88.
- ⁷ Peter Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot: A Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 49.
- ⁸ Lyndall Gordon, *T.S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* (New York: Norton, 1998), 69, 95. Eliot, *Letters*, 1:72.
- ⁹ Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 374.
- ¹⁰ Eliot, *Letters*, 1:731n1.
- ¹¹ Eliot, *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, ed. Ronald Schuchard et al., 8 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2014-), 2:119, 425, 539.
- ¹² *Ibid* at 2:513-19, 539-45.
- ¹³ Eliot, *Letters*, 1:357.
- ¹⁴ Gordon, 488.
- ¹⁵ Eliot, *Complete Prose*, 1:42.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid* at 1:xlvi.
- ¹⁷ Eliot, *Letters*, 89.
- ¹⁸ Eric Thompson, *T.S. Eliot: The Metaphysical Perspective* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1963). George Whiteside, "T.S. Eliot's Dissertation," *ELH: English Literary History* 34.3 (1967): 400-424. Jeffrey M. Perl, *Skepticism and Modern Enmity: Before and After Eliot* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989). Manju Jain, *T.S. Eliot and American Philosophy: The Harvard Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992). M.A.R. Habib, *The Early T.S. Eliot and Western Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999). Donald Childs, *From Philosophy to Poetry: T.S. Eliot's Study of Knowledge and Experience* (London: Athlone Press, 2001).
- ¹⁹ René Wellek, "The Criticism of T.S. Eliot," *The Sewanee Review* 64.3 (1956): 427. Eliot, *Letters*, 1:87-89, 97n2; *Complete Prose*, 1:198.
- ²⁰ As Jain says, however, it would be a mistake to take the absolute as "the objective of Eliot's spiritual search." Jain, 207.
- ²¹ Eliot, *Complete Prose*, 4:330.
- ²² Eliot, *Letters*, 3:165, 389n2.
- ²³ *Ibid* at 35n2.
- ²⁴ Eliot, *Inventions of the March Hare*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Harvest, 1996), 64-5.
- ²⁵ Eliot, *Poems Written in Early Youth* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967), 26.
- ²⁶ Eliot, *Inventions*, 53.
- ²⁷ The other influence behind these early references to an absolute is Jules Laforgue, whose use of the term often involved the vanishing of consciousness and a fade into nothingness, presented as alternatives to a dreary world.

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- ²⁸ Eliot, *Complete Prose*, 1:207, 212.
- ²⁹ Ray Monk, *Bertrand Russell: The Spirit of Solitude* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 439.
- ³⁰ Eliot, *Complete Prose*, 1:xxxvii.
- ³¹ J.S. Mackenzie, "The New Realism and the Old Idealism," *Mind* 15.59 (1906): 308. Eliot, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley* (New York: Columbia UP, 1989), 105.
- ³² Bertrand Russell, *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, vol. 6 (London: Routledge, 1988), 133-46.
- ³³ Russell, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* (London: Routledge, 2010), 2.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Eliot, *Inventions*, 71.
- ³⁶ Eliot, *Complete Prose*, 1:211.
- ³⁷ Ibid at 1:90. Bradley, *Principles of Logic* (New York: G.E. Stechert & Co, 1912), 533.
- ³⁸ Eliot, *Complete Prose*, 1:450.
- ³⁹ Ibid at 1:446.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid at 1:209, 2:262.
- ⁴¹ Ibid at 1:197.
- ⁴² Eliot, *Experience and Reality*, 202.
- ⁴³ Eliot, *Complete Prose*, 1:148.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Eliot, *Inventions*, 350-1.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid at 64-5.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid at 70.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid at 47.
- ⁴⁹ Eliot, *Complete Prose*, 1:148.
- ⁵⁰ Eliot, *Early Youth*, 26.
- ⁵¹ Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1950), 46.
- ⁵² Eliot, *Inventions*, 352.
- ⁵³ Eliot, *Experience and Reality*, 90-7.
- ⁵⁴ Eliot, *Complete Prose*, 1:624.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid at 2:749.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid at 1:209.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid at 1:691.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid at 2:516.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid at 2:281.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid at 1:691.
- ⁶¹ Ibid at 1:197.
- ⁶² David A. Moody, *Thomas Stearns Eliot: Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 73.
- ⁶³ Eliot, *Complete Prose*, 1:197.
- ⁶⁴ Monk, 50-1.
- ⁶⁵ Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967), 100.
- ⁶⁶ Russell, *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell*, ed. Nicholas Griffin, 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 2002), 1:30.

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- ⁶⁷ Russell, *My Philosophical Development* (London: Routledge, 1993), 42.
- ⁶⁸ Russell, *Letters*, 1:58.
- ⁶⁹ Russell, *Collected Papers*, 2:42.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid at 2:5. Eliot, *Complete Prose*, 1:209, 212.
- ⁷¹ Russell, *Collected Papers*, 2:13.
- ⁷² Ibid at 1:107.
- ⁷³ Eliot, *Complete Prose*, 1:203.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid at 1:189, 203.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid at 1:210.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid at 1:88.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid at 1:212.
- ⁷⁸ Eliot, *Experience and Reality*, 82.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid at 90.
- ⁸⁰ Eliot, *Complete Prose*, 1:159.
- ⁸¹ Russell, *Collected Papers*, 2:42.
- ⁸² Eliot, *Inventions*, 378.
- ⁸³ Eliot, *Complete Poems*, 43.
- ⁸⁴ Pound quoted in: Eliot, *Letters*, 1:781.
- ⁸⁵ Eliot, *Inventions*, 355-7.
- ⁸⁶ John J. Soldo, "Jovial Juvenilia: T.S. Eliot's First Magazine," *Biography* 5.1 (1982): 33.
- ⁸⁷ Eliot, *Complete Poems*, 82-4.
- ⁸⁸ Eliot, *Inventions*, 380-2.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid at 356.
- ⁹⁰ William, McNaughton, "Ezra Pound's Meters and Rhythms," *PMLA* 78.1 (1963): 142.
- ⁹¹ Eliot, *Inventions*, 349-52.
- ⁹² Eliot, *Letters*, 1:375, 391, 435, 792.
- ⁹³ Eliot, *Complete Prose*, 1:159.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid at 1:61; *Inventions*, 45.
- ⁹⁵ Eliot, *Inventions*, 344-5.
- ⁹⁶ Eliot, *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot*, 1: 192. Hereafter *CPE*. The doodle, of a face and hand rapturously holding up a rainbow of logical symbols, is one Eliot made in a notebook of logical exercises on Bertrand Russell's *Principia Mathematica* done for Josiah Royce's "Seminary on Logic" and dated February 24, 1914. See: Box 11, Royce "Seminary in Logic", Philosophy 21, Feb 24 1914. Eliot, MS Am 1691.14, Box 11, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University, 21 May 2015.
- ⁹⁷ As will be discussed, these numbers are necessary to key the poem to its notes. The first two versions of the poem, in *The Criterion* and *The Dial* respectively, had no notes and therefore no line numbers. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, *The Criterion* 1, no. 1 (October 1922): 50-64; *The Dial* LXXIII, no. 5 (November 1922): 473-485. Both the Liveright (New York, 1922) and Hogarth (Richmond, 1923) first editions of the poem introduced the notes and line numbers, which have accompanied it ever since.
- ⁹⁸ See this letter to J.C. Colcord: "The poem is intended to be a whole and if I allowed parts of it to be printed separately, it might not only spread the impression that it is merely a collection of

unrelated parts, but might also appear to give sanction from myself of this impression.” Eliot, *Letters*, 2: 303. Cf. also 2: 173. Hereafter *L*.

⁹⁹ Eliot, *Collected Poems*, 73. Hereafter *CP*.

¹⁰⁰ *CP*, 55, 56, 58, 67.

¹⁰¹ Eliot, “The Frontiers of Criticism,” in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), 121; *L*, 1: 638.

¹⁰² *L*, 1: 623, 1: 632, 1: 656, 1: 681. The other frequent point of reference (and contention) in these and other letters constitutes another set of numbers: the volume’s price, the return on investment, the amount of prizes possibly one, etc. Given enough space, this essay would include analysis of the rich, yet subtle vein of economic metaphors and values, accountings as well as countings, swirling around and through *The Waste Land*. One of the more famous would be Eliot’s appellation of “bogus” to the poem’s notes, with a “bogus” originally meaning a counterfeit coin. Eliot, “The Frontiers of Criticism,” 121. Another regime of numbers unstudied in this essay involves timing, whose modular arithmetic peppers *The Waste Land* from start to finish and whose actionable indications, especially in light of contemporaneous discoveries related to relativity, merit further study in light of Eliot’s larger numerical thinking.

¹⁰³ Ezra Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound: 1907–1941* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950), 169.

¹⁰⁴ Edmund Wilson, “The Poetry of Drouth,” *The Dial* (December 1922), 615; Edgell Rickword, “A Fragmentary Poem,” *Times Literary Supplement*, no. 1131 (20 Sep 1923): 616; Hugh Ross Williamson, “T.S. Eliot and his Conception of Poetry,” *The Bookman* 79, no. 474 (March 1931): 349. Wilson’s early review received a quick response from Harold Monro, who conducts a scathing, imagined interview with Eliot, in which he toys further with Wilson’s points about the poem’s numbers. Harold Monro, “Notes for a Study of ‘The Waste Land’: An Imaginary Dialogue with T.S. Eliot,” *Chapbook*, no. 34 (February 1923): 20. Williamson follows up his 1931 piece with another in 1932 that pays still more attention to Eliot’s numbers: Williamson, “A Commentary on T.S. Eliot’s ‘The Waste Land,’” *The Bookman* 82, no. 490 (Jul 1932): 192-95.

¹⁰⁵ Mentions and uses of numbers are scattered *passim* across the secondary literature on *The Waste Land*. The following are a historical arc of just some selections progressing into the early 2000s. Steven Foster, “Relativity and *The Waste Land*: A Postulate,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1965): 85; William Harmon, “T.S. Eliot’s Raids on the Inarticulate,” *PMLA* 91, no. 3 (May 1976): 454; Charles Sanders, “‘The Waste Land’: The Last Minstrel Show?,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 8, no. 1 (1980): 35; Andrew Ross, “*The Waste Land* and the Fantasy of Interpretation,” *Representations*, no. 8 (Autumn 1984): 138; Sherlyn Abdo, “Woman as Grail in T.S. Eliot’s ‘The Waste Land,’” *The Centennial Review* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 54; Sebastian D.G. Knowles, “Death by Gramophone,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 27, no. 1/2 (Autumn 2003): 8n28.

¹⁰⁶ Richards, *The Principles of Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 2001), 274-5; Robert Graves, “The Future of English Poetry,” *Fortnightly Review* 119, no. 712 (April 1926): 451, 453. Richards looks forward to *Science and Poetry*, where he associates “the new order” of *The Waste Land* and the more generalized “business” of the modern poet “to give order and coherence ... to a body of experience” with the “coherence theories” that defined “logic” and “the universe of the mathematician,” which were by degrees coming to define twentieth-century discourse.

Richards, *Science and Poetry*, 2nd ed. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1935), 55, 61. 70-1n1.

¹⁰⁷ C.D. Blanton, *Epic Negation: The Dialectical Poetics of Late Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 23, 44.

¹⁰⁸ Michael Levenson, "Novelty, Modernity, Adjacency," *New Literary History* 42, no. 4 (Autumn 2011), 671, 676-77.

¹⁰⁹ Andrea Henderson, "Symbolic Logic and the Logic of Symbolism," *Critical Inquiry* 41, no. 1 (2014): 99n39.

¹¹⁰ W.E. Collin, "T.S. Eliot," *The Sewanee Review* 39, no. 1 (Jan-Mar, 1931): 22.

¹¹¹ Blanton, 27; Richards, *The Principles of Literary Criticism*, 274.

¹¹² Thomas M. Lorch, "The Relationship between *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1964): 123; Wilson, 615. My emphasis.

¹¹³ The best and earliest essay on part-whole relations in *The Waste Land* is: Conrad Aiken, "An Anatomy of Melancholy," *New Republic* xxxiii (7 Feb 1923): 294-5. The topic continues through Richards, gets picked up by F.R. Leavis, and works its way through innumerable books and essays after that, especially work that considers Eliot's philosophical training and consequent dissertation, which is everywhere obsessed with mereological concerns. Richards, *The Principles of Literary Criticism*, 294; Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry* (London: Faber & Faber, 1932), 94-5; Eric Thompson, *T.S. Eliot: The Metaphysical Perspective*, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1963), 131; George Whiteside, "T.S. Eliot's Dissertation," *ELH* 34, no. 3 (September 1967): 403-4; Walter Benn Michaels, "Philosophy in Kinkanja: Eliot's Pragmatism," *Glyph* 8 (1981): 170-202; Jeffrey M. Perl, *Skepticism and Modern Enmity: Before and after Eliot* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 121; Jain; Habib; Childs.

¹¹⁴ Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Literary Essays 1917-1932* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932), 8.

¹¹⁵ Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," in *Literary Essays 1917-1932*, 247-8.

¹¹⁶ Aiken, 295.

¹¹⁷ Another early review referred to the poem as "a collection of flashes." Eliot, *The Annotated Waste Land with Eliot's Contemporary Prose*, ed. Lawrence Rainey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 34.

¹¹⁸ Blanton, 5.

¹¹⁹ Organization circulates through Eliot's mereological thinking in his philosophical essays and dissertation, culminating in a crucial discussion in "The Perfect Critic": *CPP*, 1: 212, 1: 159, 1: 248, 1: 302, 2: 262. Order features in Eliot's famous discernment of a "mythic method" in *Ulysses*, which Blanton has lately contrasted to the "ordering method" of Eliot's early work: Eliot, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," *The Dial* (November 1923): 481; Blanton, 50.

¹²⁰ Lawrence Rainey, *Revisiting The Waste Land* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 43, 48, 111, 117; Paul Stasi, *Modernism, Imperialism and the Historical Sense* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 54; Vincent Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 236, 241. Also see: Blanton, 26, 74; Eliot, *The Annotated Waste Land with Eliot's Contemporary Prose*, 35. Charles Altieri has recently tackled coherence and logic as terms of art or problematic ideals, but for modernism as a

whole rather than for just Eliot. Charles Altieri, *Reckoning with the Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 6, 44-6.

¹²¹ *CP*, 69.

¹²² *Ibid* at 70.

¹²³ Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile* (New York: Harvest, 1971), 147.

¹²⁴ *CP*, 69, 74.

¹²⁵ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, ed. Richard Macksey (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 34, xvii.

¹²⁶ *Ibid* at 333.

¹²⁷ Sharon Cameron, *Choosing Not Choosing: Dickinson's Fascicles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 4, 14-18.

¹²⁸ Blanton, 50.

¹²⁹ Quentin Meillassoux, *The Number and the Siren* (New York: Urbanomic, 2012). Alain Badiou, *Mathematics of the Transcendental: Onto-logy and being-there* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

¹³⁰ Yohei Igarashi, "Statistical Analysis at the Birth of Close Reading," *New Literary History* 46, no. 3 (Summer 2015): 485-504. A perfect example of current quantitative methods applied to a modernist text is: Eric Bulson, "Ulysses by Numbers," *Representations* 127, no. 1 (Summer 2014): 1-32).

¹³¹ Murray McArthur, "Deciphering Eliot: 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' and the Dialectic of the Cipher," *American Literature* 66, no. 3 (September 1994): 514-16; "Symptom and Sign: Janet, Freud, Eliot, and the Literary Mandate of Laughter," *Twentieth Century Literature* 56, no. 1 (Spring 2010), 13.

¹³² Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile*, 45-47.

¹³³ *CP*, 72.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*.

¹³⁶ *Ibid* at 61, 72.

¹³⁷ Eliot, *The Criterion* (April 1924): 233; *The Criterion* (October 1927): 291. Eliot read the first volume of *Principia Mathematica* when it came out in 1910, and he studied the full text intensively under Russell at Harvard in 1914; Brand Blanshard later wrote of Eliot's "facility" in "dealing with" *Principia Mathematica*'s enigmatic notation, and remembered him saying: "It gave me a sense of pleasure and power manipulating these curious little figures." *CPE*, 1:101, 185-8n1. Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1938), x, 116.

¹³⁸ Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics*, x. Carl Boyer, *The Concepts of Calculus* (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1949), 13. James Levine's recent overview of Russell's development is worth consulting for a more in-depth account of his evolving conception of number. Levine, "Russell and the Transfinite," *Hermathena*, no. 190 (Summer 2011), 53-112.

¹³⁹ *CPE*, 2: 266. For another good example of Eliot entertaining this view, see: 1: 326. Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics*, xv.

¹⁴⁰ *CPP*, 194.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid* at 1: 325-6.

¹⁴² As the self-proclaimed midwife to *The Waste Land*'s "Caesarean operation" (L, 1: 626) Pound's own comments on mathematics are worth injecting here, as we process Eliot's ideas about "erlebt" counting and non-objective mathematical objects. In *Gaudier-Brzeska*, Pound works through several iterations of $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ and $(x - a)^2 + (y - b)^2 = r^2$, and he concludes by rejecting the perfect symmetry of these equations, saying their constantly reliable operation "does not grip hold of Heaven." Yet, though neither life nor art becomes valuable "by mathematics," a "mathematical exactitude of proportion" is what imbues art and life with a sense of "intensive" form; by tapping into this shared sense of form, "art handles life," and we move seamlessly from "a, b, and c" to "sea, cliffs, and night." Out of this transition will emerge an art based upon "a new computation of the mathematics of harmony," an art infused with a rejuvenated sense of mathematical precision, which artistic and worldly subjects always already share, as Pound imagines elsewhere with his image of poems as "great hollow cones of steel" conducting not just "positive and negative" electricity, but a whole chromatics of energies emanating from basic mathematical operators: "+, -, x, ÷, +a, -a, x a, ÷ a, etc." Mathematics, thus reconceived, becomes a vital substance linking steel, the worldliest of materials, with poetry, the most abstract of human creations. Thus, both Pound and Eliot flirt with mathematics as "a new way of dealing with form" that opens a fresh horizon onto how "art handles life." In math's equations, form, rather than standing as something austere and abstractly separate from the dirty work of signification, becomes signified as well as signifier: "The equation [of the circle] governs the circle. It is the circle ... It is nothing that is not the circle." Numbers too, like Pound's equational example, are just what they are, their signified values entirely intimate with their signifiers, especially true in the case of, say, the Rhine daughters' "III," which is the number three, is three daughters, and is itself actually three marks. In other words, "three" tautologically recurs as its own reference, in a way that "dog," which we might refer to as a hirsute mammal, does not. For Pound, working in the tradition of Imagism, Vorticism, Objectism, and so forth, this immediacy of definition appeals because it closes that nefarious, ageless gap between word and world. Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (New York: New Directions, 1974), 90-93; "Brancusi," in *Literary Essays* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 442; "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris," in *Selected Prose 1909-1965*, 34.

¹⁴³ These and following quotations come from Eliot's main logical notebook, which has unnumbered pages. Box 11, Royce "Seminary in Logic", Philosophy 21, Feb 24 1914. Eliot, MS Am 1691.14, Box 11, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University, 21 May 2015.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Russell, "Mathematical Logic as Based on the Theory of Types," *American Journal of Mathematics* 30, no. 3 (July 1908): 222-3.

¹⁴⁶ CP, 67.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid at 75. We might recall, here, the Trinitarian impulse behind the Thames daughters' "(three)."

¹⁴⁸ Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile*, 85.

¹⁴⁹ CPE, 1: 359.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid at 36.

¹⁵¹ CPE, 1: 363.

¹⁵² Ibid at 359.

¹⁵³ *CP*, 75. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1916), 345–46.

¹⁵⁴ “Leibniz’s Monads and Bradley’s Finite Centres,” *CPE*, 1: 466.

¹⁵⁵ *CP*, 69. There is some evidence that Eliot is mistranslating Dante here in his use of the word “key.” But my reading takes force from Eliot’s own language (and understanding) of the poem, so the mistranslation is does not matter for the present close reading of “key.”

¹⁵⁶ Dante, XXXIII,13–72.

¹⁵⁷ Eliot misquotes the lines as “*E fue due in uno ed uno in due*” (*CPE*, 2: 741n39). Pound gets it nearly right in “Near Perigord,” “Ed eran due in uno, ed uno in due,” even providing a translation: “*Surely I saw, and still see before my eyes / Goes that headless trunk, that bears for light / Its own head, gripped by the dead hair / And like a swinging lamp that says, ‘Ah me! / I severed men, my head and heart / Ye see here severed, my life’s counterpart.*” Pound, “Near Perigord,” *Personae* (New York: New Directions, 1971), 156. Eliot later praised Pound’s translation in “A Note on Ezra Pound,” *CPE*, 1: 751. Alberigo: Eliot, *Inventions of the March Hare* (New York: Harvest, 1996), 349. Dante, *Inferno*, XXXIII.122–23.

¹⁵⁸ *CP*, 66–7.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid at 66.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid at 74.

¹⁶¹ Frank Chapman, *Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1896), 15, 400.

¹⁶² Jim McCue, “Did Eliot Mis-ascribe the ‘water-dripping song’ in *The Waste Land*?”, *Notes and Queries* 61, no. 1 (2014): 118–19.

¹⁶³ *CPE*, 1: 316.

¹⁶⁴ Russell, “Meinong’s Theory of Complexes and Assumptions (III.)”, *Mind* 13, no. 52 (October 1904): 509–524.

¹⁶⁵ *L*, 2: 257.

¹⁶⁶ *CP*, 69.

CHAPTER 2

UNVICIOUS CIRCLES: LOGIC'S WILDNESS AND THE POETRY OF ROBERT FROST

I. Pure form

There is at least so much good in the world that it admits of form and the making of form. And not only admits of it, but calls for it. We people are thrust forward out of the suggestions of form in the rolling clouds of nature ... Fortunately, too, no forms are more engrossing, gratifying, comforting, staying than those lesser ones we throw off, like vortex rings of smoke, all our individual enterprise and needing nobody's cooperation; a basket, a letter, a garden, a room, an idea, a picture, a poem.¹

Though always situated at the end of a “breathless swing” away from “subject matter,” conceptions of form are as likely to be physical or metaphysical as they are linguistic or literary in Robert Frost's poetry and prose.² Frost defines the latter sort of form in a 1920s note as “length tone sentence structure.”³ But we also encounter form in places like “Pertinax” — “Let chaos storm! / Let cloud shapes swarm! / I wait for form.” — in which the term becomes a stay against some generalized chaos.⁴ “To a Thinker” is another example of an appeal to form and its synonyms over against various exponents of formlessness:

From force to matter and back to force,
From form to content and back to form,
From norm to crazy and back to norm,
From bound and free and back to bound,
From sound to sense and back to sound.
So back and forth. It almost scares
A man the way things come in pairs.⁵

In both poems, the metaphysical and linguistic valences of form concur in the making of poetry, itself famously called by Frost “a momentary stay against confusion” and a summons of order from “the vast chaos of all I have lived through.”⁶ “Pertinax” foregrounds “length tone sentence structure” through rhythmic patternings of sounds and figures, which catalyze the poem's appeal to order, as with the restatement of “for” in “form” and form's consummation of a triplicate rhyme with “storm” and “swarm,” exigent poetic forms stewarding, and then receiving, the metaphysical “form” that finally arrives at the poem's ending. The dyads in “To a Thinker” correlate metaphysical oscillations between “force” and “matter” with literary pivots among “form” and “content” through anaphoric and chiasmic structures formalizing the experience that “almost scares” the speaker — the “breathless swing” enacted by “pairs.”

Consider the opposite of form, which Frost variously calls “content,” “substance,” or “subject matter,” the last a phrase itself tense with what makes metaphysics necessarily chaotic: the dualism of mind and body, subject and matter, that underlies the confrontation between, say, the “storm” and the “I” that waits in “Pertinax.”⁷ Frost typically construes form's opposites as natural phenomena or objects, as in the “cloud shapes” of “Pertinax” or “the rolling clouds of nature” in Frost's 1935 letter to *The Amherst Student*, quoted at the beginning of this essay.⁸ A

more complex example occurs in his 1919 “Remarks on Form in Poetry,” in which a “fellow ... goes into the fields to pull carrots” until finding one “that suggests something to him”:

He takes out his knife and notches it here and there, until the two pronged roots become legs and the carrot takes on something of the semblance of a man. The real genius takes hold of that bit of life which is suggestive to him and gives it form. But the man who is merely a realist, and not a genius, will leave the carrot just as he finds it. The man who is merely an idealist and not a genius, will try to carve a donkey where no donkey is suggested by the carrot he pulls.⁹

Setting aside the realist and idealist for the moment, we can discern in the genius’s actions a coordination of mind and nature through a fit between the latter’s suggestion and the former’s gift. (Suggestion also grounds the discussion of form in this essay’s aforementioned epigraph from Frost’s letter to *The Amherst Student*.) The “genius” gives the “carrot” the form “of a man,” which repudiates dualism even as it arrogates to form—*pace* the world’s suggestion—metaphysical importance akin to a *characteristica universalis*, in which understanding and experience manifest through creative acts imprinting specifically human forms upon the world, whether as etchings carved on a carrot or, we might imagine, images embedded in a poem.¹⁰

On the question of form as human: how to reconcile the subjectivism, or even redundancy, implicit in Frost’s having the “genius” carve a carrot into the form of a man with nature’s *a priori* suggestion of the form of a man? The progression goes as follows. A poet “finds” a natural subject matter, substance, or content that “suggests” a poetic form that allows the poet to “give” a form to the content already present in that content’s initial suggestion—which turns out to be the form of the poet himself. If this feels immaterial, the counterexamples of the realist and more importantly the idealist will make the genius’s example more tangible. The realist makes no change to the carrot, refusing the practice of “giving” that Frost embraces as the poet’s prerogative. The idealist, like the genius, does give a form, but rejects nature’s suggestion by choosing one that exceeds the capacities of what the idealist has found. Unlike the realist’s overt neutrality and banal inactivity in not giving a form, the idealist commits a double injustice by subverting form’s suggestion: deviating not only from the suggestive form of *matter*, but also from the celebration of the *subject* that following matter’s suggestion bequeaths. Thereby, the idealist ends up making a donkey while the genius, in a Promethean exercise of formal acuity, epitomizes humanity itself.¹¹ But, if the genius is responding to nature’s suggestion, then Frost’s poetics begin to feel like a *mise en abyme*, in which forms—natural, human, poetic—continually reveal themselves within themselves. A corollary for this revelation is the productively repetitive cycle of reaping and sowing in which the carrot is always already involved (in a cognate example Frost uses a potato).¹² A domesticated vegetable, the carrot grows into a suggestion of human form, echoing the fact of a human’s planting it originally.¹³ This is of a piece with critics’ construal of Frost as not just a “natural,” but more so as an “agrarian” poet, an idea originated in Ezra Pound’s very first reviews of *A Boy’s Will* and *North of Boston* in 1913 and 1914, written during and just after Frost’s brief tenure in London.¹⁴ Pound wedded Frost’s formalism to rural contents, as in a paraphrase of the poem “Mowing”: “The wind working

against him in the dark, the noise of his scythe in the grass are very real to him.”¹⁵ What Pound will punningly call the “sound work” of the speaker’s scythe meeting the field’s grass predicts the genius and the carrot; agricultural production, agrestal autopoiesis, and poetic form entangle in a serendipitous fit that Pound catechizes repeatedly as “natural.”¹⁶ To Pound, Frost’s form is natural not only because it comes bearing the natural subjects “of the New Hampshire woods,” but because it projects a formalism that is itself “natural” — organic as well as apposite — which is just what Frost theorizes in his poetics of suggestion and gift.

That Pound should praise Frost’s poetics as “natural” makes sense if we think about Pound’s contemporaneous involvement with Vorticism and Imagism, into which he and others tried unsuccessfully to induct Frost before he left London in 1914. In essays straddling both these movements, Pound called for poems that exhibit a “direct treatment of the thing,” “have form as a tree has form,” and work through a “natural” symbolism, for which “a hawk is a hawk.”¹⁷ The unequivocal, semitautological way in which Pound connects modes of formal presentation in poems and the worldly forms those poems bear forth — trees, hawks — is of a piece with Frost’s own thoughts on form-form linkages. Take the example Pound makes of the poem “Mowing” by selecting the “scythe in the grass” as the image most evocative of Frost’s poetic achievement:

There was never a sound beside the wood but one,
And that was my long scythe whispering to the ground.
What was it it whispered? I knew not well myself;
Perhaps it was something about the heat of the sun,
Something, perhaps, about the lack of sound —
And that was why it whispered and did not speak.
It was no dream of the gift of idle hours,
Or easy gold at the hand of fay or elf:
Anything more than the truth would have seemed too weak
To the earnest love that laid the swale in rows,
Not without feeble-pointed spikes of flowers
(Pale orchises), and scared a bright green snake.
The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows.
My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make.¹⁸

As the mower does the grass, “Mowing” culls, dispensing with what is “not” or “never” the case “beside the wood,” leaving in its wake “but one” sound, which becomes the singular focus of the poem — that of “scythe whispering to the ground.” Pound identified “tone” as the most noteworthy aspect of Frost’s poetics, Frost himself would speak of “sound images,” and a long critical tradition has interpreted Frost’s early poetry as developing a kind of auditory imagism.¹⁹ But the way in which the “sound image” of the scythe’s whisper emerges from negations, while foregrounding the process of that emergence, augurs metaphysical stakes that imagism largely avoids.²⁰ Just after Pound’s May 1913 review of *A Boy’s Will*, Frost sent his seminal July 1913 letter to John Bartlett on the “sound of sense,” in which he identifies “voices behind a door” as the superlative prototype for poetry because such voices would be neither slaves to overt contents (sense *sans* sound) nor pure nonsense (sound *sans* sense).²¹ Rather, Frost educes, these voices persist at the edge of understanding, negating their own contents while also depending

upon some original, yet occluded conversation that *could have been* heard, comprehended, known. In this liminal sonic space, poetry becomes “pure sound—pure form,” and the “artist” is one who rejects the grammatical or poetic “subject” in favor of preserving that formal purity.

Aphonic but not noiseless, the whisper in “Mowing” presages that overheard conversation, even as it implicates an agrarian scene in a sustained meditation on the nature of “pure form.” The mower, auditor as well as instigator of the scythe’s whisper, attempts to understand it and foists that attempt onto the reader with a rhetorical question and answer: “What was it it whispered? I knew not well myself.” This line of inquiry fails instructively as mower and reader test a pair of contents against what the scythe might be whispering “about”: perhaps it whispers “about the heat of the sun,” or perhaps “about the lack of sound.” Neither satisfies the will to “know” what the scythe whispers, and in fact the second supposition spurs a distinction between whispering and speaking that foils the possibility of a positive knowledge altogether. In other words, if the scythe whispers “about the lack of sound,” then its unspoken contents become an unknowable absence, a negation of sound, that leaves only the whisper with which the poem began, itself a further negation of those same contents (because a whisper is itself a sound). That whisper reenacts the same vectors between form and contentlessness that the mower’s misguided suppositions have already proved. The poem’s first words, “There was never,” entail a universal or thickly repeated experience of entanglements between the mower’s intention to order the field and the field’s openness to becoming ordered. In what Pound identifies as the key image of “scythe in the grass,” blade and field engage in a “whispered” coordination of forms, together constituting the inevitable rows of “hay” that the field, through its history of agrarian cultivation, was already disposed “to make.” As with the genius and the carrot, there is a reiterative progression among equivocal forms, a circulation through selfsimilar formings, at work here, an *ouroboros* set in motion by the realization that matter and subject are not necessarily at hylomorphic odds, or that they possibly merge in a formal stratum, and that poetry, or any other form of human invention, can express the experience of exactly that merger.

“Mowing” captures this interaction between the field’s formal disposition and the speaker’s intention to form it through a poetic formalism that replicates what that interaction is like. The concrete form of the poem entifies around the agrarian impetus to arrange “the swale in rows” drawn through a poetic impulse to simulate rather than describe, or perhaps “dream” rather than “know,” that arrangement. With lines between 10 and 13 syllables, “Mowing” recreates the labor of mowing by oscillating between metrical lengths, with recurrent structures—like the anapests that end every other line to begin the poem, or the many symmetrical rhymes, as in lines 2 and 5 and 10 and 13 or 6 and 9—marking cadences for the mower as much as for the reader.²² The poem, itself laid in rows, curves along its right side, as if to mimic a blade’s crescent edge or a patch of grass that edge has just cut. The imperfection of the cut, with the 9th line about a “too weak” surplus of “truth” standing like a missed piece of grass, matches the disfigurements “Mowing” already inflicts upon classical sonnet forms by virtue of its irregular meter and rhyme scheme. Deixes, beginning with the poem’s initial “There,” inflect the “breathless swing” of the poem’s cadence in a back-and-forth grammar of placeholders whose repetition always already effects the collapse of subject (or matter) into form. The “it it” of the third line, for instance, not only refigures the scythe’s swing as a quasi-chiastic structure, but it also models the metaphysical repercussions of that same swing—the encounter

between scythe and ground, or mower's intention and field's suggestion—in a tautological folding together of subject and object, such that “it” whispers only “it.”

This “it” recurs to begin line 7, which provides no clarity as to which “it,” subject or object, “was no dream of the gift of idle hours.” The negated “dream of the gift of idle hours” manifests the “sound work” that Pound celebrated in Frost by implicitly redefining that “gift” as not some fantasy of “fay or elf,” but rather as a tangible result of a human labor at agrarian formation coinciding with nature's responsiveness to such labor. This “labor” ends the poem with the recurrence of the now felicitous “dream” and a resolution of the poem's earlier epistemic dilemmas. If “fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows,” then the final line shows to what extent “fact” will become “the truth” that propels the final sestet: “My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make.”²³ Fact amounts to just the experience of swinging back to the poem's beginning, hearing that “long scythe whispering” with which the poem began, a process of forming the land that, in leaving “the hay to make,” implicitly refuses to move beyond the agrarian practice of ordering “the swale in rows,” suspending any imagination of how the mown hay—raw material for new inventions, left with the broad promise of a potential “to make”—might be used, instrumentalized, commodified. The speaker's simple will to order the hay resonates with the incessant character of the encounters between “scythe” and “ground” that the “whisper” resolves as a redundant formalism, which provokes Frost's dream of a poetry that is, like the conversation heard behind the door, “pure form.”

II. Wild logic

“Mowing” demonstrates how Frost's ideal of “pure form” becomes not an abstract endpoint, a hyperbolic mystification of subject and matter, but rather a heightened realism—something at least real enough to lop the heads off “Pale orchises” and to scare “bright green snakes”—which, in a final twist, makes metaphysical pitfalls (say, the “chaos” of “Pertinax”) all the more frightening. That is, if poetry and life come together in “pure form,” then any impediments or oppositions to form, embodied in the constant threat of pandemonium posed by contents, assume deeply felt and intimately experienced roles in our daily lives.²⁴ Frost himself clarifies this intimacy by eventually calling “sound of sense,” his purest of forms, a “vocal realism,” in which “form and substance merge.”²⁵ Frost's comments on poetics return again and again to that merger and the rhetoric of “pure form” that goes with it—but not always felicitously.²⁶ Frost's 1913-14 letters on the “sound of sense” were zealous in establishing “pure form” as the “vitality of our speech,” or “the living part of the poem.”²⁷ Frost took the animating concept of purity seriously, contemplating in various essays and letters the possibility of a poetry that could be entirely free of debts to anything beyond the “pure form” of its “sound,” as posited in a 1914 letter to Sidney Cox: “I shall show the sentence sound saying all that the sentence conveys with little or no help from the meaning of words.”²⁸ But, given Frost's ambition to formulate a “realism,” this cancelation of “meaning,” cognate to admonitions elsewhere of subject matter and its synonyms, proves troublesome.

For one thing, “pure form” smuggles a certain amount of paradox, and therefore a new kind of chaos, into the heart of formal systems created for the very purpose of keeping chaos at bay. Frost struggles with one paradox in a 1935 note: “There is not end so final {no form} so closed that if it hasn't an unclosed place that opens into further form.”²⁹ If the point of form is to

display a “natural” cycle between “gift” and “suggestion,” then it is unclear whether this cycle can avoid slipping into a vicious circulation among given and suggested forms. Without, as Frost says, a “final” form—and without meaning, content, substance, subject, or matter to anchor form by opposition—what recourse is there to settle form’s “swings” on any one meaning, intention, or point? Frost, at times, seems nearly overwhelmed by the constant proliferation of life’s (and poetry’s) anchorless circulations:

And then there are the circular runs like the stone the knife the handkerchief ... The stone is better than the knife because it can dull the knife, the knife is better than {the} handkerchief because it can cut the handkerchief. The handkerchief is better than the stone because it can cover the stone. And so on round and round. A College beats B College in football, B College beats C College and then C College beats A College. Nowhere can man seem to check himself in these circulations ... We get a slight hold of our first poem the better to understand {our} second, the better still our third and so on until we are back with all our experience of poetry on a day to better understand our first poem.³⁰

As Frost goes on to say, while these may be *particular* experiences of circulations, they become a *formal* problem because they condition or reveal an inevitable match between mental and worldly circularities: “The circularity of the mind {the shape of the brain pan} makes the universe look circular a circle that closed looks finite ... I suspect that curvature of the mind {which makes us reason always in a circle} would make the universe look curved.”³¹ The purest form of cycles between world’s suggestion and mind’s gift is the fact of cyclicity apparent in the mind’s own “curvature” and even “the brain pan” itself—a formal unity of selfsame circles. This purity of form, which only “looks finite,” may defeat the twinned somatic and cerebral threats posed by the world’s chaos, but such threats may also provide both subject and matter for experience and art, without which humanity loses its leverage in the world and divagates into only more and more paradoxical circles among forms. (One solution would be to settle on some “final form” chosen through an act of poetic will or sheer intention. But, as Frost muses in another note, it is not clear that any such “final form” will avoid collapsing back into circularity, as whatever is designated “final” will depend on forms that have come before: “One danger of changing materiality is that the final form may depend for its meaning on you remembering having seen and remembered the first form.”)³²

These slippery circulations mobilize Frost towards still deeper and further musings on the metaphysical connotations, and poetic affordances, of a robust formalism. To understand these affordances, we must take a moment to trace a shift in Frost’s vocabulary from the earlier dichotomy of “sound” and “sense” to a rejuvenated one of “wildness” and “logic.” This shift consummates in Frost’s most important statement on poetics, the preface entitled “The Figure a Poem Makes” completed in 1938 and published in 1939.³³ Therein, logic and wildness displace sound and sense as the key parameters for poetry. Frost identifies wildness as the “how” of the poem, an element of “surprise” and “wonder” imparting dynamism to an otherwise “static” presentation.³⁴ Logic imposes a “new order” on a poem’s wild expression, an order that if overly

abundant will force a poem “mechanically straight.”³⁵ What’s needed, as with “sound of sense,” is a medial “wildness of logic” that Frost analogizes to “the straight crookedness of a good walking stick.”³⁶ This wild logic disseminates outward from “The Figure a Poem Makes,” appearing in various formations and definitions throughout Frost’s notes, letters, essays, and poems. Such logic, for instance, repairs “the little reason” that “in man is broken,” even as subsequently logic itself is called “broken,” or opposed to unreasoned states like sleep and love that form an unbroken “continuum,” “continuousness,” or “flow.”³⁷ Though Frost frequently casts logic as exactly what poetry is not—associating it with “science”—he will also explicitly supervene felicitous poetry on a logic, as when he calls a poem “a little run of logic,” or when he castigates modern poems “without phrase, epigram, coherence, logic, and consistency.”³⁸ Frost posits logic as a protective factor in human experience, enclosing “mind” in an “unvicious circle” that keeps out “the wilderness.”³⁹

This image of an “unvicious circle” presents an important modification to the potentially vicious circles instantiated by pure form. Logic’s definition in “The Figure a Poem Makes” illustrates what this sort of circle might do for metaphysics and poetry:

I tell how there may be a better wildness of logic than of inconsequence. But the logic is backward, in retrospect, after the act. It must be more felt than seen ahead like prophecy. It must be a revelation, or a series of revelations, as much for the poet as for the reader. For it to be that there must have been the greatest freedom of the material to move about in it and to establish relations in it regardless of time and space, previous relation, and everything but affinity.⁴⁰

Logic presents itself as absent, or absents itself as present, because snared in a tensile play between “backward ... retrospect” and “seen ahead,” which engages poet and reader in a “breathless swing” across a range of always already past “materials” into never quite foreseeable “revelations.” The moment at which logic manifests as a quality of poetic making, implicitly the unnamed present situated between retrospect and revelation, elides into the description of the work logic does, which is to bridge gaps between what Stanley Cavell has called in Wallace Stevens the “lateness” of experience and the sense a poem must blindly proceed in making of that experience as a perpetually just-deferred future—“after the act.”⁴¹ The hail of verb tenses and deictics in the last sentence, “For it to be that there must have been,” enacts this same circling among past and future, with present transpiring as the opening at circle’s center (the hollow deictics, “it” and “there,” point similarly back to an already voided “logic”). Logic’s “unvicious” circulation between past and present emerges as what allows wildness to skirt “inconsequence”; and yet, in a twist, it is this circulating logic that actualizes “the greatest freedom of the material,” establishing poetry within a logical perimeter that disregards “time and space” as well as “previous relation.”

If the desideratum of a wild logic is an “unvicious circle” between mind’s free play among materials and the *a priori* freedom of those same materials—a indistinction that coordinates with our prior vocabulary of gift and suggestion—then consider perhaps the richest thesis in “The Figure a Poem Makes”:

Then there is this wildness whereof it is spoken. Granted again that it has an equal claim with sound to being a poem's better half. If it is a wild tune, it is a poem. Our problem then is, as modern abstractionists, to have the wildness pure; to be wild with nothing to be wild about.⁴²

The emptiness and hollowness troped by wild logic's "unvicious" circulations become explicit as what its wildness should ideally be "about." The "problem" of this optative "aboutness" (perhaps attained, perhaps not) derives from Frost's originary speculations on pure form, but also extends these by specifying a grammatical valence in which such purity can be enacted—what language is "about." As with the doubly employed "about" of "Mowing," clinched in being "about the lack of sound," here the goal of poetry is to be about "nothing," or about a lack *par excellence*. In one sense, this simply makes explicit an annular trajectory that has been traced throughout this essay: the nullification of contents and their synonyms, achieved by circling forms back upon themselves, or by looking for meaning in formal self-reference instead of correspondence to anything beyond form itself. We have come full circle to the very preposition, "about," that "Mowing" already spurned. In another sense, though, Frost's specification of "nothing" as a semantic *telos* presents an important new perspective on the narrative of artistic invention proffered by the genius and the carrot. What at first appeared to have traction against "chaos" as a positive match of forms becomes important now as the negation of a difference between maker and made.⁴³

Some historical and theoretical backgrounding will aid in comprehending the stakes of this negation, as well as connecting it more exactly with the formal and logical model of the "unvicious circle." Frost's wild logic's abrogation of poetry's need to be "about" non-formal subjects—with subjects instead coming alive, becoming "vital," *as* forms—was not conceived *sui generis*; nor was it without corollaries in the intellectual milieu of his day. Frost attended Harvard between 1897 and 1899, where he read the works of William James and took a course with George Santayana. These interactions place Frost squarely in a heritage with other modernists who came of intellectual age under the auspices of the same thinkers, namely Gertrude Stein, Stevens, Conrad Aiken, and T.S. Eliot, along with E.E. Cummings and John Dos Passos, who matriculated just after James's death, but who still studied his psychology under Santayana.⁴⁴ However, Frost, Stein, Stevens, Aiken, Eliot, Cummings, and Dos Passos share a third instructor in common, the philosopher Josiah Royce, who deeply influenced all seven and stands as one of the most important, least acknowledged pedagogues behind the emergence of literary modernism in America.⁴⁵ Royce's career was itself a microcosm of philosophy's evolution at the turn of the twentieth century. When Stein arrived at Radcliffe in 1893, Royce was an idealist in the *au courant* Absolutist vein of F.H. Bradley and J.M.E. McTaggart; by the time Eliot, Aiken, Cummings, and Dos Passos came in 1906, 1907, 1911, and 1912, Royce had transformed himself into a logician, in the process almost singlehandedly ushering a reactionary Harvard philosophy department into a new age of analytic and logical discourse. Frost and Stevens both got to Harvard in 1897, just as Royce's transformation commenced. Indeed, Frost was auditing Royce's courses in 1898 just as C.S. Peirce, at the behest of James, was delivering seminal lectures on logic, of which Royce would write to James: "Those lectures of poor C.S.

Peirce that you devised will always remain quite epoch making for me. They started me on such new tracks.”⁴⁶ During and after the lectures, Royce not only reoriented his written work toward logic—a reorientation that predicted much of American philosophy’s shift in that direction in response to transatlantic currents set in motion by Gottlob Frege’s *Begriffsschrift* and the nascent efforts of G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell—but he also began infusing Harvard’s philosophical curricula with the teaching of logical subjects.⁴⁷

Thus, Frost attended Harvard at a time of intense philosophical seachange, during which the word “logic” first began acquiring the outsize intellectual cachet that would distinguish it throughout his life. And much of Royce’s work at the time, torn as it was between an idealist past and a logical future, foreshadows Frost’s own complicated relationship with concepts of form and logic in his poetics and metaphysics. For one thing, Royce took pains to establish his *logic* over against Russell’s *logicism*, which argued that logic could subsume, order, and ultimately render entirely unparadoxical all other abstract discourses, especially mathematics. The notorious bug in Russell’s completist system, which he spent decades combating, was “vicious circularity,” or paradoxes of self-reference that threatened to render the mereological foundations of logicism shaky, its orderliness false.⁴⁸ Take Russell’s paradox, which asks whether the set of all sets that are not members of themselves contains itself.⁴⁹ Russell’s logicism, with its visions of completeness and perfection, needs a solution to such a paradox that would prevent it from ever occurring in the first place, so he develops a “vicious circle principle,” such that “whatever contains an apparent variable must not be a possible value of that variable.” *Voilà*—a higher-order variable (say, a set) cannot contain itself as a lower-order value. Reflexiveness and circularity disappear. Royce takes a different approach to parsing circularities:

In order that we should know, in the case here under discussion, whether the class of classes X is or is not a member of its own extension, we must first arbitrarily decide whether or not it is to be such, since apart from such decision, the defining propositional function has no value determined which solves this question.⁵⁰

His emphasis on “decision” argues that, upon logic’s encountering a circularity, some philosophical mind must execute some decision in order to resolve the problem; “apart from such decision,” logic will fall to pieces. Whereas Russell attempts to arrive at an objective system in and of itself free from paradox, Royce demands the intercession of a mind to resolve any such paradoxes.

In this quotation, Royce has one foot in the grave of an older idealist, *née* Kantian, apotheosis of subjective reasoning and one in a brave new world of commitment to a logic that, once provided with rules and variables, will function without need for reason’s decisions, judgments, or what Royce will ultimately call “interpretations.”⁵¹ In short, Royce’s logic needs a mind to correct its fallibilities, while Russell’s logicism needs an infallible logic to counteract the need for any (implicitly fallible) minds, a counteraction that derives from analytic philosophy’s general distrust of the psychological baggage that minds carry. Indeed, it was only a decade earlier that Edmund Husserl, another person with skin in both the idealist and logical games, had been skewered and nearly ruined by Frege for offering a psychologistic account of arithmetic.⁵² For Royce, though, the necessity of mind to logic is less about injecting the latter discourse with

psychology and more about balancing an evolving logical sensibility concerning objective “order” against an older idealist category of subjectivity.⁵³ Royce accomplishes this balance by embracing a concept of circularity that Russell rejects and by buttressing it with an example from a key proponent—G.W.F. Hegel—of the very idealism that Russell vilifies:

... for a thinker such as Hegel, the ideal form of the totality of scientific theory is cyclical rather than linear. Truth may be, as a whole, a system of mutually supporting truths, whose absoluteness does not depend upon any one set of first principles, but consists in the rational coherence and inevitableness of the totality of the system ... such as this or that mathematical or logical doctrine, whose theoretical development would indeed depend upon chains of deductive reasoning.⁵⁴

The “logical doctrine” supervenes on “reasoning,” which provides the energy behind the system’s “cyclical” movements. The “mutually supporting” cycles depend on a formal “coherence” with themselves, rather than a correspondence, as Royce goes on to say, to “immediate certainties” in the world, or to “first principles” within the system itself.⁵⁵ The vision is one of a sweeping formal monism rendered through, to use Frost’s lexicon, an “unvicious circle” that is mediated and moved by a reasoning mind.

It bears accentuating, given Frost’s own loops back to a concept of realism, that this cyclicity need not be immaterial. Indeed, Royce turns to the same vocabulary of “suggestion” Frost uses to comprehend how these sorts of robust formalisms can have any relation to life as it is actually lived:

... our interpretations of experience to the needs of our intellect is something far less rigid and unalterable, and is constantly subject to the suggestions of experience. We must indeed interpret in our own way; but our way is itself only relatively determinate; it is essentially more or less plastic; other interpretations of experience are conceivable. Those that we use are merely the ones found to be most convenient.⁵⁶

Elsewhere, Royce enlarges this point to encompass any experience of something that has “suggested to us certain names, memories, and aesthetic impressions,” from which a mind banishes whatever is “unfitting, absurd, untrue.”⁵⁷ Just as Frost does with the genius and his carrot, Royce channels subjectivity through a formalism that straddles the “order” of experience as it has been “found” and the abstract or creative processes of ordering that same experience—processes that could take systematic form as logic, as poetry, or as any discourse in between. Coherence, again, is Royce’s major term for showing how these processes work:

... an interpretation is not a conceptual hypothesis which can be converted into ‘perceptual knowledge’; it is a hypothesis which leads us to anticipate further interpretations, further expressions of

ideas, novel bits of information, further ideas not our own, which shall simply stand in a coherent connexion with one another and with what the original interpretation, as a hypothesis, had led us to expect ... The coherence of the whole system of interpretations, ideas, plans, and purposes shows me ... something which through these expressions constantly interprets itself, while, as I deal with it, I in turn constantly interpret it, and even in and through this very process interpret myself.⁵⁸

Recalling the specimens Frost makes of circulations between knife, stone, and handkerchief, or colleges A, B, and C, or poems first, second, and third, coherence manifests here through coeval circinate vectors, one enacted by the subject imparting coherence to the world and the other projected by the world that suggests just that sort of coherence, such that the subject, in expressing its interpretation of the world, actually ends up interpreting itself. What Royce will call “coherent unity” or “real genuine coherence” comes about through chains of interpretation that constructively self-engulf, forming enclosed coherent systems that function through veridical equivalences between subjective and objective forms.

III. Being about

Frost’s gravity must pull these thoughts on coherence in logic toward a further question: how might an experience or pursuit of “coherent unity” manifest in language? Can an “unvicious circle” come alive not just in philosophy, but also in grammatical and metrical textures? Russell can be useful in formulating an answer, so long as we keep in mind his divergence from Royce and Frost on the importance of mind in establishing logic’s coherence. Like Royce, Russell embraced coherence as an ideal for logical systems, and, since he could not rely on reason to sort out those systems’ correct operation, he invested significant efforts in parsing and legislating formal grammar, in order to promote coherence at even the granular level of logic’s syntax. Other than *Principia Mathematica*, his most significant effort in this capacity, one that had a huge influence on Royce and indeed all of philosophy, was his 1905 essay, “On Denoting.” Recollect coherence’s opposite, specified above as correspondence, which entails semantic dependence on an extension from within a formal system to something outside that system; coherence, rather, extrapolates intensional relations between a system’s forms into proprietary semantic criteria residing within the system itself. In order to obviate the former in favor of the latter, Russell abolished a Fregean distinction between reference (to something in the world) and sense (of some meaning in a sentence) by extirpating the former category and modifying the latter to carry *all* the denotative weight of expression. In short, Russell formulates a logic premised solely on a self-supporting category of sense—or, to use Russell’s vocabulary, denotation—that becomes meaningful through coherence between adjacent denotations in a sentence, rather than correspondence to anything in the world:

This is the principles of the theory of denoting I wish to advocate: that denoting phrases never have any meaning in themselves, but

that every proposition in whose verbal expression they occur has a meaning.⁵⁹

The semantic implications of Russell's claim are significant, because it is specifically within the regime of denotation, or sense, that he locates "*knowledge about*" the world:

The distinction between *acquaintance* and *knowledge about* is the distinction between the things we have presentations of, and the things we only reach by means of denoting phrases.⁶⁰

What language can be "about" is determined by what language denotes, and what language denotes are further denotations, which accumulate into the coherent whole of a sentence or proposition *sans* recourse to direct semantic correspondences between language and the world.

Formal relations between denotations subsume what would have, in idealist philosophies, been tricky figurations of mind-world relations into grammatical and syntactical relations between parts of sentences. Russell's move to transpose "*knowledge about*" into the realm of sentential, rather than sensory, relations is not only a hallmark of logic at the turn of the twentieth century; it also mirrors wider trends in adjacent discourses concerned with links between linguistics and semantics or epistemology. All of the linguistic sciences of the latter 19th century having to do with the study of meaning—from Christian Karl Reisig's semasiology, to Peirce's semiotics, to Michel Bréal's semantics, to Lady Welby's significs, to Ferdinand de Saussure's semiology—fretted about how words could be *about* anything at all. Figures like Bréal tried to nail down "aboutness" by manufacturing concrete correspondences between words and meanings.⁶¹ Saussure and others famously developed linguistics that took as self-evident an essentially unstable relationship between words and what words are supposedly "about," accusing correspondent linguists like Bréal of trapping language in a "vicious circle" between reference and meaning.⁶² Instead, Saussure redefines language as "a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others," which displaces, like Russell's logic, extensional references with intensional dependencies—*unvicious* circles among language's formal structures.⁶³ Saussure's account of linguistic function expands, as Christopher Herbert has noted, "the range of application of the coherence paradigm to linguistics in the first decade of the twentieth century."⁶⁴

These logical and linguistic trajectories share a terminus in language that is about nothing—or, literally, *no thing*. Each locates meaning and significance in the coherence of a given language with itself. We have observed Frost hinging certain metaphysical, logical, and poetic issues on ambiguities concerning what something is "about," as in the paired deployments of "about" in "Mowing" and the dream of a wild logic "with nothing to be wild about." Probing further will reveal that the grammar of aboutness in Frost's early poetry not only feeds into coherentist streams of discourse just beginning to flow as Frost burgeoned into an artist, but also that "about" forms a grammatical aperture in Frost's poems that can be peered through to observe the machinations of Frost's formal system as it handles the complicated work of having "the wildness pure" while nonetheless maintaining a dedication to some sort of realism. Especially in *North of Boston*, we can see Frost offering something that the linguists and philosophers do not: a reckoning with the felt experience of this preposition's instantiations of

differences and distances. That is, Frost grapples with the grammar of aboutness as it challenges his univocal formalism by forcing speakers to handle painful gaps and distances between themselves and the world or other people. What Frost ends up showing is that aboutness can be more than a philosophical aporia breaking a flow among selfsimilar forms; rather, that breaking can conjure emotional and intrapersonal experience foregrounding the painful or mysterious spaces—physical, affective, mental, metaphysical—between people and objects in the world. Living in a world for which difference threatens as ontologically, or at least linguistically, axiomatic becomes in *North of Boston* a stimulus for certain characters' struggles with solipsism and detachment; "about" becomes the formal, prepositional signature for these struggles, blocking out differences and distances that, though often imperceptibly subtle, nonetheless become largely and deeply felt.

"About" grounds etymologically in Middle and Old English words meaning "without" or "outside of," an etymology aligning "about" with axioms of disconnectedness, apartness, and separability that bely anything like a stable or easy relationship between something and what something is about.⁶⁵ This iota of detachment in the grammar does not much trouble Frost in his earliest work. The table of contents for *A Boy's Will* provides short paraphrases for his poems, which include a number defined by what they are "about": "In Equal Sacrifice / about love; / The Tuft of Flowers / about fellowship; / Spoils of the Dead / about death."⁶⁶ Pound would defend these paraphrases as valuable icons of Frost's simplicity and "innocence": "His very table of contents is not a scheme written into, as the stupidest of his reviewers has said, but simply a statement of his own discovery that some continuity underlies all of the lyrics."⁶⁷ Later, Frost began to demonstrate a certain disdain for thinking about poetry in terms of what it is about, as when he makes a list of "iniquitous" contractual obligations for an event: "Read us your poem about what the minister said when he ruined the furnace door with a shovelful of coal. Read us a poem about the fishes heaven."⁶⁸ Another example is the "crude" request he records from a fan to "get a poem written about" a deceased father.⁶⁹ In another note, Frost contrasts the phrase "think the book" with "think about the book" and then "think the life" with "think about the life," as if attempting to imagine a grammar that will do away with "about" altogether, closing the nefarious gap aboutness insists on maintaining between whatever terms it happens to connect.⁷⁰ He fleshes this out in another note as the "difference between thinking the book and thinking about and over and above it."⁷¹

In *North of Boston*, Frost probes the grammar of aboutness in order to explore the many ways in which it insists upon difference while masquerading as a connection. As a locative preposition with an object it can mean that the subject of the sentence is "around" or encircling the object of the preposition, as in "the rising wind / About my face and body" or "He'd keep so still about him all this time"; without an object after "about," it can imply another more general locative sense of being "out and about" or moving "to and fro," as in "There's nobody about" and "no one here but hens blowing about."⁷² As an adverb, "about" has a few different temporal valences, all having to do with being on the cusp of something happening, as in "What form my dreaming was about to take" or "These latter about to fall."⁷³ Related to this are adjectival usages of "about" as an intensifier with a similar meaning of proximity *a la* "almost," as in "I'd seen about enough of his bulling tricks."⁷⁴ Perhaps the most recognizable usage of "about," though, is as a preposition whose object stands in for a direct object, with "about" adding an explanatory or semantic flavor to the verb-object relationship, as in "Tell me about if it's

something human” or “talk about your everyday concerns” or “a book about ferns.”⁷⁵ Frost often idiosyncratically mingles the senses, as in “I went about to kill him fair enough” and “those will bear some keeping still about,” for which “about” seems all at once to convey some mixture of temporal proximity, round aboutness, intensification, and explanatory elaboration.⁷⁶

The grammatical pressures exerted by “about,” as locative preposition, temporal adverb, intensifying adjective, and semantic or explanatory preposition, all concern the adumbration of one thing’s relation to another, while maintaining a final, miniscule gap of difference between the two things. To be about locatively is to enclose something without collapsing into it, such that to have something about oneself, say clothing, is to have a replica of the outline of one’s form, which can imply the body contained in the clothes as negative space without becoming anything other than its outline, always essentially outside it though completely circumscribing it. To be temporally about is to foresee the effect of a cause, without the actual enactment of the event that would bring effect and cause together: a book’s being about to fall without its actual falling. To be semantically about is to select one set of words as the definition or subject or meaning of another set; so long as they are not tautologies, like “mathematics is about mathematics,” the two sets will be intimately related, but essentially different, as in “I am sad about death” or “we conversed about love,” in which sadness and death, conversation and love, are intimately related, but also fundamentally different: love is not conversation and death is not sadness.

These grammatical valences come to a head in *North of Boston*. “Home Burial” provides the best examples: two “abouts,” one uttered by the wife Amy and one by her nameless husband, that signpost the affective as well as the geographical landscape of the poem. The husband’s “about” occurs at the midpoint, a fulcrum balancing the poem’s two halves as much as it is a turning point in the couple’s conflict:

Tell me about it if it’s something human.
Let me into your grief. I’m not so much
Unlike other folks as your standing there
Apart would make me out.

The husband’s plea comes just as Amy is moving to leave the house; begging her to stay, he asks her to tell “about it” under the condition that “it” be “something human.” We can assume that “it” would be the depression and anxiety Amy feels at the sight and thought of her child’s grave through the window, but the husband’s twice iterated “it” puts up a fence between that assumption and the deixis that occludes it. His use of pronominal grammar as a stay against speaking about what’s obvious only serves to exacerbate Amy’s own refusal to “tell about it”; instead, these lines become a series of feints, in which “about” points to an empty “it” that points to an empty “it’s” that points ostensibly to the next line’s murky “your grief.” The vague “something human” becomes just another hollow, banal placeholder for what Amy can’t—and what her husband won’t—say. Realizing this and seeking to combat it, the husband analogizes his semantic situation to his physical apartness from Amy, arguing that their distance belies the yawning gaps in what either of them will say to one another.

It is Amy, though, who apprehends fully the relation between physical spacing and spectral referentiality. She replies:

You could sit there with the stains on your shoes
of the fresh earth from your own baby's grave
And talk about your everyday concerns.
You had stood the spade up against the wall
Outside there in the entry, for I saw it.

Amy's clear memory of seeing the spade stood up against "the wall / Outside in the entry" recalls her husband's earlier spatial accounting for the graveyard as another thing that is "outside": "the window frames the whole of it ... little slabs on the sidehill ... the child's mound." In a poem whose drama derives largely from who can see what and when they can see it, Amy's seeing the spade, the implement just used to place the dead child in the ground—outside the house and out of this world—is significant because its own placement in some "outside" space becomes an analogy for the husband's misplaced "talk about ... everyday concerns." As with the husband's earlier "about," Amy's indicates a gap in reference that maps onto gaps in space, a cascading series of geometrical and affective encounters with significant absences that leads back ultimately to the void at the center of the poem: the baby's grave. Amy fills in her husband's "talk about everyday concerns" some lines later:

"Three foggy mornings and one rainy day
Will rot the best birch fence a man can build."

That he should speak of fences, which serve to distantiate, differentiate, and divide space is unfortunately proportionate with Amy's lived experience of the affective, spatial rifts and chasms between her, her husband, and their child—rifts and chasms that aboutness pronominally catechizes and grammatically realizes. (Also, his speaking about pointless things is literally a talking "about" or around, in the sense that he will talk around what's really important, leaving the most important things as unspoken lacunae at the heart of his mundane talk.)

The grammar of "about" captures what was already latent in the poem: troubling collusion between spatial distortions and affective dissonances, which become the subject of its first several stanzas, in which the dramatic blocking of the scene—Amy at the top of the stairs, husband at bottom, window behind Amy, graveyard outside window, grave mound central to graveyard—serves only to heighten the sense of disconnection between everything and everyone in the poem. The careful staging of the scene, which could be choreographed from the poem's specifications of placement and sight lines, is of a piece with the dramatic character of most poems in *North of Boston* and Frost's own linkages between the concept of a "sound of sense" and stagecraft. (Recall his most famous explication of "sound of sense" as voices heard from behind a door, itself possessed of a dramatic flavor premised on physical apartness that has effects beyond itself, in this case manifesting a poetics.) It is furthermore the case that "Home Burial" makes sense in relation to numerous other poems in *North of Boston* that encounter, and must cope with, distantiating mechanisms, objects, and situations: think of "Good fences make good neighbors" or the phantasmal, eponymous "Mountain" only ever adumbrated as either something yet still further along the path, or as an absence—a "black body cut into the sky"—about which the poem's speaker eventually, shruggingly concludes: "I guess there's no doubt / About its being there."

If “Home Burial” shows how the undoing of formal unities through encroachments of grammatical aboutness become occasions for human suffering and disillusionment, then “After Apple-Picking” will be something of an alternative, as the poem’s speaker exercises Roycean powers of judging and imagining to overcome the distantiation that “about” enforces. Whereas Amy and her husband become viciously trapped in a regression of painfully empty enclosures—windows, fences, graves—the speaker of “After Apple-Picking” supplements the poem’s formal logic by imagining “about” its parameters, extrapolating out from a distinction between mind and world into their formal coalescence:

My long two-pointed ladder’s sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still,
And there’s a barrel that I didn’t fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn’t pick upon some bough.
But I am done with apple-picking now.
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight
I got from looking through a pane of glass
I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough
And held against the world of hoary grass.
It melted, and I let it fall and break.
But I was well
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,
And I could tell
What form my dreaming was about to take.
Magnified apples appear and disappear,
Stem end and blossom end,
And every fleck of russet showing clear.⁷⁷

Here “about,” now deployed as a temporal adverb, announces a tensile shift in the poem from past to present. Before this “about,” the speaker, in the vein of the speaker of “Mowing,” cycles through negations, thinking of the apples he “didn’t pick” and the barrel he “didn’t fill”; after “about,” he dreams of “load on load of apples,” a superabundant recurrence of the day just lived:

Magnified apples appear and disappear,
Stem end and blossom end,
And every fleck of russet showing clear.
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.
And I keep hearing from the cellar bin
The rumbling sound

Of load on load of apples coming in.

The dream's surfeit version of reality is productively tautological, occurring as a distinction without a difference in relation to a day that was itself already marked by surreal separations and divisions: the "two-pointed ladder" up in the tree, or the speaker's looking at the "hoary grass" through ice.

About's adverbial placement between dreamlike reality and a dream about that same reality suggests a less melancholy, less painful rendition of the same function "about" had in "Home Burial": as a preposition that purports to carry language forward, to make linear progress through meanings, but that actually only folds something back upon itself. In the same vein as the successive absences "about" strings together in "Home Burial," "After Apple-Picking," too, centers on absence—the excluded middle between "What form my dreaming was about to take" and the full commencement of the dream. But "about" in "After Apple-Picking" shows us an imaginative capacity latent in that very absence, now not painful but speculative, an opportunity for seeing and re-seeing the world in myriad new ways, as the speaker models previously when looking at the world through ice. Note how this adverbial "about" announces a shift from the light rhyming earlier in the poem to the intricate and interleaved rhymes after "about"; the meter, too, shifts, becoming more trochaic even as the lines themselves become less regular in length and more irregularly enjambed. These changes in the audible qualities of the poem, its sonic effects and modulations, map onto the mental and spatial shifts that "about" already mediates in the poem, commingling the speaker's transition between mental states with variations in the poem's tenor, both *vis-à-vis* the multivariate grammatical functions of "about."

IV. Conclusion

Aboutness constellates questions of relations between subjects and objects that display Frost's hand wringing over the metaphysical character of such relations. His experiments with linking "about" to varieties of absences, negations, and "lacks" showcase his attempts to allay his own metaphysical concerns about subject-object links by nourishing a "pure" formalism that can become meaningful without necessary recourse to said links. The ideal of purity, though, forms a paradoxical circularity, which Frost must deal with as a formal problem in his poems. His turn to "logic" and "wildness" suggests one way of resolving that problem by attending to the ways in which forms become meaningful by becoming coherent with themselves, as opposed to corresponding with objects in the world. But such coherence represents neither merely a philosophical quodlibet nor just a formal recursion for Frost; rather, it takes place as a realism with its own set of emotional, experiential, and metaphysical repercussions. These—the felt connotations of a poetry "about nothing"—become the subjects of Frost's early poems, whether these subjects take shape as the endless cycles of agriculture, the impossible convolutions of private disaster, or the coronas of dreams and imaginings projected by the active working of a mind. Like the "rings of smoke" thrown off by "individual enterprise" in this essay's epigraph, these various self-engulfments arise from circulations among suggested (or found) and given (or made) forms, a distinction without a difference that models both Frost's metaphysics and his poetics. Frost's wild logic captures precisely this modeling, and its paradigm of an "unvicious

circle” becomes one way of resolving the threat of paradox that Frost’s rhetoric of formal purity presents.

¹ Robert Frost, “‘Letter’ to *The Amherst Student*,” in *The Collected Prose of Robert Frost*, ed. Mark Richardson (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press Of The Harvard University Press, 2007), 115.

² Frost, “The Poetry of Amy Lowell,” in *Collected Prose*, 88.

³ Frost, *The Notebooks of Robert Frost* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press Of Harvard University Press, 2006), 192.

⁴ Frost, “Pertinax,” in *Collected Poems, Prose, & Plays*, ed. Richard Poirier and Mark Richardson (New York: The Library of America, 1995), 281.

⁵ Frost, “To a Thinker,” in *Collected Poems*, 298.

⁶ Frost, “The Figure a Poem Makes,” in *Collected Prose*, 132.

⁷ Substance: Frost, *Notebooks*, 645. The second of Frost’s now lost Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard was subtitled “The merger of form and content.”

⁸ Frost, “‘Letter’ to *The Amherst Student*,” in *Collected Prose*, 115.

⁹ Frost, “Remarks on Form in Poetry,” in *Collected Prose*, 79.

¹⁰ Critics like Norman Holland and Amelia Klein point out Frost’s dualism, especially as it churns through the dialectical metaphysics of poems like “To a Thinker,” but do not entangle this observation with Frost’s comments on poetic form, despite his frequent efforts at dovetailing the two. Norman N. Holland, “The Brain of Robert Frost,” *New Literary History* 15, no. 2 (Winter 1984): 368. Amelia Klein, “The Counterlove of Robert Frost,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 54, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 362-87.

¹¹ The genius expands what we mean by “poetics” in the case of Frost to include the term’s connections to poesis and roots in *ποίησις*—creation, production, or making beyond what poetics usually denotes. Frost will often make the connection between this almost esemplastic sort of form and the form of poetry, as when he writes: “The sentence form almost seems the soul of a certain set of words. We see inspiration as it takes liberties with the words and yet saves the word.” Frost, *Notebooks*, 135.

¹² “There are two types of realists: the one who offers a good deal of dirt with his potato to show that it is a real one, and the one who is satisfied with the potato brushed clean. I’m inclined to be the second kind. To me, the thing that art does for life is to clean it, to strip it to form.” Frost, “Some Definitions by Robert Frost,” in *Collected Prose*, 84.

¹³ Of a piece with what I am calling the “agrarian” in Frost’s form is what Siobhan Philips calls “quotidian repetition” in: “The Daily Living of Robert Frost,” *PMLA* 123, no. 3 (May 2008): 598.

¹⁴ Pound, “*A Boy’s Will* by Robert Frost,” *Poetry* 2, no. 2 (May 1913): 72-74. Pound, “Modern Georgics,” *Poetry* 5, no. 3 (December 1914): 127-30. Pound, “In Metre,” *The New Freewoman* 6, no. 1 (September 1913): 113. Early critical mentions of Frost all emphasized his “New England scenes,” “folk-spirit,” and “primitive” subjects. See: Alice Corbin Henderson, “Robert Frost’s Quality,” *Poetry* 8, no. 6 (September 1916): 327-28. Harriet Monroe, “Frost and Masters,” *Poetry* 9, no. 4 (January 1917): 202-207. Alice Corbin Henderson, “The Folk Poetry of These States,” *Poetry* 16, no. 5 (August 1920): 269. For a concise history of Frost and Pound’s fraught relationship, see: B.J. Sokol, “What Went Wrong between Robert Frost and Ezra Pound,” *The New England Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (December 1976): 521-41.

¹⁵ Pound, “*A Boy’s Will* by Robert Frost,” 74.

¹⁶ Pound, “*A Boy’s Will* by Robert Frost,” 73-74.

¹⁷ Pound, “A Retrospect,” in *Literary Essays* (1912; 1918; New York: New Directions, 1968), 3-4, 7.

¹⁸ Frost, “Mowing,” in *Collected Poems*, 26.

¹⁹ For a good summary of this line of thinking, see: John F. Sears, “Robert Frost and the Imagists: The Background of Frost’s ‘Sentence Sounds’,” *The New England Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (December 1981): 467-80. On sound images, see: Frost, “The Last Refinement of Subject Matter,” in *Collected Prose*, 138. Frost repeats this retooling of imagism as an auditory poetics in numerous places, such as at the end of one of his seminal letters to Sidney Cox on “sound of sense”: “We value the seeing eye already. Time we said something about the hearing ear—the ear that calls up vivid sentence forms.” Frost, “Letter to Sidney Cox, December 1914,” in *The Letters of Robert Frost* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014), 234.

²⁰ Pound over-simplifies by concluding that Frost’s “tone” and his unschooled demonstration of an Imagistic formalism amount to a realism of “personality” and circumstance “direct from his own life,” or the “real” voices of people Frost “has known” and that “exist as he has portrayed them.” Pound, “In Metre,” 113; “*A Boy’s Will* by Robert Frost,” 74; “Modern Georgics,” 129. Related to this critique is Frost’s rejection of the “verse libre” that Pound purveyed and pushed Frost to write. Frost, “Letter to Thomas Bird Mosher, July 17 1913,” in *Letters*, 132. Secondary literature on Frost’s work after Pound has largely echoed Pound’s sentiments on this score, despite the fact that Frost’s commentaries on poetics, which focus overwhelmingly on confluences between metaphysical and poetic formalisms, reveal Frost to be a poet of a deeply serious and avant-garde philosophical and theoretical bent. To wit, work on Frost’s form habitually leashes to his agrarian subjects and dalliances with vitalism—to the “natural,” the “organic,” and the “unsystematic,” or to whatever breaks from categorial reasoning—while relying on his frequent admonishments of “science,” “philosophy,” and “scholasticism” to hold up poetry as something other than those discourses. This ignores the richness of Frost’s thoughts on poetic form as itself a philosophical issue, such that, rather than standing over against non-poetic discourses, poetry emerges as a formal presentation of what those discourses otherwise merely gesture towards in prose. Richard P. Adams, “Permutations of American Romanticism,” *Studies in Romanticism* 9, no. 4 (Fall 1970): 260-2. B.J. Sokol, “Bergson, Instinct, and Frost’s ‘The white-Tailed Hornet,’” *American Literature* 62, no. 1 (March 1990): 44-55. On Frost and categories, see: Thomas K. Hearn, “Making Sweetbreads Do: Robert Frost and Moral Empiricism,” *The New England Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (March 1976): 78-9. Conrad Pendleton, “The Classic Dimensions of Robert Frost,” *Prairie Schooner* 38, no. 1 (Spring 1964): 81-5. Scholasticism: *Notebooks*, 188-9, 364. Philosophy: *Collected Prose*, 147. Science: *Collected Prose*, 100, 343.

²¹ Frost, “Letter to John Bartlett, Fourth-of-July, 1913,” in *The Letters of Robert Frost*, 122.

²² For a detailed look at the prosody of “Mowing,” including an analysis of the “breath” of the poem as shown through Frost’s and others’ readings of it, see: Seymour Chatman, “Robert Frost’s ‘Mowing’: An Inquiry into Prosodic Structure,” *The Kenyon Review* 18, no. 3 (Summer 1956): 421-438.

²³ Fact is a familiar term in Frost’s poetics and philosophizing, as in the following note on facts and making: “Facts come to the mind as stars come out in the sky, scattered broadcast, thin at

first and thick enough to suggest constellation. The lines between them that bring out the figures are ours, the final and conscious part of our world building. A world you didn't make? Yes you did too." Frost, *Notebooks*, 310.

²⁴ Frost, "Letter to Sidney Cox, Jan 19 1914," in *Letter*, 167.

²⁵ Frost, *Notebooks*, 645.

²⁶ The subtitle of Frost's lost second C.N. Eliot lecture was "Vocal Imagination: The Merger of Form and Content." Frost, *Collected Prose*, 302. See also Frost's "definition" of poetry as that which has "brushed clean" life "to strip it to form." Frost, "Some Definitions by Robert Frost," in *Collected Prose*, 84.

²⁷ Frost, "Letter to Sidney Cox, January 19, 1914," in *Letters*, 167.

²⁸ Frost, "Letter to Sidney Cox, December 1914," in *Letters*, 233.

²⁹ Frost, *Notebooks*, 363.

³⁰ *Ibid* at 301.

³¹ *Ibid*.

³² *Ibid* at 212.

³³ Cf. Mark Richardson's note on the history of this essay in: Frost, *Collected Prose*, 293-4.

³⁴ Frost, "The Figure a Poem Makes," in *Collected Prose*, 131-2.

³⁵ *Ibid* at 132-3.

³⁶ *Ibid*.

³⁷ *Notebooks*, 193, 265, 376, 662. "The Literate Farmer and the Planet Venus," in *Collected Poems*, 337.

³⁸ *Notebooks*, 188-9, 259, 267, 364. *Collected Prose*, 116.

³⁹ *Notebooks*, 301.

⁴⁰ *Collected Prose*, 132.

⁴¹ Stanley Cavell, "Reflections on Wallace Stevens at Mount Holyoke," in *Artists, Intellectuals, and World War II: The Pontigny Encounters at Mount Holyoke College*, ed. Christopher Benfey and Karen Remmler (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts), 63. Press, 2006. 61-79.

⁴² *Ibid* at 132.

⁴³ In his comments on Pound's "Portrait D'une Femme," as that poem crescendos through its piecemeal assemblage of the woman from her scattered parts to "find its hour upon the loom of days," Frost inscribes "Nothing!" just to the side of the poem, as if to indicate the way in which this "finding," as with the genius who finds the carrot, begets a formal climax primarily because it instructs us in how a creative act manifests just the lack of a difference between what is sought by the subject and what is found in the world—arriving at a poem that is about, literally, "nothing." Josephine Grieder, "Robert Frost on Ezra Pound, 1913: Manuscript Corrections of 'Portrait D'une Femme'," *The New England Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (June 1971). 304.

⁴⁴ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Picador, 2000), 60-1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid* at 64. Howard Greenfeld, *Gertrude Stein: A Life* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1973), 11. Lyndall Gordon, *T.S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 86. Edward Butscher, *Conrad Aiken: Poet of White Horse Vale* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 85-6. Biographies of Stevens do not make much of his contact with Royce, but Stevens himself lists Royce, along with James, as philosophers he remembers from his time at Harvard in

a 1950 epistle. Stevens, "Letter to Sister M. Bernetta Quinn, December 28, 1950," in *Letters of Wallace Stevens* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 704. Royce was actually a friend of Cummings's father, so Cummings had known him for years before coming to Harvard. Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno, *E.E. Cummings: A Biography* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2004), 38, 50. Virginia Spencer Carr and Donald Pizer, *Dos Passos: A Life* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2004), 52.

⁴⁶ Josiah Royce, "Letter to William James, June 21, 1901," in *The Letters of Josiah Royce* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 422.

⁴⁷ Royce, for instance, runs a seminary on logic in 1898. He standardizes such seminaries by 1901. "The Harvard University Catalog, 1897-98" (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1898), 349. "The Harvard University Catalog, 1901-02" (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1902), 372. It is worth noting that Royce paid attention to, and wrote sparingly on, logic long before turning his full efforts to it in 1898. See: Royce, "Review of *Logik* by Benno Erdmann," *The Philosophical Review* 1, no. 5 (September 1892): 547-552.

⁴⁸ After exploring the Liar's paradox, Richard's paradox, the Burali-Forti paradox, and his own paradox, Russell concludes: "In all the above contradictions ... there is a common characteristic, which we may describe as self-reference or reflexiveness." Bertrand Russell, "Mathematical Logic as Based on the Theory of Types," *American Journal of Mathematics* 30, no. 3 (July 1908), 224.

⁴⁹ Russell, *Principles of Mathematics*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1938), 500.

⁵⁰ Robert Burch and Josiah Royce, "An Unpublished Logic Paper by Josiah Royce," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 196.

⁵¹ Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 337.

⁵² Edmund Husserl, *Philosophy of Arithmetic* (New York: Springer, 2003). Gottlob Frege, "A Review of E. Husserl's *Philosophie der Arithmetik*," in *Frege's Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic and Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 195-209.

⁵³ Cf.: Royce, "Order," in *Royce's Logical Essays* (Dubuque, IA: WM. C. Brown Company, 1951), 204-231. Royce, "Recent Logical Inquiries and their Psychological Bearings," *Psychological Review* 9 (1902): 105-133.

⁵⁴ Royce, "Axiom," in *Royce's Logical Essays*, 135.

⁵⁵ Coherence also becomes a watchword for Frost's other major intellectual influence, Henri Bergson, who discusses it at length in his *Creative Evolution*, which Frost read avidly. Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911), 235-6.

⁵⁶ Royce, "Introduction to Poincaré's Foundations of Science," in *Royce's Logical Essays*, 275.

⁵⁷ Royce, "Recent Logical Inquiries and their Psychological Bearings," 129.

⁵⁸ Royce, "Mind," in *Royce's Logical Essays*, 166-7.

⁵⁹ Russell, "On Denoting," *Mind* 14, no. 56 (October 1905). 480.

⁶⁰ *Ibid* at 479.

⁶¹ See, for instance, Bréal's discussion of "laws: governing and guaranteeing verbal correspondences to things in the world: *Semantics: Studies in the Science of Meaning* (London: William Heinemann, 1900), 11-38.

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- ⁶² Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (1916; New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 9, 31.
- ⁶³ *Ibid* at 114.
- ⁶⁴ Herbert, "The Conundrum of Coherence," *New Literary History* 35, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 189.
- ⁶⁵ "† bout, adv.1 and prep.1," OED Online, June 2015, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/22147> (accessed July 29, 2015).
- ⁶⁶ Frost, *A Boy's Will* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1915), ix.
- ⁶⁷ Pound, "In Metre," 113.
- ⁶⁸ *Notebooks*, 147.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid* at 294.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid* at 303.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid* at 209.
- ⁷² *Collected Poems*, 30, 39, 52, 69.
- ⁷³ *Ibid* at 56, 87.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid* at 58.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid* at 43, 44, 52.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid* at 60, 67.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid* at 70

CHAPTER 3

STEIN, WITTGENSTEIN, AND THE LOOP OF REFERENCE

What is a sentence. A sentence is a duplicate. An exact duplicate is depreciated. Why is a duplicated sentence not depreciated. Because it is a witness. No witnesses are without value.

I believe in reality as Cezanne or Caliban believe in it. I believe in repetition. Yes. Always and always write the hymn of repetition.¹

I. Variation, repetition, tautology

H.W. Fowler, in his 1926 *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, distinguished between three modes of stylistic iteration: elegant variation, repetition, and tautology.² With a typically Fowlerian emphasis on infelicitous usage, each categorizes a deleterious characteristic of the English sentence. Elegant variation, despite its rosy adjective, comes off the worst: as a strategy deployed by “second-rate writers” who believe that one should never “use the same word twice” in close proximity. Rather, a false elegance is pursued through what Fowler considers a banal panoply of synonyms that ends up overly stylized yet nonetheless repetitive, as in this headline: “German emperor’s visit to Austrian monarch.” If “emperor” were simply reprised after “Austrian,” the headline would be transitioned into the next iterative mode, which Fowler calls repetition; this is a more acceptable device, though writing can suffer when repetition manifests less by choice and more through carelessness, as Fowler diagnoses in this sentence: “They dug their own clay, often in front of their own front doors.” Finally, tautologies—like “the same equality” or “limited only”—emerge as hyperbolic outliers on the scale of possible careless repetitions, functioning almost exclusively as lapses in stylistic judgment, or signatures of intention’s momentary absence.

And intention really is the heart of the matter. From elegant variation to repetition to tautology can be graphed a descending asymptote of intentionality, as Fowler writes: “To repeat the word or the substance of a preceding sentence or passage may be impressive & a stroke of rhetoric, or wearisome & a sign of incompetence, mainly according as it is done deliberately or unconsciously.” Highest up on the arc is elegant variation, which suffers from far too much intentionality. This is the social climber of stylistic sins, typical of “young writers” who “carefully” refuse to repeat, in order, so they presume, to write more “prettily.” Fowler skewers such writers for so clearly displaying the purpose behind their choices: they are too obviously, too eagerly invested in the success of their own invention. Midway down the arc is repetition, which straddles a divide between a possible intentional choice to repeat and the type of bad repetition that is “always unintentional” and signifies a “want of care.” However, even good repetition, which Fowler claims for intentionality, is good precisely because it refuses to announce its intentional character: unlike an elegant variation, Fowler supposes, a well-executed repetition is unlikely to catch eyes as necessarily stylized. At the bottom is tautology, at which point a mind has truly lost control of the language it wields, “loosely” allowing words “to recur without point.” Fowler demarcates tautology as a device specifically devoid of intent, which arises when a writer fails to notice, attend to, care for, or otherwise think about the stylistic relation between words and ideas.

If style shapes the nexus between a language’s intentions and what that language intends towards, then, for Fowler, modes of repetition figure as a telling gauge for that nexus’s function.

W.K. Wimsatt captures this idea succinctly in an essay on Fowler's concepts of variation and repetition, when he writes that bad repetition and elegant variation are

“diametrically opposed” faults ... one of which consists in “carelessly repeating a word in a different application,” the other in “carefully not repeating it in a similar application.”³

The fluxion between degrees of caring displayed by varieties of repetition implicitly sketches a trajectory through “more central matters of rhetoric and poetry,” as Wimsatt says, but this trajectory is occluded by the chromatics of possible “applications” for a language. Wimsatt explains by turning to Ogden and Richards's division between “referent (thing)” and “reference (idea),” which collectively form the contours of a language's so-called “application,” meaning just the collaboration between an objective motivation for some utterance and the subjective formulation of the utterance as an idea.⁴ In Ogden and Richards's model, language fills the gap between objective (thing) and subjective (idea), but it also keeps them apart. It is the bridge and, simultaneously, the reason why a bridge is needed. Repetition stands as one of the only possible exceptions to this model that Ogden and Richards can imagine—or, as one of the only stylistic features that can overcome the gap between thing and idea:

An exceptional case occurs when the symbol used is more or less directly like the referent for which it is used, as for instance, it may be when it is an onomatopoeic word, or an image, or a gesture, or a drawing. In this case the triangle is completed; its base is supplied.⁵

(The triangle refers to Ogden and Richards's triangular diagram of semantics, which places thoughts, objects, and words in a trilateral relationship. The triangle has a dotted line between “symbol” and “referent,” or words and objects, indicating the always-tenuous nature of their connection.)

At this point it might be objected that, in moving from Fowler, to Wimsatt, to Ogden and Richards, the force of the term “repetition” has shifted significantly. Fowler was interested solely in the stylistic valence of verbal expression (relations between words and other words); Ogden and Richards have a much more metaphysical emphasis on the part language plays in the theater of Cartesian interactions between mind and world (relations between minds, words, and objects). In the quote above, for instance, Ogden and Richards make clear that their curiosity about repetition applies only insofar as words strive to replicate “directly” some aspect of the world itself; they do not link this process of replication to the ways in which words get repeated in linguistic clusters under the auspices of style. Why, then, does Wimsatt introduce Ogden and Richards into an essay on Fowler, who almost never treats of such speculative philosophical ideas and their possible associations with linguistics, semantics, stylistics, etc.? Because, if we follow Wimsatt's logic, perhaps farther than he himself intended it to go, it becomes apparent that language does not merely fill the Cartesian hole between ideas and things in Ogden and Richards's model; rather, it repeats it with a difference—or an elegant variation—transforming what begins as the metaphysical quandary of the gap between mind and world into the grammatical problem of subject and predicate. Language is, according to such an idea, neither the

culprit in nor the solution to Ogden and Richards's struggle with mind-world relations. It is, instead, the mirror into which their metaphysics peers, reflecting back a grammatical inversion of age-old quodlibets regarding relations between subjects and predicates (*née* objects).

As Wimsatt makes clear, the *mise-en-abyme* resurfacing of metaphysics' paradoxes in grammar arises not from the subject-subject equation but, rather, from the dislocation of objects into predicates. Consider his analysis of one of Fowler's examples of elegant variation:

Dr Tulloch was for a time *Dr Boyd's* assistant, & knew the *popular preacher* very intimately, & the picture he gives of the *genial essayist* is a very engaging one.

His name was Dr. Boyd; he was a popular preacher and a genial essayist, and he had certain relations with Dr. Tulloch. All this is predicated of a certain *him*, or, to cleanse our term as far as possible of residual predication, of a certain *it*. It is true that predications are made in various ways; they are hung like Christmas-tree ornaments on various branches of a syntactic structure. But what then?

The desire to repeat, as Wimsatt diagnoses it in Fowler, is a symptom of stylistic embarrassment about the inevitable gap between a subject and a predicate: the separation between Dr. Boyd, popular preacher, and genial essayist. This mimics subject-object dichotomies in models like Ogden and Richards's, wherein any given symbol—Dr. Boyd, popular preacher, genial essayist—stands in a definitively arbitrary relationship to the actual, physical person to which each refers. (The most famous recognition of such arbitrariness, and the way it can resonant across both metaphysical and physical planes, is Gottlob Frege's point about "morning star" and "evening star," which in fact both refer to the same star, yet the difference between which has massive connotations for navigation and orientation in the world.)⁶ For Ogden and Richards, a way around this arbitrariness is to correlate the symbol "directly" with the object: for instance, the word "bark" with the sound a dog actually makes. This closes, as much as possible, the gap between word and object; it adds a linguistic element of display that forges one of the strongest possible bonds between language and its referents.

When language repeats in relation to itself (rather than repeating in relation to the world, as in the onomatopoeia of "bark") it accomplishes a similar feat, but in a grammatical arena, replacing objects with predicate nominatives, or, in other words, with a replica of a sentence's subject in the object position. In order to thread Fowler's worries about intentionality and style back through Wimsatt's readings of Ogden and Richards, observe what now reads as a paradox in Fowler's argument: that the most direct repetitions and tautologies, for Fowler, demonstrate a low degree of compositional subjectivity (because direct repetitions signify stylistic carelessness), while, as Wimsatt shows, nonetheless generating a high degree of grammatical subjectivity (because the subject suddenly begins to proliferate throughout other grammatical positions in the sentence). To continue with the idea that language might be the mirror of metaphysics, or at least a *mise en abyme* of metaphysical struggles with Cartesian duality, stylistic repetition reveals itself as an intriguing way of completing the base of Ogden and Richards's triangle, or otherwise of closing the gap between symbols and objects. The suggestion is that when we study repetition as

a point of style, we inevitably learn about its metaphysical corollary: repetition as an “exceptional case” in early 20th-century understandings of how humans come to know their world.

Three problems loom over such a hypothesis, and all have to do with predication. The first originates in Wimsatt’s image of predicates “hung like Christmas-tree ornaments on various branches of a syntactic structure.” As Wimsatt goes on to explain, Fowler’s sense of what “predicate” means is far too rudimentary. In fact, all sorts of grammatical positions, from subjects to verbs to prepositions to subordinated structures to plain-old objects, can have so-called “residues” of predication on them. Wimsatt arrives at this idea by, once again, infusing Ogden and Richards’s thoughts on language-world relations into his critique of Fowler on style:

Predicates of propositions are not the only parts that have a predicative function. Almost all terms in a discourse manage to betray some predication, to assert something of something. “The barn is big. It is red.” “Barn” predicates as much as and more than “big” and “red.” Only the “it” is a pure subject, algebraically an x , a pointer to the thing under discussion.⁷

Again, Wimsatt is confounding the metaphysics of Ogden and Richards with the stylistics of Fowler, to interesting effect. “Barn” only predicates in the sense that it refers to an actual barn. While Ogden and Richards were obsessed with interrogating this sort of predication, Fowler almost never considered it, only ever meaning by “predication” the grammatical position. Nonetheless, the two types of predication ramify upon each other. Wimsatt explicates the ramification by showing that the only way to avoid the baggage of predication, whether metaphysical or grammatical, is to winnow down language to its barest particulars: to re-envision it as an array of algebraic variables, x and y . Wimsatt mimics—mocks—this winnowing with his sudden turn to logicistic vocabulary: proposition, function, discourse, algebra. And indeed, once we have arrived at the language Wimsatt satirizes, we have only a bare-bones linguistic apparatus, mostly composed of placeless placeholders and generic copular verbs. (An inverse argument could be made, as in the earlier section on Stein’s diagrams, that rather than being the level at which language ceases to predicate, this is precisely when language predicates the most—to an infinite degree, in fact. The sheer deixis of x and y are either null cases of reference, or they are cases in which reference suffuses everything. The struggle of these variables is that they need the world the most, to have any value at all, yet their intrinsic abstraction insists that they void themselves of worldly content.) Wimsatt uses this hyperbolic endpoint to Fowler’s stylistic trajectory to critique a preference for repetition over elegant variation, by showing that the only way truly to achieve repetitions that are entirely devoid of variation is to reduce the fecundity of language to the most meager of logical codes.

The second problem is that, even if patience were mustered for dwelling with these codes, their primary purveyors, logicians themselves, had failed to clarify the value of tautologous structures in logical systems, so that what begins (for Fowler) as a quest after stylistic and grammatical clarity ends up mired in logical paradox. F.H. Bradley formulates the problem succinctly:

If you predicate what is different, you ascribe to the subject what it is *not*; and if you predicate what is *not* different, you say nothing at all.⁸

The first issue, ascribing to a subject what it is not via predication, rehashes the point made earlier about transmitting Cartesian paradoxes through linguistic structures, so typical of turn-of-the-century philosophy (as observed, to take just one example, in Ogden and Richards). The grammatical subject, like the Cartesian ego, encounters the sheer difference of the predicate and can neither flee nor surrender: rather, grammatical subject and predicate, like metaphysical subject and object, must remain at eternal odds, always somehow intimately connected yet simultaneously severed: cleaved in both senses of the word. More unexpected is Bradley's second issue, which is that a pure repetition of the subject in the predicate, while it may heal the conflict between subject and predicate, leads to a circumstance in which the proposition communicates nothing, *says* nothing.⁹ The result of cleansing language of difference appears to be a discourse that carries no information, has no discernible objective, or that is, quite literally, objectless.

The third problem arises from rebuttals to Bradley lodged between 1900 and 1910, the heyday of atomism and a time of great hostilities towards universalist or absolutist philosophers like Bradley, "who" to quote Bertrand Russell, "more or less follow Hegel."¹⁰ To continue with the image of metaphysics finding its reflection in language, in 1906 Russell accuses Bradley of utilizing his impossible subject-predicate equation to smuggle into grammar an analogue to rigorous Absolutism:

The axiom of internal relations is thus equivalent to the assumption that every proposition has one subject and one predicate. For a proposition which asserts a relation must always be reduced to a subject-predicate proposition concerning the whole composed of the terms of the relation. Proceeding in this way to larger and larger wholes, we gradually correct our first crude abstract judgments, and approximate more and more to the one truth about the whole. The one final and complete truth must consist of a proposition with one subject, namely, the whole, and one predicate. But since this involves distinguishing subject from predicate, as though they could be diverse, even this is not quite true ... it is as true as any truth can be; but even absolute truth persists in being not quite true.¹¹

Two things happen here vis-à-vis what Russell takes as a received grammatical *telos* of particular subjects linking with holistic predicates. First, this *telos* is attributed to a Hegelian program for language, in which the movement from subject to predicate is viewed as always a step toward something larger (recall, here, the Kant's mereological imperative of wholes subsuming parts). Second, these steps are imagined as progressing to a cosmic, and implicitly unscientific or otherwise illogical, outcome, at which point Russell sarcastically imagines there must be some Absolute sentence, a paragon of subject and predicate.

The idea Russell is working towards involves reconsidering the import of age-old logical sentences like “Socrates is wise,” which had for hundreds of years been used to demonstrate the necessarily telic sentence-form of a particular subject being engulfed by a universal predicate. (Necessary because “wise is Socrates,” though comprehensible, is infelicitous. Stein herself plays with this particular reversal at times, as in the line from *Tender Buttons* “red is rose.”)¹² But, as F.P. Ramsey writes,

suppose we turn the proposition round and say, “wisdom is a characteristic of Socrates,” then wisdom formerly the predicate is now the subject. Now it seems to me as clear as anything can be in philosophy, that the two sentences “Socrates is wise,” “wisdom is a characteristic of Socrates” assert the same fact and express the same proposition ... Which sentence we use is a matter of literary style, or of the point of view from which we approach the fact ... Hence there is no essential distinction between the subject of a proposition and its predicate, and no fundamental classification of objects can be based upon such a distinction.¹³

This can be read as a radicalized version of Wimsatt’s critique of Fowler: instead of asserting just that subjects and predicates leak into one another, Ramsey shows that the very categories of subject and predicate are inherently unstable, arbitrary, reversible. “Socrates is wise ... wisdom is a characteristic of Socrates” becomes a test case for a switch that can be enacted throughout language—any sentence can be flipped in this way. Proof of that fact cascades from grammar up the metaphysical chain because, as Ramsey goes on to conclude, it “throws doubt upon the whole basis of the distinction between particular and universal.”¹⁴ And once doubt is cast on that distinction, language becomes a huge problem for philosophers, who can no longer rely on traditional sentence structures to carry truths stably between minds and worlds; “Socrates is mortal” becomes an issue not just for linguistic particulars and universals, but for the metaphysical force of particulars and universals in general.

To summarize, the philosophical thesis under consideration is that stylistic repetitions redound upon repetitive facets of metaphysics. The three issues with this thesis, laid out above, can be abridged as follows: most grammatical features predicate something; the quest to eradicate predication produces a language that says nothing and is ultimately tautologous; subject and predicate are perfectly reversible. These issues themselves stage a precarious move from particular to universal, beginning with a localized grammatical problem (predicates), spelling out that problem’s solution (removal of predicates), and concluding with a more generalized recurrence of the original problem (predicates). A Hegelian, syllogistic logic prevails here, despite Russell et al.’s best efforts to avoid it, as 20th-century logic, forged in the fires of predication’s negation, emerges from those fires branded all the same with predication’s mark, stained nonetheless by its effects. As Philip Jourdain says, in a somewhat ridiculing piece, this syllogistic *uroboros* that stands at the heart of Russellian logic—or perhaps self-reflecting ternion, to place the image in accordance with Ogden and Richards’s triangle—reduces logic *as a discipline* “to a huge tautology.”¹⁵

Of course, Jourdain's joke only works because it re-stages a problem with logic's internal structure as a problem with logic as a whole, repeating at a higher level the same triumvirate of intractabilities listed above: logic cannot escape its predicational character; logic, in an effort to escape predication, becomes tautologous; (implicitly) logic ends up illogical because, being tautologous, it can no longer properly distinguish the subject-predicate categories into which its symbols must fall. That logic would suffer from what amounts to a Third Man paradox should not be surprising, given Paul Weiss's idea that "nothing but a tautology can contain the alternative represented by another tautology, so that the entaileds of a tautology must be a tautology."¹⁶ Logic, it would seem, begins the 20th century at an impasse that turns on the strangely insistent character of repetitions, which, once given as a quality of experience, metastasize throughout everything from subject-world relations to logical operations to grammar and style. There are two paths forward, which, though they feel separate on the surface, correlate in crucial ways. One is to push harder on the idea of logical tautology itself. The other is to query what Ramsey means, in the formulation quoted above, by "matter of literary style," when he discusses the reversibility of predicates and subjects. Both paths turn on the question of predication and what it really denotes to "say nothing."

II. Stein's repetitions

Following the latter path, if we take seriously Ramsey's invocation of "literary style" in light of philosophical thinking on repetition after the turn of the century, then no figure besides Gertrude Stein, the consummately repetitive modernist, suggests herself as more obviously a candidate for analysis. Stein's thoughts on repetition became especially prominent in the secondary literature in the middle of the 1990s, when scholars like Marjorie Perloff read her repetitions as bridges between some of the more inscrutable aspects of Stein's style and the philosophical system-building she seemed to be undertaking in her lectures and essays. Such readings were premised on claims like the following from "The Gradual Making of *The Making of Americans*":

I then began again to think about the bottom nature in people, I began to get enormously interested in hearing how everybody said the same thing over and over again with infinite variations but over and over again until finally if you listened with great intensity you could hear it rise and fall and tell all that there was inside them, not so much by the actual words they said or the thought they had but the movement of their thoughts and words endlessly the same and endlessly different.¹⁷

As Stein writes more concisely in *The Making of Americans*, one "must have in them an open feeling, a sense for all the slightest variations in repeating."¹⁸ Or, to put the point even more bluntly: "I never repeat that is while I am writing."¹⁹ The intrigue of such claims is, of course, that Stein repeats herself everywhere; this is one of the hallmarks of her style. Rationalizing her denial of repetition with the sheer fact of her repetitions has been one of the seminal challenges for her critics. Perloff, for one, catches Stein's idea as follows: "Repeat the same and it is no

longer the same.”²⁰ Perloff’s Stein conjures the possibility of rich mind-world repetitions through seemingly banal, vacuous word-word repetitions.

The play between these two types of repetition has long been acknowledged by Stein’s critics, as when Georgiana King wrote in 1913 that Stein’s style “sets down the things that happen inside one, actually as they happen” specifically because it is “full of repetitions and inconsistencies and recurrent formulas.”²¹ At stake is the relation between what “was inside” people and how these people ineluctably matched that “inside” with their external expressions; Stein juxtaposes this match between inside (thought) and outside (expression) with a sheerly linguistic repetitiveness pertaining amongst stylistic and grammatical choices: or, with the fact that people literally “said the same thing over and over again.” This juxtaposition, for Perloff, was of interest primarily because of Stein’s paradoxical claim that, though her stylistic repetitions appeared to be of the most banal and obvious sort, they actually each instantiated subtle degrees of variance between the repeated terms. In focusing on the *a posteriori* assertion of differences, rather than the value of repetitions *eo ipso*, Perloff reveals a lineage in Stein’s thoughts that goes back to her early essay “Composition as Explanation,” wherein Stein describes composition as a “continuous present” defined by the process of “beginning again.”²² Beginning again, in Stein’s early essay, refers to the beginnings and re-beginnings so indicative of Stein’s early style and also to a more metaphysical sense of rejuvenating one’s experience of the world—making that experience begin, as it were, again—by glimpsing it through the lens of Stein’s stylistic re-beginnings, or her repetitions. Terry Castle, in a review that Perloff cites, captures this idea succinctly, when she writes:

The laborious convolutions, the obsessive reiteration, the perplexing non sequiturs, must all be read as revivifying gestures, as ways of forcing the reader to “begin again,” to see the world in a new and more immediate way.²³

The connection between stylistic repetition and metaphysical revelation is not to be dismissed, but it does raise a number of issues. The first of these comes about from the trickily strong assertion of causation implied by Castle’s use of the word “forcing” to capture what repetitions do to the mind. It is one thing to suggest an understated correlation between the style of an expression and the quality of the mind that generated it, but it’s quite another to commit to this effect as something direct, profound, and knowable. In fact, while Castle and Perloff do not go this far, such a commitment is reminiscent of one of the more problematic, and also one of the oldest, ways of reading Stein’s repetitions: as realistic depictions of mental activity, deployed to replicate stylistically the way a mind repeats words and images to itself as it moves through the world, “like,” as Stein writes, “a cinema picture made up of succession and each moment having its own emphasis.”²⁴ Stein associates the material fact of cinema—its literal repetition of a scene a number of times every second, with only microscopic differences each time—with the mind’s own way of experiencing the world, and it can be tempting to interpret her imagination of literature coming alive in some sort of inflected Cartesian theater as necessitating an extrapolation out of formalism into a broader psychological field. (Imagining Stein laying out all the scenes in a film, transporting temporal progress and movement into the realm of spatial juxtaposition, is also one of the more important avenues into reading her work as Cubist.)²⁵ This

leads to relatively simplistic construals of Stein's repetitions as supposedly representative inflections of what is inherent already to the minds they supposedly depict. Stein's repetitions, in such a light, become a kind of psychological onomatopoeia, as described in this early review of *Three Lives*: "'Three Lives,' by Gertrude Stein, is a rather peculiar exposition of the art of character delineation, in which is shown the constant repetition of ideas in minds of low caliber and meager cultivation."²⁶ The reviewer goes on to muse that "if she should attempt the same things with minds of a higher caliber, the result might be more entertaining," indicating that the fact of repetition has been tethered strictly to the localized portrayal of just a small subset of "low caliber" minds. This essentially instrumentalizes repetition in the service of psychology; it also suggests a symptomatic, almost behavioral, reading of Stein's style, wherein small points, like a repetition, suddenly become metonyms for personality traits.

In 1934, psychological interpretations of Stein's work took an opposite and more intriguing turn, when B.F. Skinner published an essay theorizing that a number of Stein's earliest works, especially *Tender Buttons*, were merely continuations of earlier psychological experiments in "automatic writing," which she had undertaken while at Radcliffe.²⁷ (Stein later wrote of Skinner's piece that it "was very amusing.")²⁸ In the two papers resulting from these experiments, Stein recounts investigations into aberrant psychological phenomena like hysteria, wherein a single subject's personality can become "double."²⁹ The point of both studies is to normalize this doubling phenomenon by discovering it in quotidian psychologies (in the first study, Stein and Solomons use themselves as subjects; in the second, Stein uses "a large number of subjects").³⁰ Normative doubling is postulated through a theory of automatism, in which subjects are asked to perform two mental labors contiguously, such as listening to a novel being read aloud and writing the letter *m* repeatedly (an example Skinner uses), leading after a period of time to the subject "automatically" reproducing words from the novel amongst the letters *m*.³¹ Solomons and Stein arrive at a number of conclusions based on this result, the most intriguing of which in the present context is an observation concerning repetition's prevalence in the automatic generation of text:

A marked tendency to repetition.— A phrase would seem to get into the head and keep repeating itself at every opportunity, and hang over from day to day even. The stuff written was grammatical, and the words and phrases fitted together all right, but there was not much connected thought. He unconsciousness was broken into every six or seven words by flashes of consciousness, so that one cannot be sure but what the slight element of connected thought which occasionally appeared was due to these flashes of consciousness. But the ability to write stuff that sounds all right, without consciousness, was fairly well demonstrated by these experiments.³²

As the pair go on to say, the repetitive character of the writing led to a scenario in which there pertained "an expectation of what word would be written, but no *intention* to write it."³³

Behavioral psychology, especially of the radical sort espoused by Skinner, is really an anti-psychology, in that it evacuates all willfulness from the external symptoms of one's internal

processes. Behaviorism is a death sentence for intention. Therefore, it's unsurprising that Skinner took an interest in Stein's psychological studies, since they appear to give a proto-behavioral account of psychology. If applied to Stein's fiction, poetry, and plays, all burgeoning less than a decade later, this behavioral seed in Stein's art flies in the face of her early psychological reception. Repetition becomes the relic left behind by consciousness's evacuation from art, rather than the evidence for its suffusion by a particular consciousness. Of course, Skinner's application of these early experiments to Stein's art is rudimentary, at best, especially his supposition that a text like *Tender Buttons* might not be just somewhat informed by the studies, but that it might be a literal exercise in automatic writing. If anything, Stein's studies return us to someone like Fowler, who, as Stein did in the studies, tracked the ways in which intentional signatures embed in grammatical units. Like Fowler, Solomons and Stein track degrees of "intention" through repetitions, as in this "specimen" from one of the experiment's subjects:

Hence there is no possible way of avoiding what I have spoken of,
and if this is not believed by the people of whom you have spoken,
then it is not possible to prevent the people of whom you have
spoken so glibly³⁴

According to Solomons and Stein, the recurrence of "spoken," "people," "of whom," etc., brand the subject's language as tautological, in the sense that Fowler uses that word as an index for a facile, unintentional style.

However, Solomons and Stein hitch their conclusions to an account of attention that turns on a concept of experimental control: "The hysterique has no trouble here ... What in his case is done for him by his disease we had to do by acquiring a control over our attention."³⁵ The hysterique, on the one hand, repeats and behaves in an automatic way because he lacks attention; the experimenters and their subjects, on the other hand, repeat and behave automatically because they have invested quite a lot of attention into constructing a mental environment that replicates the hysterique's. The difference of the hysterique's dearth of attention and the experimenters' surfeit of it, though both may lead to the same result, generates an unavoidable dichotomy between what variable Solomons and Stein hope to isolate and what they, in fact, do isolate. The latter turns out to be, rather than some psychological feature of fugue states, attention itself. In effect, Solomons and Stein mislead themselves, and Skinner, into reading their subjects' repetitions as behavioral lacunae, indicative of a particular type of mind; instead, they observe qualities of attention (and intention), such as its divisibility and distractibility, as well as its varied patterns of focalization, which pertain across consciousnesses. The true value of the studies shines through in the robust account of attention's expression through factors of repetition, which cascade across the study at all sorts of levels. The study itself is premised on the possibility of replicating hysterical conditions. Repetition, once the study has commenced, becomes the signal variable for attention's distraction. It also becomes the indicator for interchanges between one subset of mental activity (a mind's openness to worldly stimuli) and another (composition, which is already, in the context of the study, repetitive, as Solomons and Stein have their subjects complete tasks like reiterating the letter *m*). Even the supposed height of awareness, in which attention is interpreted as permeating a subject's state of mind, is referred to as "conscious

consciousness,” the tautology betokening repetition’s traction throughout Solomons and Stein’s model, from fully automatic states to entirely deliberate ones—all observed through the lens of repetition’s presence or absence in a subject’s written expressions.

Castle and Perloff receive Stein on psychology more along the lines of Skinner than of her more rudimentary, early psychological critics. But, the way they do so involves language that is strikingly reminiscent of vocabulary bandied about by these same critics. “Realistic” and “realism” are particularly resonant. Stein herself spoke of her work, especially her repetitions, in terms of a realism, as she does in the second epigraph to this chapter; the word (realistic, realism) appears throughout Perloff’s early work on Stein, wherein Stein’s compositions are juxtaposed to prevailing conceptualizations of modernism’s turn to a “Jamesian psychological realism.”³⁶ (Perloff quotes William James, with whom Stein studied at Radcliffe, as saying of *Three Lives* that it demonstrated “a fine new kind of realism.”)³⁷ The idea of Stein as a realist re-appears in Perloff’s later essay and becomes an important feature of Stein scholarship in the 1990s.³⁸ Perloff’s reliance on the term is surprising, given realism’s immediate appropriation by Stein’s earliest, and much more psychologically-motivated, critics. Take for example this two-sentence review from 1910: “‘Three Lives,’ by Gertrude Stein, is told crudely, with naïve disregard of literary and rhetorical convention. It is about colored people, and very realistic.”³⁹ Or consider this line from another 1910 review: “The characterization in these short stories is unique; the psychology is interesting ... Miss Stein lays bare their subjective selves in a strong, realistic way.”⁴⁰

Perloff, perhaps in an attempt to distinguish her reading of Stein’s realism from more overtly psychological readings, eventually modifies the term to “literalism” and even “hyperrealism.”⁴¹ But she never fully defines what would distinguish a hyperrealism and literalism from just plain realism. By way of an answer, we might postulate that Stein was a realist at the level of consciousness, rather than psychology. What would this mean? Recall the claim lodged by Stein’s early psychological critics: that the repetition implied by the correspondence between something someone thinks and how that someone expresses the thought is captured by stylistic patterns of repetition endemic to the expression itself (a repetitive style). But why should the fact that expression repeats thought lead to a repetitive style of writing if that style, as many of Stein’s critics have interpreted it, is meant to reflect the psychology of the voice that generates it? As Stein’s experiments with automatism make clear, the psychological content is not what is necessarily repetitive: only the relation between that content and its expression is so. What, then, do Stein’s stylistic repetitions do? To what do they correspond in, to use Perloff’s word, Stein’s “word-system”?⁴² While the *content* of expressions in Stein’s work may indeed “repeat” the content of a character’s conscious thinking (otherwise language would be inhuman gibberish) the *style* of Stein’s expressions reflects not the content-content equation, but rather the formal character of that equation: repetition itself. It is the repetitive structure of mind-world relations (thinking a thought, saying that same thought) that is rehearsed at the level of style, through Stein’s various modes of repetition, not, as it has been more commonly understood, the content of any particular psychology.

To put this all another way, Stein’s repetitive style does not reflect the psychological content of a mind, but rather the formal structure of consciousness itself, evacuated of psychological content. Stein’s stylistic repetitions are essentially transpersonal, but they are also intrinsically human, because they display the most basic attribute of consciousness itself—the

impossible match between interiority and exteriority, thought and object, reference and referent—and, therefore, what they display is not just Cartesian duality, but what Cartesian duality is *like*: in short, how it feels to be human *in abstracto*. Stein's voices repeat themselves not because their psychological content is repetitive, but rather because none of them can stop performing what it is like to be conscious in a structural or ontological sense. Immanuel Kant gives what may be the originary account of this essential repetitiveness as it pertains to consciousness, when he reveals that “the object of representation” *is* “the formal unity of consciousness itself.”⁴³ Perhaps more valuable still is Edmund Husserl, whose phenomenology becomes indispensable later in the chapter, and who is instructive on this exactly point, when he distinguishes between the “intentional essence” of any given mental activity and the “semantic essence” of that activity's expression. Take, for instance, his treatment of wishing as a repeatable cognitive state:

Many persons cherish the *same* wish, when their optative intention is the same. This wish may in one person be fully expressed, in another unexpressed, in one person it may bring to full intuitive clarity its basic presentative content, in another it may be more or less ‘notional’ etc. In each case the identity of essence plainly lies in the two aspects distinguished above, in an identity of act-quality and of matter.⁴⁴

The intentional essence of wishing is shared by all wishers; its repeatability derives from, as Husserl says, the consanguinity between “act-quality” and “matter,” or in Ogden and Richards's terms “idea” and “referent.” The argument at hand regarding Stein is precisely this: that the “intentional essence” of conscious structures, in an ontological rather than a psychological sense, is what is at stake in Stein's repetitive stylistics. Repetitions of intentionality repeat through repetitions of style.

This is realistic, or hyperrealistic in Perloff's terms, because style portrays deliberately an aspect of consciousness (like wishing). It is also, to pick up on a related term circulating through descriptions of Stein's style, “exact,” in the sense that “the real Alice B. Toklas” uses that word in the following response to a question from one of Stein's readers about “rose is a rose is a rose”: “The device rose is a rose is a rose is a rose means just that. Miss Stein is unfortunately too busy herself to be able to tell you herself, but trusts that you will eventually come to understand that each and every word that she writes means exactly what she says, for she says exactly what she means.”⁴⁵ Stein herself writes about the idea of exactness throughout *How to Write* and *Lectures in America*, especially in relation to her descriptions of *Tender Buttons* in “Portraits and Repetition,” where she describes “the absolute refusal of never using a word that was not an exact word all through the *Tender Buttons*.”⁴⁶ There is nothing, of course, more exact than a repetition; this was Fowler's qualm about variation in the first place: the muddled equivalences, to return to an earlier example, of Dr. Boyd, popular preacher, and genial essayist.

Exactitude and realism are not necessarily at odds, but neither are they assuredly conjoined, or even complementary. Charles Swinburne famously distinguished between William Wordsworth's “The Thorn” and S.T. Coleridge's “The Three Graves” by finding in the latter a “tragic exactitude” that made it worthier than the “crude realism” of the former.⁴⁷ More

recently, in a survey of critical approaches to realism, Marshall Brown attributes a type of realism that subsists primarily on exactitude to “the least possible amount of composition ... the lowest conceivable degree of art.”⁴⁸ Brown, following Proudhon, suggests realist photography as demonstrative of this type of exactitude. Louise Hornby, in an essay on James Joyce—whom Perloff designates a “psychological realist,” in contrast with Stein—also turns to photography, this time the motion-capture daguerreotypes of Edward Muybridge, to discuss realism and exactitude: “His sequences are about the precision of linear symmetry, exactitude, and order, qualities that do not necessarily adhere to a strict realism but instead account for the passage of time according to the mathematical logic of the series.”⁴⁹ (The image of Muybridge’s famous images of animals in flight or stride, each millisecond of their movement rendered separately and positioned side by side, cannot help recalling Stein’s own analogy of her “portraits” to cinematic frames unsutured and paratactically arrayed.)

Hornby’s attachment of exactitude to logic rather than realism and Brown’s emphasis on exactitude’s simplicity, its status as art’s “least possible” mode of artistry, speak to Stein’s particular way of being exact and how she imagined herself as an exacting stylist. As Hornby observes of Muybridge, Stein is committed to an exact language, even if it means she has to “reduce,” to use Stein’s own term for the process, “listening and talking” to their most basic components, their simplest grammatical forms.⁵⁰ As Wimsatt observes of Fowler, to eliminate psychology from language (via repetitions) leads inevitably to such a reduction, ending in an extremely sparse palette of linguistic possibilities. Stein embraces this idea and, in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, specifically tethers it to an idea of exactitude in language, even referencing the sort of mathematical exactitude glimpsed in the quote from Hornby:

Gertrude Stein, in her work, has always been possessed by the intellectual passion for exactitude in the description of inner and outer reality. She has produced a simplification by this concentration, and as a result the destruction of associational emotion in poetry and prose ... It is because of this that her work has often been compared to that of mathematicians and by a certain french [sic] critic to the work of Bach.⁵¹

The question of how to “associate” inner and outer reality is fundamental, as is the fact that Stein attempts to describe the association through a process of simplification and concentration. Stein repeats this idea in “How Writing is Written,” and ties it specifically to an ideal of exactitude, when she writes that “I wanted as far as possible to make [writing] exact, as exact as mathematics.”⁵²

It can be difficult to square Stein’s comments about exactitude with her emphasis on “the slightest variations in repeating.” Her essay “Portraits and Repetition” is an homage to the latter idea; but, then, in *How to Write* she submits a defense of repetition *per se*, which presents a strong case for repetition’s “value”:

What is a sentence. A sentence is a duplicate. An exact duplicate is depreciated. Why is a duplicated sentence not depreciated. Because it is a witness. No witnesses are without value.⁵³

How, in short, to handle a figure like Stein, who at one turn describes her art as mathematically precise, simple, reduced, concentrated, and at the next turn appears to celebrate its organic, illogical effulgence? Further compounding the problem is the fact that both possibilities organize themselves around the trope of repetition, but to very different ends. In Sianne Ngai's recent work on Stein, repetition *qua* excess is given preferential treatment, as Ngai utilizes *The Making of Americans* in service of demonstrating her concept of "stuplimity," which manifests through "thick" and "agglutinative" uses of repeated linguistic structures that "stupefy" or "fatigue" a reader through the sheer fact of their profusion.⁵⁴ Stein's repetitive stylistics, teased out by a simultaneous reading of Søren Kierkegaard's *Repetition* and set up by Gilles Deleuze's thoughts on repetition's necessary differences in *Difference and Repetition*, is harnessed to an aesthetics of stretching, foaming, accumulating, lumping, mushing, and heaping.⁵⁵ Each repetition, by being taken as slightly—just slightly—various from what it is ostensibly repeating, gloms onto the whole mass of its fellow repetitions, forming in the process an ever expanding corpus of what Ngai (quoting Beckett) calls "bits and scraps." The insistence throughout is on proliferation and accumulation: an overwhelming, inordinate accretion conducted through the sheer fact of varied repetitions, leading to an aesthetics in which "system and subject converge ... where language piles up and becomes dense."⁵⁶

Ngai's use of repetition to link "system and subject," with system standing in her analysis as an avatar for a certain mode of objectivity, continues the theme of theorists, stylists, and writers using repetition to limn the nexus of mind and world by means of a formal trope. But, like Perloff, Ngai is apotheosizing the part of Stein that prioritizes differences as they are carried through repetitions, a kind of conditioning process made real by the force of repeating over time, as Deleuze describes in his reading of David Hume: "Repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind which contemplates it."⁵⁷ This reader-response version of repetition's effects has its corollary in Ngai's dedication to repetition as a factor in characterization, as in her first reading of stupefaction through Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust*, when Homer Simpson's mental state is interpreted as a torrential outpouring of "thick" language.⁵⁸ Yet again, this pushes the discussion of Stein's art more toward realism (of psychology, of character) than exactitude (of consciousness). This may be true at the level of Stein's aesthetics, but it feels at least questionable as a way of doing justice to Stein's desire for something like "exactitude in the description of inner and outer reality."

A counter-argument would be that Stein's style, specifically her repetitiveness, captures the nexus between inner and outer not through agglutination or heaping, but rather through an emptying out, a simplifying, or a reducing. The urgency in positing such a reading alongside ones like Ngai's becomes apparent when we look at Stein's idea of counting:

One and one and one and one and one. That is the natural way to go on counting. Now what has this to do with poetry. It has a lot to do with poetry.⁵⁹

Like a number of moments in Stein's work—say, the seemingly infinite repetition of "yes" at the end of "Business in Baltimore"—this can easily come off as exactly to Ngai's point: to count by one and one and one is, indeed, to end with a "heap" of ones, rather than a single number like

three.⁶⁰ This is also the essence of beginning again, in which the success of counting hinges on the counter's eternal recursion to counting's beginnings, to "one." But, at the same time, though every "one" may be a new beginning, and these new beginnings may form a heap of slight differences (each "one" being located, as it is, at its own distinct point on the page, read by its reader at a particular moment in time) it is still only ever "one." The exactness of the repetition of "one," the fact that on a certain level it never changes, that it *does* perfectly repeat—and, therefore, that it never accumulates into a heap and never "begins again" in any strong sense—*must* be acknowledged.

Stein herself seems to have in mind both repetition as all difference and repetition as no difference at all; her critics have favored the former. To read Stein in terms of the latter, to take seriously her ideas about exactness and reduction, is to venture away from Ngai's vision of proliferating masses of language and into a linguistic vacuum: away from treating Stein as saying everything to treating her as saying nothing.⁶¹ Focalizing the latter reveals two complementary trajectories. The first leads to Stein's dispersed mereologies and home-brewed set theories. These are spelled out most lucidly through her account of paragraphs in "The Gradual Making of *The Making of Americans*":

In describing English literature I have explained that the twentieth century was the century not of sentences as was the eighteenth not of phrases as was the nineteenth but of paragraphs. And as I explained paragraphs were inevitable because as the nineteenth century came to its ending, phrases were no longer full of any meaning and the time had come when a whole thing was all there was of anything ... In fact inevitably I made my sentences and my paragraphs do the same thing ... I made a paragraph so much a whole thing that it included in itself as a whole thing a whole sentence.⁶²

"A whole," as Stein writes in *Tender Buttons*, "is inside a part, a part does go away."⁶³ This is Stein at her most abstract, her most theoretical: what Wimsatt would call her level of "*x* and *y*." Writing has been reduced to its most basic units; these units are shifted around without any regard to their potential content. The possibility of a paragraph's wholeness is in no way premised on what the paragraph might contain. Sentence—as index for transfinite wholes assimilated under the auspices of paragraph—has no attachment to the nature of any given sentence. These terms have become variables, in an algebraic, logicistic sense. A number of critics in recent years have seized on Stein's "engagement with set theory" as a way into understanding her poetics.⁶⁴ These critics inevitably use set theory as a way around psychological readings of Stein, to arrive at an intrinsically "nonhuman" account of her work.⁶⁵

This is a beguiling alternative to Stein's psychological interpretations. But it ignores certain aspects of Stein's claims about the reduced structures in her work. For one, Stein makes clear that she turns to this type of discourse because she feels that certain developments in literary history have produced a language "no longer full of any meaning." Relatedly, Stein does not leave her mereology in disarray; she prioritizes the patterns that can be found even at this most basic of levels, leading to a radical preference for wholes over parts. Wholeness, in general,

implies relation, and where relation is present the human can be as well, which is perhaps why Stein, in “Poetry and Grammar,” attributes “emotion” to paragraphs, thereby imagining, as Steven Meyer writes, a syntax suffused with “emotionally resonant wholes.”⁶⁶ Meaning, pattern, wholeness: these are not the tropes of a nonhuman language. Neither, though, are they easily justified with relation to psychology, characterization, or description. As a scientific or mathematical claim, what Stein is adumbrating here looks nothing like what she envisions in her famous statement about her art’s relation to Jamesian psychology:

When I was working with William James I completely learned one thing, that science is continuously busy with the complete description of something, with ultimately the complete description of anything with ultimately the complete description of everything. ... and so description is really unending. When I began *The Making of Americans* I knew I really did know that a complete description was a possible thing, and certainly a complete description is a possible thing.⁶⁷

The difference between something complete and something whole is analogous to the distinction between realistic and exact language. Stein demarcates these two concepts at a number of points in her writing, as when she contrasts two types of repetition, “a complete one” and “a whole one,” in *The Making of Americans*.⁶⁸ The former suggests a process of filling a descriptive arena with masses of detail by utilizing a language that never reaches the ends of its own referentiality, never runs out of differences to explore between its repetitions.

This feels correct for a text like *The Making of Americans*, which captures something about a set of voices and people through the sheer fact of its completeness: the unavoidable bulk and heft of the book itself. For a slim text like, say, *Tender Buttons*, with its relatively self-contained units, the logic of the whole prevails, and, as Stein makes clear above, this logic operates through a strict coherence between a text’s parts, to the extent that these parts themselves assume the character of wholes, thereby inculcating a robust repetitiveness at the heart of Stein’s structure (wholes repeating inwardly into further wholes). One glimpses this emphasis on holism from the book’s first-edition cover, with its distinctive green circle wrapping around the author’s name, the book’s title, and the three subtitles (Objects, Food, Rooms). The circularity of the cover presages the more famous circular inscriptions of “Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose,” which play simultaneously on the mechanical quality of pure iteration (the typing of “rose” potentially endlessly accomplished) and on iteration’s inclusiveness: its complete intimacy with itself and, through this intimacy, its infallible connection with what it signifies—a rose itself.⁶⁹ (And, indeed, the circular inscriptions often contained an image of a rose at their centers, demonstrating in one swoop both the success of the phrase at conjuring its object and the evacuated quality of its own signification success, as the object becomes only one link more in the tautological chain, only now a spiral inwards rather than a strict circle.) Along these lines, Stein famously says of her rose repetition:

Now listen! I’m no fool. I know that in daily life we don’t go around saying “is a . . . is a . . . is a . . .” Yes, I’m no fool; but I

think that in that link the rose is red for the first time in English poetry for a hundred years.⁷⁰

In this idea, as in her experiments with automatism, Stein privileges not the particular realness of a pattern of speech emerging from some empirical subject, but rather the precision of the correlation between the stylistic choice of repetition and its worldly object. There is a symbiosis between this correlation and the essentially correlative function of “rose is a rose is a rose is a rose,” in which no germ of difference can find room to fester between phrases. The result is a referentiality that is vacuous, yet perfect; the key is to determine whether perfect vacuity might have a stylistic or aesthetic value.

III. Stein's logic

Thus far, we have juxtaposed two theses, one philosophical and one literary; these must now be brought into a more direct relationship. The philosophical thesis, from Russell, Ramsey, et al. is that the style of language might reflect the same metaphysical problems that analytic philosophers had turned to language, in the first place, to alleviate. The literary thesis is that Stein's repetitive style restages, or reenacts, what it is like to be conscious in a general sense, rather than any single repetitive psychology. Both theses reveal an apparition of something like the mind-body problem, unexpectedly threatening the domain of linguistic style. Consider how “A Feather,” a subsection of “Objects” in Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*, demonstrates precisely this issue. Therein, the various ways in which a feather has been “trimmed” are spelled out three times, each with greater detail than the last:

A feather is trimmed, it is trimmed by the light and the bug and the post, it is trimmed by little leaning and by all sorts of mounted reserves and loud volumes. It is surely cohesive.⁷¹

The passage begins with a plain, passive assertion of some prior activity, which has led to a current fact: “The feather is trimmed.” This statement immediately recurs, but with the instrumental force behind “trimmed” now given more weight: “it is trimmed by the light and the bug and the post.” It then recurs a final time, with even more verbiage supplementing the “by”: “it is trimmed by little leaning and by all sorts of mounted reserves and loud volumes.” The way in which these building iterations play on the grammar of “is” can't help but feel anachronistically related to what Stein would later describe, looking back on this period of her work, as a “continuous present.”⁷² In each case, the “is” functions simultaneously as a marker of passivity—by way of which Stein is able to introduce the flurry of prepositional accouterments (“by” and its objects) that generates most of the passage's force—and as a sign of present activity, in which capacity the process of trimming the feather feels always already as if it has just now, at this instant, been enacted (as in the phrase “dinner is served”). The “is,” thus, imbricates the feather in a paradoxical state of constant re-presentation: its trimming has a history that is represented through the passive voice's insistence on a necessarily past-tense participle, but this past is only ever presented through the present-tense achievement of the “is.”

Adding to the tensual entanglements of “is” is the second and final sentence of “A Feather”: “It is surely cohesive.” The claim for cohesion is, first of all, seemingly at odds with the bifurcated grammatical attitudes imposed on the feather by “is.” The competition between active presentation and passive voice appears to disbar anything like “cohesion,” something that Stein herself plays with by severing the claim for cohesion from the sentence it supposedly modifies, i.e. severing its syntactic cohesion with the object of its claim (the object of “it,” or the prior sentence). Trimming, of course, already implies severing, and trimming’s focalization in “A Feather” foregrounds an activity that specifically undermines cohesive relations: a trimmed feather is a feather that once had some connection to something which has been trimmed from it, or with which it is no longer cohesive. Trimming too, though, suggests a paradox—this one etymological—related to the tensual problem described above, because “to trim” can mean to cut, but it can also mean to supplement or add to an object, a dichotomy captured in “to trim a tree,” which could refer either to removing excess foliage or to adding ornamentation. Indeed, throughout the history of its usage, “trim” has had as many productive definitions (bring forth, provide, furnish, dress, adorn) as reductive ones (clip, shave, reduce, eliminate, cut off).⁷³ However, while “trimmed” stands as the perfect emblem for why “cohesive” is most surely what “A Feather” is not, it also offers a way into threading cohesion back through its own etymology and also through the passage’s grammar. This comes through in a third usage of the word, mostly in nautical contexts, to mean things like adjust, align, balance, arrange, modify, and equalize; such definitions are actually at the root of trim’s etymology, which tentatively originates in the Old English *trymman*—to make strong, confirm, or set in arrangement.

Trim, therefore, registers a deep etymological tension, as well as that tension’s solution. To add and subtract from a physical body, to trim it, is to pursue activities that are at odds with one another, but which, in the context of trimming, can pursue the same goal: balance, equity, alignment. To trim something away and to add something by trimming may be opposite actions, but they both can function towards the same purpose, which is, as it turns out, some varietal of cohesion. To return to the grammatical valence of “A Feather,” this cohesion can be discovered in the first sentence’s grammatical particularities, which, though superficially at odds with one another, can be seen as in tandem figuring the feather’s approach to some state of equalization or arrangement. The first modification of “trimmed” aligns with both the additive and subtractive senses of trimming: “by the light and the bug and the post.” These objects emerge as accessories constellated around the feather—different from it, yet brought into its orbit as physical *relata*. They are simultaneously additions to it and excisions from it, as their juxtaposition suggests relation (they trim the feather like ornaments) while their essential difference belies disconnection (they trim the feather into a form separable from themselves). The second modification of “trimmed” pulls the split sense of the first toward a resolution in the third definition of trimming: “by little leaning and by all sorts of mounted reserves and loud volumes.” Each of these modifications, though it may adumbrate something about a physical feather, is itself non-physical: the first is positional and the third is sonic, while the second seems to register some sort of force, perhaps a potential for movement. The feather may exist in a state of paradoxical connection to, yet severance from, the light, bug, and post, but it does so in such a way that qualities demarcating its place in the world emerge as facets (leaning, mounting, loudening) that can be observed, measured, or, as a ship’s sails might be, trimmed.

The type of cohesion that is drawn out in the grammar of “A Feather” redounds upon other aspects of the passage’s grammar. Even more so than it is by “trimmed,” the question of cohesion is foregrounded by the passage’s repetitiveness. The thrice-recurring “it is” telegraphs a deictic network of interrelated grammatical pointers across all three sentences. From the perspective of grammatical subjecthood, the passage never progresses vis-a-vis these pointers; rather, it reverts again and again to the same image: a feather, which itself reads tautologically just after the selfsame title “A Feather.” The passage cannot help but keep looking backwards at its own origins, through the lens of the deictic “it,” even as it seems to burgeon into a series of realizations, with the “mounted reserves” seeming to find a grammatical corollary in the burgeoning quantities of language generated by the increasingly detailed objects of the preposition “by,” culminating in the satisfying conclusion that all that has been generated is, in fact, itself cohesive. The passage somehow both goes somewhere, yet goes nowhere; says something, yet says nothing.

On the latter point—on, that is, the grammatical quality of “A Feather” that appears to resist saying anything—consider again the grammatical repercussions of the “is.” The verb “to be” is a copular verb, which does not take a traditional grammatical object. Rather, “is” links a subject either to a predicate adjective or a predicate nominative. In either case, whatever occurs in these predicate positions does not function according to its relation with the subject, as an object might do, but rather expresses some facet of the grammatical subject that that subject already contained within itself. In short, what predicate nominatives do is repeat or rename qualities of a grammatical subject in what is traditionally an object position in the sentence. Therefore, the grammar of the predicate nominative is essentially repetitive, serving merely as a conduit for features of the subject to slip in the object position. As a formula, the grammar of the predicate nominative or adjective would be as follows: “subject is [an aspect of] subject.” In the case of “A Feather,” in which no other verb besides “is” occurs, this means that, from a grammatical perspective, there really is no object (despite the overarching title of the section, “Objects”) in the passage at all. What remains amounts merely to a play of grammatical subjectivity, with “A feather” reiterating and renaming itself four separate times, with each iteration transmitted through the deictic “it.”

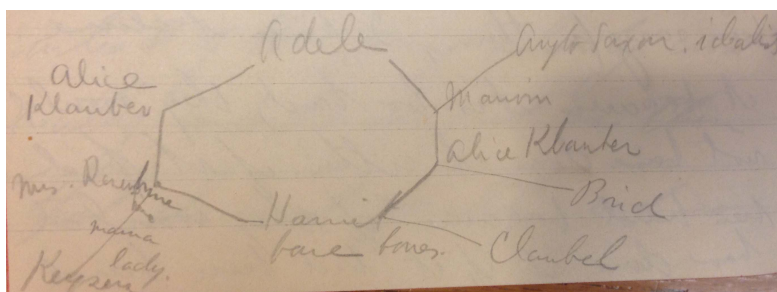
Observations on the function of predicative nominatives in “A Feather” have implications for *Tender Buttons* as a whole. There are 14,959 words in *Tender Buttons*; many of these repeat so that the text ends up with a lexicon composed of 2,607 different words (including different parts of speech of the same words). Of these 14,959 words, varieties of the verb “to be” account for almost 11%, by far the highest percentage of any single word. Taken just by itself, “is” comes in as the second-most used word in the text, just slightly tailing “a.” *Tender Buttons* is not typically considered one of Stein’s classically repetitive texts, because it does not contain anything like the huge chunks of explicitly repetitive language that, say, *The Making of Americans* does. But, an attention to the consequences of these propagating instances of the verb “to be” shows that, on a grammatical level, *Tender Buttons* channels a huge amount of repetitiveness just under the skin of its ostensibly diverse contents. The question of grammatical subjectivity’s infiltration of predicates through the copular verb suggests a paradoxical state for the text that mimics, on a larger scale, the push-and-pull between saying something and saying nothing in “A Feather.” The question, as it has been throughout this chapter, is: what value might “saying nothing” have?

One way towards answering that question with regards to Stein is to read the predicate nominatives in *Tender Buttons* alongside a strange mode of recording experiences in certain notebooks surrounding the production of *The Making of Americans* and *Tender Buttons*. This mode offers a way into considering her own potential encounters with overlaps between repetitions as simultaneously stylistic devices and metaphysical specula. It took shape as various schema that blended written words with geometric lines: “endless diagrams” and “enormous charts,” as she later described them. These functioned as classificatory devices, by way of which Stein bundled otherwise disparate people, objects, and events into sets of *relata*:

You start in and you take everyone that you know, and then when you see anybody who has a certain expression or turn of the face that reminds you of some one, you find out where he agrees or disagrees with the character, until you build up the whole scheme. I got to the place where I didn't know whether I knew people or not. I made so many charts that when I used to go down the streets of Paris I wondered whether they were people I knew or ones I didn't.⁷⁴

A number of critics have spoken fluently about the referential and tropic implications of the diagram in relation to Stein's work. Gabrielle Dean, copulating the sensuous diagramming described above with comments Stein made elsewhere about diagramming sentences, points out that the diagram offers Stein a way of “perceiving and simultaneously ordering experience.”⁷⁵ The diagram presents as literary *matériel*—evidence for the transubstantiation of phenomenological bricolage into categorical series—standing at the interface between perception, conceptualization, and expression. Dean's emphasis on order resonates with other critics' accounts of the diagrams, which invariably play up their value as principles of assembly, accumulating to depict Stein's language as a “landscape” and, in turn, making visual her transmutation of experiential particularity into holistic grammar.⁷⁶

Certainly diagrams put things in order. Stein's are no different; consider the one here, which places the names of several Stein acquaintances into an octagonal form. The diagram wears its intentionality, its constructedness, on its sleeve,

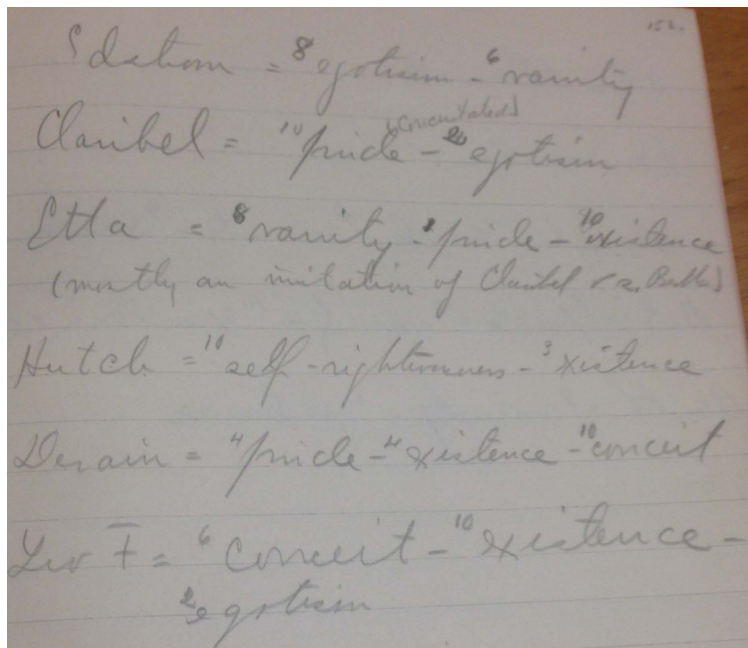


despite not revealing the purpose behind its construction, other than that each figure is “in common” with the other. Contra order, Dydo writes about the ways in which Stein's diagrams “bleed” into strange appendages and clinging features that disrupt symmetry.⁷⁷ Something like bleeding can be observed here in the offshoot of “Anglo-Saxon. idealist.” from the right corner, or the “Clauber” that divagates off towards the bottom. The diagram, thus, leaves us suspended between two impulses. The first is to follow Dean's lead in reading for order. Dean traces this impulse through a variety of technical discourses, each with some connection to the Stein's work—the mapping of colonial states, the diagrammatic nature of lines on notebook paper, the

charting of components from aviatational and automechanical industries, or, most importantly, the cartographic impulses latent in detective fiction. Like a detective does a piece of evidence, we can approach Stein's diagram as a signature for some intentional activity that, while initially inscrutable, might nonetheless function as a device that forwards our understanding of a certain personality's activity in the world.⁷⁸ The diagram can, in short, be crucial to an investigation into the underpinnings of what Marjorie Perloff calls Stein's "Word-System."⁷⁹ The second is to pursue Dydo's concept of bleeding, placing more weight on the asymmetry of the diagram, and ultimately utilizing this asymmetry to arrive at a difference-based grammar, which in turn sponsors the diagram's (a)referential value.

Neither choice feels right. Both Dean's and Dydo's explanations of Stein's diagrams place too much emphasis on their purpose as "references," to borrow a term from Dean, who explicates what happens when we treat them as felicitous references, while Dydo does the opposite, celebrating what flourishes when they are received as short-circuiting reference. The distinction maps onto two more general tendencies in Stein scholarship, which will both receive extensive attention later in this chapter: one reads Stein as constructing systems or grammars (emphasizing relations), while the other reads her as deconstructing them (emphasizing differences). What both readings fail to acknowledge is that the stakes for Stein's engagement with order, whether she is making it or dismantling it, do not necessarily operate according to principles of reference, even when they manifest in diagrammatic forms—forms seemingly dedicated to practices of explanation, demonstration, communication. To understand the consequences of disentangling ordering from referring, look closely at Stein's account, quoted above, of what diagramming accomplished for her. First, Stein says, "you take everyone that you know." Out of this raw material, you attend to "certain expressions," things that "remind you of someone," and other aspects of "character," which all correlate to the original set of names. (This accumulation of people and traits, undertaken previous to the act of diagramming, can be witnessed throughout the diagram notebooks, which are flush with reams of names placed in stark equivalence with certain characteristics, as seen in the figure below.) Out of these correlations, "you build up the whole scheme," connecting certain people based on shared traits. This is the moment at which the diagram manifests. But, then, the script flips. What had begun as a didactic lesson in how "you" make a diagram becomes an altogether different narrative about what "I," presumably Stein herself, experienced as a result of diagramming. The shift from "you" to "I" at the moment Stein invokes the diagram, "the whole scheme," tracks alongside a shifting relation between the diagrammer and the diagrammed across the quotation. To begin with, the activity of the "you" is prioritized, along with the robustly subjective process of gathering and sorting. The "you" "builds up" the "scheme" out of interconnections that it notices between extant facts. But then, between this "scheme" and the appearance of the "I," the quotation turns from describing the production and evaluation of diagrams to recounting the effects of a diagram on its producer. This moment of possible recognition between the intentional subject and the world it has worked so hard to schematize is characterized not by the consummation of a referring relation between subject and world, but instead by a withholding of consummation, a refusal to ratify the connection. Rather than serving as a tool for reference *a la* Dean, or as a demonstration of reference's failure *a la* Dydo, the diagram suspends reference altogether, leading to a situation in which "I didn't know whether I knew."

To not know whether one knows is not not to know; it is not, that is, a state of epistemic chaos. The phrase indexes, instead, an explicit lack of reference lurking at the heart of Stein's account of the ways in which the mind orders the world. The ordering happens, and the world exists, but the referential bridge between the two is purposefully drawn up. Orderly bodies of knowledge come to light, but the subject cannot reflect on, or even verify, their dimensions. Or, perhaps, just the opposite. Consider that to know about what one knows is implicitly a tautological activity: knowing about knowing about knowing about ... The diagram, too, is a tautology, revelatory about the world only because it reflects classifications already present within it (if we were to place diagramming into a Coleridgean or Hulmeian rubric, it would align



more with juxtapositional fancying than with esemplastic imagining). Thus, not to know what one knows could be about a lack of reference, or it could be about an over-abundance of reference: if knowing what one knows is to know what one knows, then what difference is there between knowing about knowing and knowing itself? Really to know about knowing would just be to repeat knowledge to oneself verbatim, in the same way that an ideal diagram would correspond perfectly with what it diagrams. Thus, on the level at which knowledge is referred to by a subject, the best result that can be imagined as pertaining between

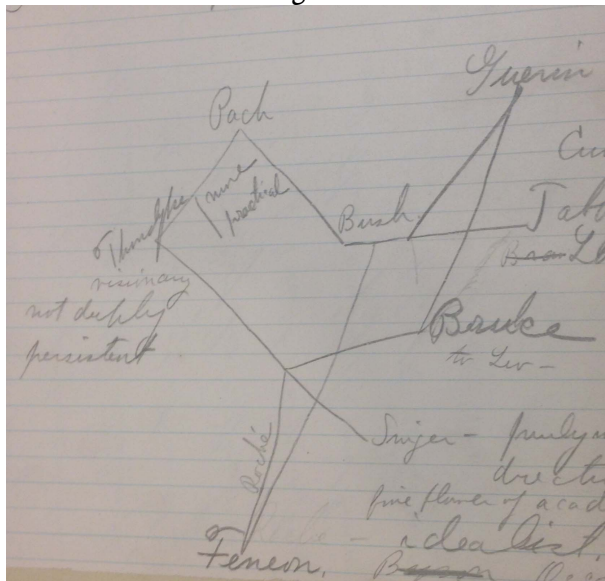
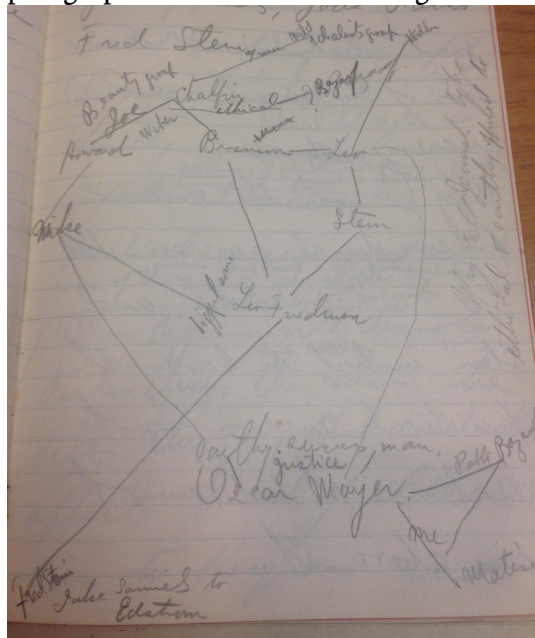
structures like diagram and world, or knowledge and meta-knowledge, is a pure tautology, which does nothing for—says nothing about—the relation between conjoined terms.

The hypothesis is as follows: that Stein's diagrammatic practice inflects the paradoxical question of knowledge's knowledge of itself. The diagram becomes, in this sense, the stylistic configuration of an epistemic issue; in becoming so, it repeats the same problem that it inflects, by staging itself as a material realization of knowledge's knowledge (its presumed categories, its notice of patterns, its preference for wholes). This possibility, which would demand as many diagrams of diagrams as there were knowledges of knowledges (both infinite), gives new meaning to Stein's claim of fashioning "endless diagrams." So what *is* the point of diagramming? Diagramming shows the necessarily vacuous nature of any ordering regime. Recall that Stein names the result of her diagramming a "whole" scheme: not just a scheme that is itself whole, but also a scheme *of* wholes. For Stein, the whole is derived from meta-epistemic practices, in which one notices the patterns stretched across an accumulated body of particular things that are known. Men—many of her diagrams are about men and women—are like *this* because they all seem to be like *that*. The strange logic of the whole, like the strange logic of the diagram, leads to a tautological circumstance, in which the egotism, say, of men is the product of the egotism of any given man. If every man placed under the rubric of egotism is egotistical, which must be the

case, then the holistic concept of egotism really only captures itself: the process of noticing a condition of order, a pattern, in a supposedly varied subset of experiential data turns out to reveal only that order's omnipresence in the data to begin with and, thereby, the order's subsequent repetitions, both at the level of experience and knowledge.

Consider, in this light, the homophonic reverberation between “whole” and “hole,” which Stein herself toys with a number of times, most memorably in *Tender Buttons*: “A whole is inside a part, a part does go away, a hole is red leaf.”⁸⁰ Wholes are things minds make that, supposedly, rein in the overpowering variety of sensuous reality. But they also, quite literally, do not exist: they are, as constructs, mere shells of what has been, or could be. The shell-like quality of the whole is evident in the diagram above (figure 1), which is literally hollow at its core. Other examples of diagrams abound (figures 3 and 4 below), each taking their surveyor on a referential journey that inevitably folds back in upon itself, simultaneously projecting closed loops (wholes) and vacuous diameters (holes). Each diagram is a merry-go-round of supposed reference. In the case of figure 1, whether the endlessness of the octagon's circumferential relations, coupled with the complete vacancy of relations at its center, is interpreted as a superabundance of reference, or as the complete absence of reference, matters not; what matters is that the achievement of the diagram, while definitively having to do with putting things in order, is also the discovery that the value of order may just be order itself, given that the diagram manages to refer, quite literally, only to itself, and *not* to the quintessence of what critic's like Dean and Dydo take to be order's reference: the relation between what is in disarray (the world) and what quells chaos (the mind).

To understand better the radical nature of Stein's take on wholes, we can look to classical mereology, such as Immanuel Kant's account of wholes in the first critique, wherein a whole is recognized as “greater than its part.”⁸¹ Stein, following in the steps of Cantorian set theorists, rejected this as an ontologically necessary condition, imagining instead a mereological status quo in which, to return to the quote above from *Tender Buttons*, “a whole is inside a part, a part does go away.”⁸² She describes a similar result, only specifically entrenched in the discourses of grammar and syntax, in “The Gradual Making of the Making of Americans”: “I made a paragraph so much a whole thing that it included in itself as a whole thing a whole sentence.”⁸³



Instead of a whole “assembled from its parts,” a mereological narrative that Stein gives and then overwrites, she arrives at a vision of wholes containing further wholes. The problem is that, for the diagrammatic Stein, a whole is clearly an obtained distinction, something that is gathered together through the noticing of shared qualities and the mapping of those qualities into some sort of relation. If the raw material from which wholes are derived turns out to be further wholes, then it isn’t clear on what ontological ground Stein’s work stands—certainly not the world *eo ipso*. To put it a different way, there is no such thing as pride, vanity, egotism, or any of the other traits that Stein assigns to individuals in figure 2 above. There are only vane, prideful, and egotistical people. To arrive at a world in which the holistic concept of pridefulness is placed on the same ontological level as a particular prideful person is to reach the ends of reference entirely, from which, as Bertrand Russell famously said, “there is no backward road.” Differently from Russell, however, Stein’s referential end, and the impossibility of return to reference’s source, is premised not on the occlusion of some wildly spontaneous process, with the subject frozen in place by the sheer variety of possible paths that could have been taken to arrive at that end. Rather, the subject, perhaps in the process of appreciating some whole it has manufactured out of observing the world, is immobilized by the realization that the manufacture of said whole may be no achievement at all: that the end of reference just might be the beginning of reference, or that forward progress (through knowledge, through expression, through conceptualization) might just amount to repeating oneself, again and again and again.

In that light, it becomes clear that Stein’s diagrams foreground questions of predication similar to the ones with which her philosophical contemporaries were struggling. In figure 1, “Alice Klauber” is clearly a predicational reference to Stein’s acquaintance, the painter Alice Klauber, just as “barn” predicates an actual barn. At the level of the diagram’s style, to treat of it in Fowlerian terms, “Alice Klauber” is also a predicate, because the diagram implies a copular relation between interconnected terms, so that geometric relation takes on linguistic life as sentences like “Lady Keyser is [related to] Alice Klauber” and “Alice Klauber is [related to] Adele.” Here Wimsatt’s critique of Fowler, along with Ramsey’s extension of that critique, helps to collapse the seemingly rigid subject-predicate structures projected through these sentences, by directing our attention to what seem like normal predicates (Alice Klauber, Adele) and revealing them to be predicate nominatives. The grammar of the predicate nominative, in turn, forces us to read the diagram’s relations as fundamentally tautological and eminently reversible (Alice Klauber is as much Adele, according to the diagram, as Adele is Alice Klauber).

The role of predication in Stein’s work has been the subject of much recent critical speculation. Indeed, two of the more seminal recent accounts of Stein’s language turn on divergent readings of how she uses predicates; taken together, these accounts form a vicious circle, a Charybdis swirling at the nadir of any critical endeavor seeking to probe downwards into the inner workings of Stein’s grammar. Keith Waldrop proposes the first account, when he transfigures Stein’s writing on nouns into a claim that her work pursues a state of “pure predication,” in which the results of a grammatical subject’s activity (a subject’s predicates) are relayed *sans* the assertion of a subject’s claim to those activities (without, that is, a grammatical subject).⁸⁴ *Tender Buttons* is ripe with instances that are to Waldrop’s point. Take, for example, the seeming half-sentence “A place in no new table.”⁸⁵ Perhaps the most striking feature of this sentence is its perceived lack of grammatical subjectivity—no “I see” or “there is” or “they discuss” to give perspective, let alone context, to the image. The value in this practice of

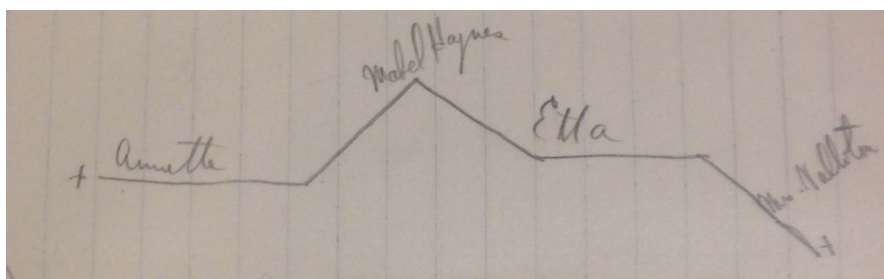
eliminating the subject, as Waldrop puts it, is a “reduced vocabulary,” which implies not a “shortened” or curtailed flow of words, (in fact the opposite can prevail, as Stein’s lexical strings stretch to “indefinite length”), but rather suggests an intensified grammar in which “fewer and fewer words carry more and more sense.”⁸⁶ This is all well and good, except for the fact that it clashes with the second account of Stein’s language, which is that her “word-system,” again to borrow Perloff’s phrase, is bedeviled precisely by the fact of Stein’s predications’ variety and ambiguity:

Predication becomes meaningless (“When the ancient grey light is clean it is yellow”). A equals B or modifies C or is in apposition to D, but how and why?⁸⁷

So, in trying to synchronize the two accounts, we are left with a situation in which Stein’s language tends toward a reduced, intensified state of “pure predication,” only to discover that predication is the most complex, least reducible quality of Stein’s language.

One way to understand the impasse is to look at Stein’s more overtly sentential diagrams—that is, those which formally resemble diagrams of sentences.

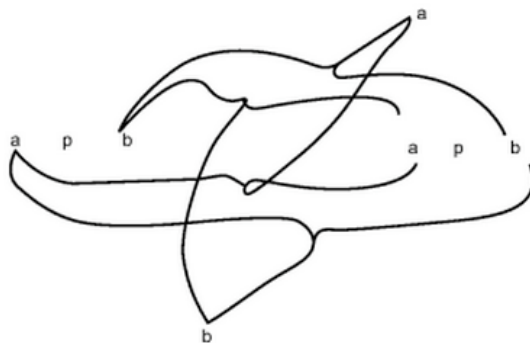
Take, for instance, figure 5



above. As a “sentence,” this diagram appears to have a peculiar y-axis play of priorities, as “Mabel Haynes” rests on a peak and “Mrs. Nellita” drags into a trough. The strangeness of that play (why should Haynes go up and Nellita down?) is precisely what Perloff muses on in Stein’s writing: words seem placed in hierarchical relations, in which the words and relations make some sense, but the hierarchy (in Perloff’s case, hierarchy obtained through a panoply of predicational subjugations and transcendences) does not. The x-axis, however, demonstrates a completely different problem, one more closely aligned with Waldrop’s concerns. On this axis, there is no differentiation; the names proceed in a completely linear fashion, with no hierarchy or divagation troubling their relations. In fact, Stein even attaches small plus signs onto the ends of the diagram, as if to indicate that it could extend infinitely to the right and the left. This is one way of visualizing the combined, seemingly paradoxical force of Waldrop’s idea that Stein’s language is at once “reduced” and of “indefinite length”: the relations along this diagram’s x-axis are indistinguishable, reduced to a singular copular linkage, yet endless, as that reduction refabricates itself across a line that might never stop extending.

V. Making sense

Of the myriad philosophical efforts expended on the subject of tautology and repetition in the 1910s and 1920s, Stein’s repetitive diagrams rhyme most powerfully with Wittgenstein’s proprietary methodology for tracing the effects of tautological formulae in logical space. In late November 1913, specifically, Wittgenstein composed a letter to Bertrand Russell, in which he sketched the following peculiar figure:⁸⁸



This is Wittgenstein's first attempt to illustrate a relation between a proposition (p on the left) and itself (p on the right)—or, in other words, a perfect tautology: think, “I am I.” The letters a and b signify “true” and “false,” respectively (elsewhere, Wittgenstein replaces a and b with w and f , for *wahr* and *falsch*). Each “ $a p b$ ” cluster cumulatively indicates a proposition p that is either polarized toward a (i.e. it is truthful) or that is polarized toward b (i.e. it is false). The parallel brackets, which move laterally across the figure, trace what essentially amounts to a process of epistemic factoring used to determine the synchronization of the tautology with itself: one line connects a - a , one connects b - b , one a - b , and one b - a . Each of these possible epistemic factors is tied to one of several perpendicular lines slicing through the brackets; these perpendiculars connect either to the a at the top or the b at the bottom. The upper a and lower b index the overall character of the tautology. If the tautology factors asynchronously (as either a - b or b - a) then it is tied to the lower b , or in other words is considered as being ultimately infelicitous—i.e., it is not a proper tautology. If it factors synchronously (as either a - a or b - b) then it is tethered to the upper a , which means its relation to itself is fundamentally truthful, or otherwise properly tautologous.

Even with some explanation, it remains unclear exactly what purpose the figure served. The whole process seems rather academic and overwrought, not to mention more than a little, as it were, tautologous. In what circumstances would the question of a proposition's relation to itself ever turn up any result other than a , or true? This feels like adding $1+2+2$ and then subtracting 4 to get to 1: back to where the “equation” began in the first place. It is as if the methodology behind Wittgenstein's figure somehow partakes of the tautologies that it is designed to analyze, leading to a mode of inquiry that cannot help but be self-fulfilling, in the same way that p cannot help but be, always and already, p . Bertrand Russell, for one, struggled to understand the method when it was first presented to him in 1913. He had to ask more than once that it be repeated, leading Wittgenstein to abuse him with more tenacity than usual: “it is INTOLERABLE for me, to repeat a written explanation which even the first time I gave only with the *utmost repugnance*.”⁸⁹ (Here, Wittgenstein nicely plays on something like Fowler's distinction between a repetition and a tautology.) Wittgenstein himself, in his much later Cambridge lectures of the 1930s—just after, therein, manifesting the last recorded instances of figures resembling the one that begins this essay—acknowledged the seeming pointlessness of discussing tautologies at all: “Why, if they are tautologies, do we ever write them down? What is their use? ... Further, if all tautologies say nothing then don't they mean the same?”⁹⁰

It can be hard, in short, to understand why such a thing as a tautology should need to be discussed, or to cognize how it could possibly be important to analyze. Nonetheless, Wittgenstein, especially in his very early work, returns again and again to the question of

tautology, and he specifically feels compelled to draw and re-draw assorted versions of the figure that begins this essay. Those familiar with Wittgenstein will recall various permutations, especially ones which occur in proposition 6.1203 of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*; similar ones appear throughout Wittgenstein's notes and letters from 1913 to 1919, with a late instance showing up in his Cambridge lectures during the mid-1930s.⁹¹ (Indeed, there is something almost behaviorally tautologous in the way that the young Wittgenstein returns again and again to the subject of tautology and this figure in particular.) Both the consistency with which Wittgenstein revisited the figure, and its prevalence in his writings, mark it as an unusually consistent and vital feature of his early philosophizing—typically so protean in its interests and conclusions. Regarding the former point, this figure, and the coterie of ideas in which it is situated, stands as one of the only aspects of Wittgenstein's early philosophy to translate out of his early- and into his middle-career work (into, in particular, the Cambridge lectures, so important for the conception of the later *Philosophical Investigations*). Regarding the latter point, the earliness of the figure cannot be overemphasized; it sits at the center of an exchange between Wittgenstein, Russell, and G.E. Moore that collectively embodies some of Wittgenstein's earliest, serious philosophical thinking. The exchange culminates in the "Notes on Logic," which, as Michael Potter notes in his critical edition, comprises Wittgenstein's "first surviving philosophical work."⁹²

The textual evidence for tautology's high status in Wittgenstein's early philosophy is supported by major claims that he makes for its significance. He writes to Russell that it is "the fundamental problem of all logic" and then repeats the point a month later: "The question of identity cannot be answered until the nature of tautology has been explained. But that question is fundamental to the *whole* of logic."⁹³ He goes so far as to attest that: "All the propositions of logic are generalizations of tautologies and all generalizations of tautologies are propositions of logic. There are no other logical propositions. (I regard this as definitive.)"⁹⁴ All propositions of logic are tautologies; all tautologies are logical propositions. This holds true both for pure tautologies ("p \equiv p") and for, as James Simmons says, "all deductive inference" conducted by the logician to connect otherwise divergent propositions.⁹⁵ A basic example would be "p \supset q," meaning *p* implies *q*; this is tautologous, in Tractarian logic, because it always already asserts that *p*, in some sense, contains the seed of *q* within itself, or that: "the original postulates implicitly contain the conclusions desired."⁹⁶ (This explains how Wittgenstein draws tautology figures representing not only *p-p* equations but also *p-q* ones. More on this later.) Tautologous logic was a radical idea at the time Wittgenstein devised it in 1913, though Burton Dreben and Juliet Floyd have shown that it quickly became, through the efforts of Russell and G.E. Moore, an accepted part of philosophical discourse in the late 1910s and early 1920s.⁹⁷ The idea of a tautologous logic is also, as noted by Russell Wahl, "perhaps the most enduring legacy" of the *Tractatus* in present-day scholarship.⁹⁸

It has connotations, for instance, with regards to the so-called "resolute" reading of *Tractatus*, which stems from Cora Diamond's pivotal move to take literally the penultimate proposition (6.54), which states:

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He

must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)⁹⁹

The key here is “nonsensical,” or *unsinnig*, which is a vital term in Wittgenstein’s corpus, and one that had occupied Diamond for almost a decade before she arrived at her seminal reading of 6.54; she distinguished between six different types of nonsense that Wittgenstein condemned: obvious falsehoods, wild inapposites, category errors, syntactical confusion, mixtures of nonsense words into otherwise sensible propositions, and pure gibberish.¹⁰⁰ To be nonsense, of any type, meant very specifically to be excluded from the realm of logic, which encompasses “*all regularity*”; nonsense, by contrast, “is accident.”¹⁰¹ According to this definition, what Diamond interprets Wittgenstein as attempting to do, when he calls all of the *Tractatus* “nonsense,” is to exclude his own pronouncements about logic from the realm of logic itself. Most scholars of Wittgenstein after Diamond, including those generally opposed to resolute readings, like Danièle Moyal-Sharrock, agree on this point: that the *Tractatus*, though it may describe or adumbrate a logic, is not itself a part of what Russell identifies as Wittgenstein’s “doctrine of pure logic.”¹⁰²

The question, though, is: what is it? For resolute readers working in Diamond’s wake, the disbarment of *Tractatus* from logic left behind a single discernible motive for the text: a therapeutic project. As James Conant says, the value of the *Tractatus*, and indeed of all Wittgenstein’s philosophical writings, is to aid its readers in transitioning “from a piece of disguised nonsense to a piece of undisguised nonsense.”¹⁰³ In other words, the *Tractatus*, as Moyal-Sharrock writes, fundamentally wants to “*make sense*,” and to unmask nonsense in the process.¹⁰⁴ Wittgenstein himself says as much at a number of different points in the *Tractatus*; take, for instance, proposition 4.112, of which Russell strongly approved: “Philosophy should make clear and delimit sharply the thoughts which otherwise are, as it were, opaque and blurred.”¹⁰⁵ It is positioned as a kind of cipher, map, or model that denotes the difference between “pure logic” and ordinary speech, or what Wittgenstein calls “the ordinary form of expression” or “the language of everyday life.”¹⁰⁶ As a text, it functions quite similarly to how Wittgenstein describes the individual propositions that entirely compose it: as “arrows” engaged in a process of never-ending indication or demonstration, inevitably oriented more toward “*how* a thing is, not *what* it is.”¹⁰⁷ The *Tractatus* is, thus, more adverb than object: a signpost at the boundaries of logic and language that shows not where one is but, rather, where one may be going.

The question of the *Tractatus* as a text dovetails with one of the main problems for resolute readings: this being that they treat Wittgenstein’s work as necessarily autotelic, or as inevitably possessed of an singular purpose—namely, making sense. The attribution to Wittgenstein of such purposiveness is a curious artifact in resolute readings, given that part of the point behind “throwing away the ladder” was to reject a generation of interpretations that sought to construe Wittgenstein as a system-builder, in an almost metaphysical vein. P.M.S. Hacker is Diamond’s scapegoat for these interpretations, especially his idea that the “realm of possibility” for any given atom of logic is projected by ontological substructures enduring beyond logic and life themselves.¹⁰⁸ A common bit of rhetoric in resolute readings is to say that they “free” Wittgenstein, and his readers, from metaphysical lead-balloons like “ontological substructures.”¹⁰⁹ But, if the resolute process is in fact one that resolves in freedom, why should Wittgenstein manifest such an airtight, systematic focus? Is not an all-encompassing goal of

making sense simply the Trojan horse of yet another systematic interpretation of his philosophy, waiting to burgeon from within the therapeutic project? Seen in this light, the resolute Wittgenstein looks not all that different from any other Wittgenstein to come before him.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Tractarian logic that falls to the wayside in resolute readings is a sense for what Montgomery Link calls a “critical technical distinction in the *Tractatus*” between what is “nonsensical” (*unsinnig*) and what is merely “senseless” (*sinnlos*).¹¹⁰ This receives no attention, for instance, in Diamond’s early essay on types of nonsense.¹¹¹ Michael Kramer captures the distinction nicely:

[Wittgenstein] has to make clear that tautologies, while lacking sense since they do not divide the space of possibilities into those with which they agree and those with which they disagree, are nonetheless not nonsense since they are built up out of expressions that have a determinate meaning, or use, in the language.¹¹²

Nonsense exceeds logic, and in the process becomes totally severed from what logic does. Senselessness, on the other hand, plays by logic’s rules, but somehow fails to pertain as a logical result; this is what Wittgenstein means, e.g., when he says that senseless statements “say nothing.”¹¹³ For a reader who considers Wittgenstein to be engaged in any sort of therapeutic effort with regards to language and logic, the category of senselessness feels recalcitrant, since it is neither fully nonsense nor sense. Because senselessness is not completely in the domain of nonsense, it cannot be entirely dismissed from the conversation about what the *Tractatus* is doing: it is somehow involved in that text’s project of making sense. But, how could something that is senseless, or otherwise completely devoid of sense, contribute to the making of sense? Diamond at one point writes that:

throughout [Wittgenstein’s] writings, from the period before the *Tractatus* was written and onwards ... [t]here is no ‘positive’ nonsense, no such thing as nonsense that is nonsense on account of what it would have to mean, given the meanings already fixed for the terms it contains.¹¹⁴

Nonsense is entirely negative; it is even the case, as Wittgenstein says in a letter to F.P. Ramsey, that “*the negation of nonsense is nonsense*.”¹¹⁵ It produces nothing, does nothing. Is senselessness similarly sterile? Is it equally bereft of influence? Can there be a “positive” account of senselessness?

VI. The sense of senselessness

Wittgenstein has a very concrete idea about what senselessness is: in a word, tautology.¹¹⁶ Recall, in this light, his “definitive” assertion that “all the propositions of logic are generalizations of tautologies.”¹¹⁷ *Q.E.D.*, all the propositions of logic must be senseless. It is key that Wittgenstein says “propositions of logic,” rather than logic in and of itself; the difference lies between the efforts of logicians to express logic through propositions and the abstract essence

of logic itself which these propositions can only gesture towards. (The latter would wade deeply and unproductively into the territory of Hacker's "ontological substructures.") The result is that the *Tractatus* itself—as nothing more than a collection of propositions, all of which are by definition tautological—is the domain of senselessness. This fact cascades up what Cyril Barrett calls the "architectonics" of Tractarian logic, affecting a number of its core, canonical principles.¹¹⁸ These effects, in turn, further elucidate Wittgenstein's uses of tautology, which are in no way synchronic across his early corpus.

At the foundations of Wittgenstein's so-called architectonics are "atomic" facts or propositions. Russell summarizes their definition as follows: "All atomic propositions are logically independent of each other. No atomic proposition implies any other or is inconsistent with any other."¹¹⁹ Atomic propositions are, to use a word from much later in Wittgenstein's career, "bedrock" (*Begründungen*).¹²⁰ They are the ultimate limits of logic, on top of which all further (molecular) propositions are built. Wittgenstein needed to assert the existence of such a bedrock as a means of overcoming various paradoxes suggested by Russell and Whitehead in their *Principia Mathematica*, namely Russell's seminal paradox, which he described in a letter to Frege as follows:

Let \wp be the predicate: to be a predicate that cannot be predicated of itself. Can \wp be predicated of itself? From each answer its opposite follows. Therefore we must conclude that \wp is not a predicate. Likewise there is no class (as a totality) of those classes which, each taken as a totality, do not belong to themselves. From this I conclude that under certain circumstances a definable collection does not form a totality.¹²¹

Essentially: do sets of all sets include themselves? If they do not, then they are not sets of all sets. If they do, then the logician is forced to theorize a further set of all sets to encompass the initial set. The paradox is typologically related to many others, some of them ancient: the liar's paradox, Richard's paradox, Burali-Forti's contradiction, the third man paradox, and so on. Russell eventually pointed out that all have to do with just one class of problems: those arising from "self-reference or reflexiveness."¹²² Anytime a group, collection, or whole of something—anything: rocks, numbers, words, propositions, people—is encountered or imagined, logic faces the question of whether to include the whole as an entity in the tally of the parts. The choice leaves logicians stranded between a Cantorian Scylla and Charybdis.

Such paradoxes are monstrous for Wittgenstein, especially a resolute Wittgenstein, because they challenge the reality of wholes. Indeed, they are a threat to the very idea of sense, because any sense being made of some cluster of propositions, say the *Tractatus*, would succumb to Russell's paradox. (Is the sense of the cluster a part of its own sense?) Pure logic itself is, implicitly, an umbrella term for a massive body of logical entities performing functions in logical space. There can be no "logic," in that case, if Russell's paradox proves true, because the question of whether logic includes itself leads either to a rejection of the existence of logic as a whole or the necessity of imagining some other, higher logic to encompass the original logic, a process that threatens an infinite regression. (Wittgenstein specifically rejects the latter option in 4.12 and 4.121, when he dispenses with the possibility of higher logics: "To be able to represent

the logical form, we should have to be able to put ourselves with the propositions outside logic, that is outside the world ... Propositions cannot represent the logical form.”)¹²³

What would be left in logic *sans* recourse to wholes is chaos, with no way for any given atomic or molecular proposition to relate, in any way, to any other. As soon as these relations form, they would be exploded by the insoluble question of their own togetherness, forced back into separate existences. For the young Wittgenstein, this vision of the world was one of true solipsism, wherein every ontological plane—from atoms to thoughts to language to human beings—is condemned to eternal solitude, in the name of avoiding paradox. Wittgenstein’s solution is to go straight for the source, i.e. Russell’s idea that all of these paradoxes arise from “self-reference or reflexivity,” or, as Wittgenstein more often calls it, *identity*—as when he writes to Moore that: “Identity plays hell with me.”¹²⁴ If identity can be somehow tranquilized, a well-functioning logic can be imagined as pertaining universally, holding the world together. It is on this score that Wittgenstein first develops his idea of atomic propositions, in a letter for Russell from January 1913 (months before he had arrived at his thoughts on tautology):

I have changed my view on “atomic” complexes: I now think that Qualities, Relations (like Love), etc. are all copulae! That means I for instance analyse a subject-predicate prop[osition], say, “Socrates is human” into “Socrates” and “Something is human” (which I think is not complex). The reason for this, is a very fundamental one: I think there cannot be different Types of things! In other words whatever can be symbolized by a simple proper name must belong to one type.¹²⁵

Quite simply: there can be no problem of identity if everything is the same thing already. Reflexivity, or self-identity, implies an ontological distinction, even a dualism, between the term that identifies and the term that is identified with. Wittgenstein does away with this degree of separation, which will always succumb to Russell’s paradox (does the dualism include itself?), in favor of a strict monism, in which “there cannot be different Types.”

The upshot is this: that Wittgenstein “banishes identity” and replaces it with two things, which it can be instructive to track through Russell’s introduction to the *Tractatus*—he catches one and the other he doesn’t.¹²⁶ What he catches is the atomic basis of Tractarian logic: that atoms are entirely independent of one another, or that “different letters are to mean different things.”¹²⁷ This is represented in Wittgenstein’s move above to separate “Socrates is human” into “Socrates” and “Something is human.” There is, quite literally, an absence of identity between these propositions; a seemingly identificatory statement has been torn into two separate entities, neither of which necessarily implies the truth or even the existence of the other. Russell uses this fact to come to the conclusion that there can be no way, in Tractarian logic, to speak of “the totality of things” or “the world as a whole.”¹²⁸ This is right, of course, because to speak of such things is to create a situation in which Russell’s paradox rears its head. But this does not mean that the *Tractatus* does not have a sense of totality within it, or does not make totality a goal. What Russell misses is that Wittgenstein does not merely *remove* the principle of identity; he, rather, *replaces* it with a principle of tautology, which becomes the foundation of a new source of unity between things, propositions, people, et al.

His progression toward this idea can be tracked across the early letters and notes. Just after writing to Russell to describe his figure illustrating the epistemic operations of tautology, and asserting that these operations pertained across the width and breadth of logic, Wittgenstein claims: “I have not yet succeeded in finding a notation for identity that satisfies this condition [tautology]; but *I have NO doubt* that it must be possible to find such a notation.”¹²⁹ Just after this letter, Wittgenstein writes another in which he says that: “The question of identity cannot be answered until the nature of tautology has been explained. But that question is fundamental to the *whole* of logic.”¹³⁰ (Notice the pun on *whole* here: indeed, the stakes for tautology have to do with the very existence of wholes and with logic’s status as a whole especially.) By *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein has positioned himself to undertake, as Russell calls it, “a destructive criticism [of identity] from which there seems no escape.”¹³¹

One *telos* of Wittgenstein’s steady march away from identity towards tautology has been recognized: the way in which a tautologous logic can overcome Russell’s paradox, thereby defending the reality of wholes in logical space. But, if tautologous logic is given, what else happens? What else changes? The answers begin to bend the present discussion back towards Stein. The question of wholes, of course, has already invoked Stein, who, like Wittgenstein, plunged head-on into the mereological difficulties inherent to thinking about language and reality in terms of holistic rubrics. For both, the stakes of finding some value for wholes, finding a systematic role for them—a role that underwrites the possibility for a system, itself a whole, in the first place—outweighed their paradoxical nature. Wittgenstein is, however, instructive on a number of other points concerning tautology, which each can inform a reading of Stein’s repetitions. Perhaps the most remarkable description of tautology’s logical function that Wittgenstein ever gave is buried in his later *Cambridge Lectures*. The quote, which was mentioned earlier, is as follows:

Further, if all tautologies say nothing then don’t they all mean the same? ... All have the same sense, viz., no sense! Difficulty is not only posed by the question, “What are they used for if they have no sense?”, but also by the question, “Why do we use so many of them if they have the same sense?” Let us examine the use we do actually make of them. First, we do not inform by means of them. When in all the blanks in the truth-table for a proposition there appears a T, it does not even seem judicious to call it a proposition. But to call it nonsense is also not judicious, because it is unlike “yellow tables chairs” and “the slithy toves gimble”, which we call nonsense. When I called tautologies “senseless” I meant to stress a connection with a quantity of sense, namely 0 ... A tautology is a degenerate case of a proposition. It plays something of the same role in logic as the 0 of arithmetic. $0 + 2 = 2$.¹³²

The senseless tautology is marked by two characteristics: that it has no sense and that, being always senseless, it is everywhere the same. Unlike nonsense, which, as Wittgenstein gestures towards in the quote above, can have many unpredictable permutations, the holistic rubric of

senselessness is formally tautological, even as it encompasses a content defined by tautologous propositions.

The analogy of tautology to the arithmetical operation “0 +” demonstrates nicely what Wittgenstein means. Every number can accept the modification of “0 +” without its essential character changing. Numbers can, in fact, accept the modification infinitely: no matter how deep the recursion of additive zeroes goes, the equational outcome remains unfazed. (Think of the x -axis in figure six above, in which Stein’s “+” at the ends of the diagram seem to simulate a similar property—that the array of names could continue on indefinitely.) Wittgenstein goes on to claim that this sameness and iterability do not dilute the value of the “0 +”; rather, these qualities position it as a kind of constant companion for all particularity. Every single equation imaginable in arithmetical space, like every proposition conceivable in logical space, shares among its multifarious variables the “0 +” relation, which, through its sheer sameness and universal applicability, becomes a carrier of the possibility of wholeness through all diversity. By prioritizing this particle, Wittgenstein is valorizing relation and pattern, bringing forward the one property that all things, no matter how various they may be, share, which is that when they take themselves as themselves plus nothing else (+ 0) they find their existence verified. The fact that this proof is itself the same for every particular case proves, for Wittgenstein, that wholeness—togetherness, relation, pattern—abides at the heart of any given system, rather than being a paradoxical condition that has to be proved after the fact. Tautology, in effect, precedes identity.

That “0 +” is shared by all particularity lays the groundwork for abstract systems to progress across difference, as Wittgenstein goes on to say after the quote above: “What allows the inference of q is not what the proposition *says* but the fact that it is a tautology.”¹³³ The system does not function because its particular components, and the rules governing them, say certain things—or, that is, proliferate in singular combinations that generate inferential movement across a spectrum of outcomes. Rather, the system functions because every single particular instance within it, no matter how surprising or strange, comes with the promise of the same possible accompaniment: that it is equal to itself plus nothing else. To be equal to oneself plus nothing else presents a radical confluence of positivity and negation, with the “nothing else” standing in as a metonym for every conceivable possibility besides what the 0 adds itself to in the particular equation. (Or, in other words, representing the entire system save what the 0 is modifying. We begin to see here that, though the 0 is formally self-similar across all particular equations, it too displays deictic transiency, depending on what it is meant to negate. 0 means, by this definition, something like “everything that what is at hand is not.”) In that light, to be accompanied by 0 is to be haunted by an abstract ghost that is simultaneously inaccessibly ethereal (the vacuous hole of the 0 yawning onto empty nothingness) and entirely tangible (the unimpeached circumference of 0 standing as a figure of complete wholeness). In being everything that its related term is not, 0 comes to represent a shadow of the world itself, or what the world would be like without the modifying term, so that, when whatever “0 +” modifies looks into the 0 that modifies it, what it sees is an inverse image of its own possible existence, a world with a space carved out just for it; 0 thus simultaneously supplies everything (the world itself) and nothing (a representation of the modified term’s absence in that world).

A very brief swerve at this point should elucidate the importance of tautology’s being cast as the number 0, given the metaphysical implications for zeroness spelled out above. Famously, Wittgenstein makes a number of claims in *Tractatus* that tether the particular manifestations of

certain logical and ontological arenas to the most general expressions of the contours of those arenas. For instance, he writes of a particular proposition that it “presupposes the forms of all propositions in which it can occur.”¹³⁴ Another example is his position that specific “objects,” in addition to their specificity, “contain the possibility of all situations.”¹³⁵ In both cases, atoms (propositions, objects) indicate a full spread of possibilities, or otherwise function a repositories for the potential forms of all other atoms that might emerge from their particular (onto)logical type. From a single proposition, all of logic can be inferred; from a single object, all physicality can be predicted. For Jennifer Ashton, this comfortable exchange between particular and universal demonstrates a “logic of variability,” in which the multiple functionality of atoms, simultaneously existing particularly for themselves and referring universally to everything else, connects with Stein’s images of spreading difference, captured also by Dydo’s account of Stein’s work as “bleeding.”¹³⁶ Ashton means to critique Perloff’s marriage of Wittgenstein and Stein, which is even more focused on the concept of difference, as worked out by Wittgenstein in his later work on what Ashton dubs “semantic indeterminacy.”

Ashton is right to tack Perloff’s Stein-Wittgenstein comparison back around toward *Tractatus*, which is temporally much more in sync with Stein’s moment of composition in the 1910s, 20s, and 30s; while ignorant of Wittgenstein’s work, Stein was very much aware of the texture of philosophical discussions coursing at that time. Strangely, though, Ashton’s continued emphasis on terms like variation and difference ends up smuggling in a diluted form of Perloff’s argument—for radical degrees of difference in Stein’s work—into what is supposed to be a revision of that argument. What is truly remarkable in Wittgenstein’s claim is not that the atom has a plurality of functions and forms, each indicating a difference, with these differences accumulating into a system that is then paradoxically said to underwrite the atom in the first place (Russell’s paradox threatens here). Rather, the atom is fully synonymous with the possibilities of its system, just as the system contains the atom to begin with. If ever there were a philosophy that could do justice to Stein’s image of “a whole is inside a part,” this would be it. And, as just shown through the analysis of Wittgenstein on tautology, atoms gain this ability not through their singular shades of variance, but rather because every single atom is repetitive before it is different. All atomic propositions are general propositions because all atoms are defined by what they are not (0 +), and this definition is the same for every single proposition imaginable. The shared recourse to tautology, and the fact that that recourse is itself always already the same operation (i.e. is itself a tautological gesture), discovers a strong proof of wholeness that is premised on radically undifferentiable sameness, *not* spreading differences.

The other payoff in reading Stein through this Wittgensteinian lens becomes apparent in Wittgenstein’s distinction, posited above, between what a proposition “says” and its tautological accompaniment, which, as Wittgenstein notes elsewhere, “says nothing.”¹³⁷ The distinction is between a content-oriented grammar that carries a payload of information (saying) and a grammar that does nothing of the sort (tautology). The question is: what, then, does tautology do? What does it offer to linguistic systems that seem intractably desirous of saying things? (Recall Wimsatt’s critique of Fowler—that every word predicates *something*.) These questions overlap with the discussion of atomic and general propositions above, because they involve a distinction between what propositions say and, to introduce another of Wittgenstein’s terms, what they show.

Before Wittgenstein properly defines propositions (from 3.1 to 3.5 in *Tractatus*), he provides (from 2.1 to 3) one of his more spurned and idiosyncratic ideas: what has been variously dubbed the “picture theory” of meaning, propositions, or language.¹³⁸ These pictures function as criteria for the origins of symbolic logic: they are “like a scale applied to reality.”¹³⁹ Nothing specific comes of them; their purpose is almost affective: to communicate to the logician a certain surety and confidence about how to proceed in developing propositions about the world. The picture theory is as close as Wittgenstein ever comes to a theory of consciousness. It is also the closest he ever comes to a theory of representation, in an almost literary vein. “The picture,” he writes, “can represent every reality whose form it has.”¹⁴⁰ The picture, as a kind of scale or abstract model held up to the world, adumbrates through its sheerly formal qualities something like the world it metonymizes. The picture, crucially, cannot speak: it cannot, for instance, “represent its form of representation.”¹⁴¹ Rather, it “shows it forth.”¹⁴² This quality of pictures is found in the propositions that spawn from them: “The propositions *shows* its sense.”¹⁴³ Of course, propositions also *say* things too, namely that such and such is the case. But they can only *show* or *exhibit* “the logical form of reality” —and: “What can be shown cannot be said.”¹⁴⁴ Propositions, like pictures, cannot say anything about their “form of representation,” which is the fabric of logic itself; this they can only ever show.

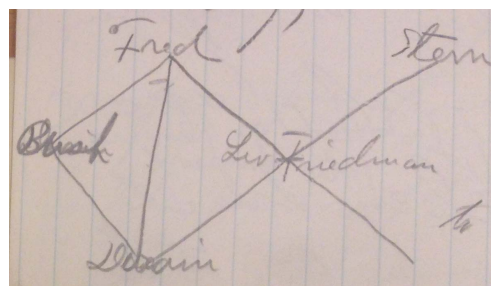
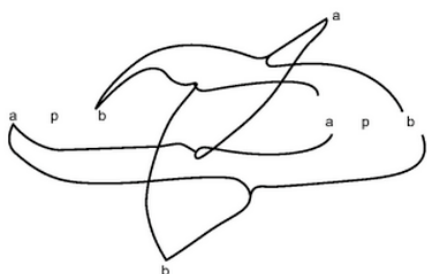
Both propositions and pictures acquire this say/show distinction from tautologies; indeed, this acquisition is why Wittgenstein is so intent on proving logic to be tautologous. Tautologies originally fascinated Wittgenstein, and then held his interest for so many decades, because they inherently “say nothing.” Conversely, tautology “*shows* what it appears to *say*.”¹⁴⁵ This is because, to come full circle, tautology is *the* “limiting case” for the *Tractatus* as a logical project.¹⁴⁶ Everything written therein is tautological; therefore, tautology is taken as axiomatic. It requires nothing prior to itself in order to be true: “A tautology’s truth is certain.”¹⁴⁷ It is what Wittgenstein would call, much later in life, “bedrock” (*Begründungen*).¹⁴⁸ Wittgenstein explains the idea best in the following quotation:

As to what tautologies really are, however, I myself am not yet able to say quite clearly but I will try to give a rough explanation. It is the peculiar (and *most* important) mark of *non*-logical propositions that one is *not* able to recognize their truth from the propositional sign alone. If I say, for example, ‘Meier is stupid’, you cannot tell by looking at this proposition whether it is true or false. But the propositions of logic—and only they—have the property that their truth or falsity, as the case may be, finds its expression in the very sign for the proposition.¹⁴⁹

This is the essence of senselessness: that it should somehow show itself to be irrefutably true, yet also entirely devoid of information, content, purpose, and—thereby—sense. Wittgenstein makes this clear when he writes that: “I know, e.g. nothing about the weather, when I know that it rains or it does not rain.”¹⁵⁰ True, yet senseless. But what, then, does showing entail? Recall, before we explore possible answers, the image of grammar as reflective of metaphysics in Ogden and Richard. Remember, as well, the discussion of 0 as a kind of mirror for the term it accompanies, simultaneously showing to the term the entire breadth of the world beyond itself, and also the

outline of its absence in that world: simultaneously positing and negating a vibrant, infinite array of possibilities. And, finally, go back and look at the epigraph to the chapter, in which Stein elusively describes a repetitive sentence as a “witness.”

What remains after tautology’s positive negation takes shape as something like the diagrams that begin this chapter. And the similarities between some of Stein’s diagrams of the world around her and Wittgenstein’s proprietary process for diagramming tautologies are not without pertinence to understanding what tautologies offer.



Dean calls Stein’s diagrams “landscapes” of sentences. The idea of a landscape applies to Wittgenstein’s diagrams as well, in that each supplies the general form of the tautology, its lines tracing (almost whimsically) a series of relations that (despite the strange fluidity with which they are traced) will always be the same. Wittgenstein’s diagrams, like Stein’s, must be read as the tracings of a universal relation out of a particular instance, the universal rising to the foreground of the landscape no matter how vibrantly singular the particular entity (proposition, object, etc.) that emblemizes it may be. In fact, since Wittgenstein positions tautologies at the ends of logic, before even identity itself, what the tracing reveals is the closest thing we can get to an account of what is beyond logic: the (nonsensical) world itself. Tautology, as it embodies the category of senselessness, necessarily stands as the sentinel along a border between what is logic and what it is not; when Wittgenstein, locked in the sphere of logical propositions, challenges that sentinel to reveal the character of what it guards, the diagram that emerges stands as a record of logic’s beyond: that is, tautology, as a whole, takes its place as all of logic’s “0 +,” carrying within itself all that logic is not, and thereby functioning as the doorway through which some access to the nonsensical world beyond logic is provided. The looping landscapes that Wittgenstein’s tautological diagrams sketch, then, turn out to be primitive renderings, cave paintings, of whatever early Wittgensteinian logic took its world to be, left behind as a kind of fossil record in Wittgenstein’s earliest philosophical texts.

Stein’s diagrams, as she described them above, devolved her mental acumen to the point at which “I didn’t know whether I knew.” While failing as mnemonic devices, her diagrams eventually do become registers showing, not telling, the parameters of a knowledge that is always already lost as soon as it is gained. Like Wittgenstein’s tautologies, Stein’s diagrams transpose aspects of a lost experience through geometrically circular forms that collectively indicate the fact of repetition itself, rather than any particular experiential feature. This is a failure of knowledge, in a sense, because it implies a loss of contact with any particular content that the world might deliver; but it is also an achievement, because it delivers a single message: that the world repeats itself and, by virtue of those repetitions, is whole. The diagrams that Wittgenstein and Stein draw do, thus, the same thing: they limn what the world might be like, thereby discovering its

essentially repetitive character, which, in turn, communicates a promise of totality and integration, standing alongside—constantly modifying—any iota of difference.

¹ Gertrude Stein, "Sentences and Paragraphs," in *How to Write* (New York: Dover, 1975), 35. Stein quoted in: Leon Katz, "Weininger and The Making of Americans," *Twentieth Century Literature* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1978), 22.

² H.W. Fowler, *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (1926; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 130-33, 495-97, 595-96.

³ W.K. Wimsatt, "When Is Variation 'Elegant'?", *College English* (January 1942), 369.

Quotations from Fowler.

⁴ Wimsatt, 369. Wimsatt cites Ogden and Richards and these terms as follows: C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning* (New York, 1930), 10-12, 92, 126.

⁵ Ogden and Richards, 12.

⁶ "If we now replace one word of the sentence by another having the same reference, but a different sense, this can have no bearing upon the reference of the sentence. Yet we can see that in such a case the thought changes; since, e.g., the thought in the sentence 'The morning star is a body illuminated by the Sun' differs from that in the sentence 'The evening star is a body illuminated by the Sun.' Anybody who did not know that the evening star is the morning star might hold the one thought to be true, the other false. The thought, accordingly, cannot be the reference of the sentence, but must rather be considered as the sense. What is the position now with regard to the reference? Have we a right even to inquire about it? Is it possible that a sentence as a whole has only a sense, but no reference? At any rate, one might expect that such sentences occur, just as there are parts of sentences having sense but no reference." Gottlob Frege, "On Sense and Reference," in *Meaning and Reference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 28.

⁷ Wimsatt, 370.

⁸ F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality* (1893; London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1926), 20. For a demonstration of the degree to which logicians were still struggling with Bradley's idea in the early decades of the 20th century, see: Howard V. Knox, "Mr. Bradley's 'Absolute Criterion,'" *Mind* 14, no. 54 (1905): 210-220.

⁹ The claim that tautology "says nothing" is ancient, but it grew particularly prevalent among analytic logicians after the turn of the 20th century, who (I will argue) hoped to play on the word "say." For, for instance, the following encapsulation of the idea from John Dewey: "all tautology ... seems to say something but does not." Dewey, "Reality and the Criterion for the Truth of Ideas," *Mind* 16, no. 63 (July 1907), 337. Another example comes from Leo Abraham, who argues that the necessity of tautologous logic (something discussed at length below) rests on the fact that is "says nothing" and "asserts nothing whatsoever." Abraham, "Implication, Modality and Intension in Symbolic Logic," *The Monist* 43, No. 1 (January 1933), 143. Tautology may say nothing, but it also may have other powers. This will become clear in the section on Wittgenstein that follows later.

¹⁰ Bertrand Russell, "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism," *The Monist* 28, no. 4 (October 1918), 496.

¹¹ Russell, "On the Nature of Truth," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 7 (1906-1907), 39.

¹² Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 15.

¹³ F.P. Ramsey, "Universals," *Mind* 34, no. 136 (October 1925), 404. Cf.: Ogden and Richards, 97n1.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Philip E.B. Jourdain, "The Philosophy of Mr. B*rtr*nd R*ss*ll," *The Monist* 26, no. 1 (January 1916), 27.

¹⁶ Paul Weiss, "The Nature of Systems: Part II," *The Monist* 39, no. 3 (July 1929), 456.

¹⁷ Stein, "The Gradual Making of *The Making of Americans*," in *Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, 272.

¹⁸ Stein, *The Making of Americans* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995), 294.

¹⁹ Stein, "Portraits and Repetition," in *Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, 295, 296.

²⁰ Perloff, "'Grammar in Use': Wittgenstein / Gertrude Stein / Marinetti," *South Central Review* 13, no. 2/3 (Autumn 1996), 42.

²¹ Georgiana Goddard King, "A Review of Two Worlds: Gertrude Stein," *International* (June 1913), 157.

²² Stein, "Composition as Explanation," 525.

²³ Terry Castle, "very fine is my valentine," in *Boss Ladies, Watch Out!: Essays on Women, Sex and Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 211.

²⁴ Stein, "Portraits and Repetition," in *Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, 307.

²⁵ This idea was probably first floated in Mabel Dodge's 1913 piece on Stein and cubism: Dodge, "Speculations, or Post-Impressionism in Prose," *Arts and Decoration* (March 1913).

²⁶ "Review of 'Three Lives'," *Washington D.C. Herald* (December 12, 1909).

²⁷ B.F. Skinner, "Has Gertrude Stein a Secret?," *The Atlantic Monthly* (January 1934), 50-57. In total, Stein's name was attached to two psychological papers during her time at Radcliffe. The first paper included her name merely as recognition of her ancillary role in organizing the study. The second, as Stein notes in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, was "the first writing of hers ever to be printed." Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, in *Selected Writings* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 73. Leon Solomons and Gertrude Stein, "Normal Motor Automatism," *Psychological Review* (September 1896), 492-512. Stein, "Cultivated Motor Automatism. A Study of Character in Its Relation to Attention," *Psychological Review* (May 1898), 295-306. This tendency toward psychologizing Stein's style, and especially her repetitions, is still present in recent criticism, as in George B. Moore's recent book on repetition in *The Making of Americans*. Moore, *Gertrude Stein's The Making of Americans: Repetition and the Emergence of Modernism* (New York: Peter Land Publishing, Inc., 1998), 47-48.

²⁸ Stein, "How Writing is Written," 156.

²⁹ Solomons and Stein, 492.

³⁰ Stein, "Cultivated Motor Automatism," 295. The work is particularly intriguing given Stein's critics frequent castigations of her work as somehow itself deranged or stylistically "insane." One critic imagines a sort of outer bound to interpretations of Stein, wherein a kind of "imagism transferred to the subjective" prevails, in which case the point of her work becomes entirely inscrutable—fully personalized to the problematic mind that created it. "On the other hand, we would like to ask the members of this school of word painting whether they have ever followed their practice to its logical conclusion: an atomistic anarchy in the significance of words that would ultimately make every poet his own lexicographer, his own and only audience, and the reader of himself to the exclusion of all his contemporaries whom he would not be able to understand and for whom he could never hope to find a translator. All of which would be very

amusing if too many people already did not associate poetry and insanity—to the injustice of what is really—when not abused—the sanest of the arts.” “Words,” *Evening Post* (November 6, 1914).

³¹ Skinner, 51.

³² Solomons and Stein, 506.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Solomons and Stein, 502. Stein, “Cultivated Motor Automatism,” 305.

³⁶ Perloff, “Poetry As Word-System: The Art Of Gertrude,” 38.

³⁷ Donald Gallup, ed. *The Flowers of Friendship: Letters Written to Gertrude Stein* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 50. Quoted in Perloff’s essay “‘Grammar in Use’: Wittgenstein / Gertrude Stein / Marinetti” on pages 61-2.

³⁸ Perloff, “‘Grammar in Use’: Wittgenstein / Gertrude Stein / Marinetti,” 42. Cf. also: “‘A Fine New Kind of Realism’: Six Stein Styles in Search of a Reader,” in *Poetic License: Essays in Modernist and Postmodernist Lyric* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 145- 59.

³⁹ “Review of ‘Three Lives,’” *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (February 23, 1910), 18.

⁴⁰ “Review of ‘Three Lives,’” *Boston Massachusetts Transcript* (January 29, 1910).

⁴¹ Perloff, “‘Grammar in Use’: Wittgenstein / Gertrude Stein / Marinetti,” 42, 44.

⁴² Perloff, “Poetry As Word-System: The Art Of Gertrude.”

⁴³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 104.

⁴⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, vol. 2 (New York: Routledge, 2001), 124.

⁴⁵ Alice B. Toklas, “Rose Is a Rose Is a Rose,” *Savannah Georgia News* (November 19 1933).

⁴⁶ Stein, “Portraits and Repetition,” *Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, 306.

⁴⁷ Charles Algernon Swinburne, *Miscellanies* (London: Chatto & Windus, Piccadilly, 1886), 140.

⁴⁸ Marshall Brown, “The Logic of Realism: A Hegelian Approach,” *PMLA* 96, no. 2 (March 1981), 225.

⁴⁹ Louise E.J. Hornby, “Visual Clockwork: Photographic Time and the Instant in ‘Proteus,’” *James Joyce Quarterly* 42/43, no. 1/4 (Fall 2004 – Summer 2006), 61.

⁵⁰ Stein, “Portraits and Repetition,” *Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, 302-3.

⁵¹ Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 198-9.

⁵² Stein, “How Writing is Written,” 157.

⁵³ Stein, “Sentences and Paragraphs,” in *How to Write*, 35.

⁵⁴ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 249, 253, 274.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* at 282-285. Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Gilles Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

⁵⁶ Ngai, 264.

⁵⁷ Deleuze, 90.

⁵⁸ Ngai, 249.

⁵⁹ Stein, “Poetry and Grammar,” in *Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, 325. On Gertrude Stein’s peculiar account of counting, see: Ashton, 289-331.

⁶⁰ Stein, “Business in Baltimore,” in *A Stein Reader*, 489-90.

⁶¹ Intended as derision, the claim that Stein says nothing has been around since she began publishing her work. Take, for instance, this 1914 review, which quotes another critic on Stein’s “simplicity” and extends the idea into one accusing Stein of saying nothing: “Simplicity is a

quality one is born with, so far as literary style is concerned, and Miss Stein was born with that ... After reading that we begin to think that Miss Stein was well advised to develop her late style ... In the former style the critic could make a more positive claim than that he did not see anything in it. He could say that he did see nothing in it." "Words," *Evening Post* (November 6, 1914).

⁶² Stein, "The Gradual Making of *The Making of Americans*," in *Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, 285.

⁶³ Stein, *Tender Buttons: The Corrected Centennial Edition*, 59.

⁶⁴ Cf. Gregory S. Kinzer, "A Shifting Mathematics of Poetry: Gertrude Stein and Modern Mathematics," in *Catalysis: Experimental Poetry and the Sciences*, 33-96. Juana T. Guerra de la Torre, "Fractals in Gertrude Stein's 'Word-System': Natural Reality and/or Verbal Reality," *Atlantis* 17, no. ½ (November 1995), 89-114. For an overview of the relation between artists of Stein's milieu and the mathematics of their day, see: Robert Tubbs, *Mathematics in 20th-Century Literature & Art* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

⁶⁵ Kinzer, 74. An emphasis on the "nonhuman" in Stein's poetics can be found in a number of her critical accounts, as in Joshua Schuster's recent account of the textual history of *Tender Buttons*: Schuster, "The Making of 'Tender Buttons': Gertrude Stein's subjects, objects, and the illegible," *Jacket2*, accessed October 23, 2014, <http://jacket2.org/article/making-tender-buttons>.

⁶⁶ Stein, "Poetry and Grammar," in *Writings: 1932-1946*, 244.

⁶⁷ Stein, "The Gradual Making of *The Making of Americans*," in *Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, 284.

⁶⁸ Stein, *The Making of Americans*, 311. Steven Meyer, "'The Physiognomy of the Thing': Sentences and Paragraphs in Stein and Wittgenstein," *Modernism/Modernity* 5, no. 1 (1998), 100.

⁶⁹ On the former, repetition as mechanism, Car Van Vechten relays to Stein an anecdote about a record player that "got stuck on a record of a song and it went on repeating 'a rose is a rose is a rose'." *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, 1913-1946*, vol 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 389.

⁷⁰ Stein, *Four in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), vi.

⁷¹ Stein, *Tender Buttons: The Corrected Centennial Edition*, 27.

⁷² Stein, "Composition as Explanation," in *Stein: Writings 1903-1932* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 525.

⁷³ This and other insights into trim's etymology derive from the *OED* entry. "trim, v.," *OED Online*, September 2014, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/206108?rskey=CRn3Ia&result=3&isAdvanced=false> (accessed November 13, 2014).

⁷⁴ Stein, "How Writing is Written," in *How Writing is Written* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1975), 156.

⁷⁵ Gabrielle Dean, "Grid Games: Gertrude Stein's Diagrams and Detectives," *Modernism/modernity* 15, no. 2 (April 2008), 318. On diagramming sentences, see: Stein, "Poetry and Grammar," in *Stein: Writings 1932-1946* (New York: Library of America, 2008), 314.

⁷⁶ Ulla Dydo, *Gertrude Stein: The Language that Rises, 1923-1934* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 246. Gregory Kinzer, *Catalysis: Experimental Poetry and the Sciences* (Ann Arbor: ProQuest, 2006), 51-53.

⁷⁷ Dydo, 247.

⁷⁸ Dean's essay is on Stein and detective fiction. The grid becomes a figure that forwards understanding as it maps a set of potential causes and effects. For the detective, this pushes

towards a resolution of inquiry. This push gets tied into other mappings, like colonial maps, the grids in Stein's *carnets* and *cahiers*, and grids in modernist painting.

⁷⁹ Marjorie Perloff, "Poetry As Word-System: The Art Of Gertrude," *The American Poetry Review* 8, no. 5 (September/October 1979).

⁸⁰ Stein, *Tender Buttons: The Corrected Centennial Edition* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2014), 59.

⁸¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), B 17.

⁸² Stein, *Tender Buttons: The Corrected Centennial Edition*, 59.

⁸³ Stein, "The Gradual Making of *The Making of Americans*," in *Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, 286.

⁸⁴ Keith Waldrop, "Gertrude Stein's Tears," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 12, no. 3 (Spring 1979), 240.

⁸⁵ Stein, *Tender Buttons: The Corrected Centennial Edition*, 13.

⁸⁶ Waldrop, 240.

⁸⁷ Marjorie Perloff, "Poetry As Word-System: The Art Of Gertrude," 35.

⁸⁸ Wittgenstein, "Letter to Bertrand Russell [November or December 1913]," in *Wittgenstein in Cambridge* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012), 56.

⁸⁹ Wittgenstein, "Letter to Bertrand Russell [November or December 1913]," in *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 58.

⁹⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge, 1932-1935*, 137. This quotation overlaps with a larger chunk of this lecture used as an epigraph to the present essay.

⁹¹ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922; Oxford: Routledge, 2005), 6.1203. Wittgenstein, "Notes Dictated to G.E. Moore," in *Notebooks 1914-1916* (1961; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 115. Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge, 1932-1935*, 136. The idea behind the figure, though *sans* any version of the figure itself, suffuses the very early "Notes on Logic," set down around the same time as the notes to Moore and the letter to Russell (all were really part of the same conversation); C31-C35, as labeled in Michael Potter's edition of the notes, are especially important: *Wittgenstein's Notes on Logic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 285-6.

⁹² Michael Potter, "History of the text," in *Wittgenstein's Notes on Logic*, 263.

⁹³ Wittgenstein, "Letter to B. Russell [November or December 1913]," in *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 59. Wittgenstein, "Letter to B. Russell 15.12.1913," in *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 61.

⁹⁴ Wittgenstein, "Letter to B. Russell [November or December 1913]," in *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 58.

⁹⁵ Cf. with regards to this idea: Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.1201. James R. Simmons, "Whitehead's Metaphysic of Persuasion," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1969), 73.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Burton Dreben and Juliet Floyd. "Tautology: How Not to Use a Word," *Synthese* (April 1991), 23-49.

⁹⁸ Russell Wahl, "Impossible Propositions and the Forms of Objects in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 45, no. 179 (April 1995), 190.

⁹⁹ This quote comes from propositions 6.54; in German it runs as follows: "Meine Sätze erläutern dadurch, dass sie der, welcher mich versteht, am Ende als unsinnig erkennt ..." The translation I use here is not taken from C.K. Ogden and F.P. Ramsey's edition, which I otherwise

use throughout this essay. It is from, rather, the later translation by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 6.54. I switch to the later translation in this one case because I believe that the translation by Ogden and Ramsey misleadingly gives a definition of *unsinnig* as “senseless,” when it should really be “nonsensical,” as Pears and McGuinness render it. “Senseless,” in Ogden and Ramsey as well as Pears and McGuinness, is more typically how *sinnlos* is rendered. It is worth noting, on the other hand, that Wittgenstein made no comment on the translation of *unsinnig* as “senseless” in 6.54; indeed, he made no mention of the *sinnlos/unsinnig* question throughout his communication with Ogden and Ramsey. Cf.: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Letters to C.K. Ogden* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), 51. The essay by Diamond referred to here is: Cora Diamond, “Throwing Away the Ladder,” *Philosophy* 63, no. 243 (January 1988), 5-27. “Resolute,” as a term for a way of reading the *Tractatus*, comes from Thomas Ricketts. It was first used in print in: Warren Goldfarb, “Metaphysics and Nonsense: On Cora Diamond’s *The Realistic Spirit*,” *Journal of Philosophical Research* 22 (1997), 64.

¹⁰⁰ Cora Diamond, “What Nonsense Might Be,” *Philosophy* 56, no. 215 (January 1981), 5. Diamond’s position in this paper he remained largely unchanged in the decades since this article was published. Cf. for instance the recent: Diamond, “Logical Syntax in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 55, no. 218 (January 2005), 78-89.

¹⁰¹ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.3.

¹⁰² Russell, “Introduction,” in Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 21. Moyal-Sharrock advances a viewpoint like the one described above here: “... but some nonsensical expressions are also considered by Wittgenstein to play a formal role in the *Tractatus*—and these include all Tractarian sentences. However—and this is crucial—the formal role nonsensical Tractarian sentences play is not the same as the formal role played by senseless expressions. I am not suggesting, then, that Tractarian sentences are what the *Tractatus* calls and takes to be ‘propositions of logic’ (or even ‘rules of logical syntax’). Tractarian sentences are not like ‘propositions of logic’ in that they are not ‘part of the symbolism’, not features of conceptual notation, but rather elucidations; logical clarifications of thoughts (4.112)—precisely what Wittgenstein later calls ‘rules of grammar’—and these range from straight-forward instructions for our use of words to broader conceptual elucidations, such as reminders of *the kind of statement* we are making (cf. PI 90).” Danièle Moyal-Sharrock, “The Good Sense of Nonsense: A Reading of Wittgenstein’s ‘*Tractatus*’ as Nonself-Repudiating,” *Philosophy* 82, no. 319 (January 2007), 163.

¹⁰³ James Conant, “Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors,” in *The Grammar of Religious Belief*, edited by D.Z. Phillips (New York: St. Martins Press, 1996), 249.

¹⁰⁴ Moyal-Sharrock, 148.

¹⁰⁵ *Tractatus*, 4.112.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* at 3.431, 3.232.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* at 3.221.

¹⁰⁸ Diamond, “Throwing Away the Ladder,” 20-21. Diamond quotes specifically from: P.M.S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 20-24.

¹⁰⁹ Diamond, “Throwing Away the Ladder,” 10, 24. Cf. also the use of that word throughout: John McDowell, “Wittgenstein on Following a Rule,” *Synthese* 58, no. 3 (March 1984), 325-263.

¹¹⁰ Montgomery Link, "Wittgenstein and Logic," *Synthese* 166, no. 1 (January 2009), 45.

¹¹¹ Diamond, "What Nonsense Might Be."

¹¹² Michael Kramer, "The Purpose of *Tractarian* Nonsense," *Noûs* 35, 1 (March 2001), 53.

¹¹³ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 4.461.

¹¹⁴ Diamond, "What Nonsense Might Be," 16.

¹¹⁵ Wittgenstein, "Letter to F.P. Ramsey, 2.7.1927," *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 158.

¹¹⁶ To be sure, there is a second term, "contradiction," which Wittgenstein also includes under the rubric of senselessness; but this ultimately gets wrapped back in as just another form of tautological proposition. Wittgenstein defines contradictions as propositions which are "false for all the truth-possibilities" (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 4.46). He defines tautologies as propositions which are "true for all the truth-possibilities" (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 4.46). Thus, these categories of senselessness reveal themselves as two sides of the same coin; the former stands at the pole of complete logical falsehood and the latter comprises an opposite pole of complete logical truth: "The tautology has no truth-conditions, for it is unconditionally true; and the contradiction is on no condition true" (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 4.461). Determining these so-called "truth-possibilities" is the point of the *a* and *b* polarization in the figure that begins this essay. Elsewhere, in a more commonly understood process, Wittgenstein uses what Brian McGuinness calls a "truth tables" method to explore such truth possibilities. Cf. Brian McGuinness, "The Path to the *Tractatus*," *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 38, no. 1 (January/March, 1982), 11. These tables are meant to indicate the varieties of "agreement and disagreement" amongst the possibilities for truth arising on the occasion of any given proposition. It then juxtaposes outcomes of *T* or *F* in one proposition with outcomes in another, in order to determine an overall designation of *T* or *F* for the relation between the two. Overall designations of *F* indicate a contradiction, which overall *T* indicates a tautology. Even in the earliest iteration of his tautology figure, Wittgenstein worked to include *F-F* outcomes, or *b-b* in the case of the early figure, under the auspices of tautology, which is why *b-b* in the early figure is tethered to truthfulness, along with perfect tautology. This impulse only becomes stronger over the course of his career until, in *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein actually draws a tautological figure representing A.N. Whitehead and Russell's "law of contradiction," to prove that even this, too, is a tautology (*Tractatus* 6.1203).

¹¹⁷ Wittgenstein, "Letter to Bertrand Russell [November or December 1913]," in *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 58.

¹¹⁸ Cyril Barrett, "Wittgenstein, Leavis, and Literature," *New Literary History* 19, no. 2 (Winter 1988), 395.

¹¹⁹ Russell, "Introduction," in Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 21.

¹²⁰ *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 217. They are also the bedrock of Wittgenstein's philosophical thinking, identified by him as early as 1912 as the source of most problems in philosophy. Wittgenstein, "Letter to B. Russell [Summer 1912]," in *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 35.

¹²¹ Russell, "Letter to Frege," in Jean van Heijenoort, *From Frege to Gödel: A Source Book in Mathematical Logic, 1879-1931* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 124-125. Russell developed the paradox privately as early as 1901.

- ¹²² Russell outlines seven such paradoxes/contradictions in: “Mathematical Logic as Based on the Theory of Types,” *American Journal of Mathematics* (July 1908), 224.
- ¹²³ *Tractatus*, 4.12, 4.121.
- ¹²⁴ Wittgenstein, “To G.E. Moore, 23.10.1913,” in *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 48. He writes a similar lament to Russell a week later: “Identity is the very Devil.” Cf. Wittgenstein, “To B. Russell, 28.10.1913,” in *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 49.
- ¹²⁵ Wittgenstein, “To B. Russell, January 1913,” in *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 38.
- ¹²⁶ Russell, “Introduction,” in Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 16.
- ¹²⁷ *Ibid.* at 17.
- ¹²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹²⁹ Wittgenstein, “Letter to B. Russell [November or December 1913],” in *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 61.
- ¹³⁰ Wittgenstein, “Letter to B. Russell 15.12.1913,” in *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 61.
- ¹³¹ Russell, “Introduction,” in Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 16.
- ¹³² Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein’s Lectures: Cambridge, 1932-1935*, 137.
- ¹³³ *Ibid.* at 138.
- ¹³⁴ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 3.31.
- ¹³⁵ *Ibid.* at 2.0141.
- ¹³⁶ Jennifer Ashton, “Gertrude Stein for Anyone,” *English Literary History* 64, no. 1 (1997), 330.
- ¹³⁷ Wittgenstein advances this idea in numerous places. Cf., for instance: *Tractatus*, 4.461; *Wittgenstein’s Lectures*, 137.
- ¹³⁸ These terms come, respectively, from the titles of the following essays. Asher Seidel, “The Picture Theory of Meaning,” *Linguistics and Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (January 1977), 99-110. David Pears, “The Relation between Wittgenstein’s Picture Theory of Propositions and Russell’s Theories of Judgment,” *The Philosophical Review* 86, no. 2 (April 1977), 177-196. David Keyt, “Wittgenstein’s Picture Theory of Language,” *The Philosophical Review* 73, no. 4 (October 1964), 493-511.
- ¹³⁹ *Tractatus*, 2.1512.
- ¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* at 2.171.
- ¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* at 2.172.
- ¹⁴² *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴³ *Ibid.* at 4.022.
- ¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* at 4.121, 4.1212.
- ¹⁴⁵ *Notebooks 1914-1916*, 12e.
- ¹⁴⁶ *Tractatus*, 4.466.
- ¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* at 4.464.
- ¹⁴⁸ *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 217.
- ¹⁴⁹ *Cambridge Documents*, 58
- ¹⁵⁰ *Tractatus*, 4.461.

CHAPTER 4

BELIEVING IN BELIEF: PARADOX AND THE BIRTH OF CLOSE READING

He was a semasiologist—aware, as few have been, that to ask about the meaning of words is to ask about everything.¹

I. Aspects of connection

A tendency to action. An acceptance by the mind. A sense of reality. A giving of actuality. A sense of emotional warmth. An adhesion. A feeling of trust. An illumination. Connection.... What is it that these phrases share in common? There are many possible answers. I happen to have a particular one in mind—as did the person who made the list—but let’s pretend that this is not the case. A process of guessing might commence with the final term, as most of the phrases do seem to be about realizing or recognizing some form of “Connection.” A few concern an emotional aspect of connection; others are about initiating connection through action; still others appertain to connection at an intellectual level, brought about through a process of apprehension. However, while each phrase may be about connection *per se*, it is not clear that one asserts or ascribes connection in the same way as the next. Consider three aspects of the phrases’ grammar. Each hangs on a nominalized verb: tendency instead of tend, acceptance instead of accept, adhesion instead of adhere. Each, save for “Connection” itself, begins with an indefinite article, “A” or “An.” And each—in a kind of double-edged intransitivity, leading to an insistent passivity—lacks both a subject and an object, giving, thereby, clues neither as to what does the accepting, sensing, or giving, nor as to what is accepted, sensed, or given.²

These three aspects combine to obfuscate the phrases’ denotative scope: does each mean a particular instant, a specific sensing or giving or feeling, or does each describe a more general state of sensing, giving, and feeling that persists across time? In other words, some phrases seem to suggest an instant of connection, while others suggest a connective state. “An illumination,” epiphanic and fleeting, would tend more toward the former, whereas “A tendency” would lean more toward the latter, as in a tendency to violence or to herniation. “A feeling of trust,” in which the gerund balances both verbal and nominal aspects, is the most ambiguous example, in that it could indicate the ongoing process of coming to feel trust, or it could name the final result of that process, which would be a concretized feeling of trust.³ Consider related ambiguities in the prepositional complements, which are projected in very different ways. “A sense of reality” turns on an objective genitive, while the “of” in “A giving of actuality” has a subjective valence that coexists alongside the objective.⁴ This possibility of the subjective genitive troubles the otherwise obvious connective capacities of the “of,” because it reverses the expected direction of fit for connectivity—with actuality functioning both in the object position, as something given, and in the subject position, as something that gives. This leads to indeterminacy about what aspect of the phrase initiates the connection and uncertainty about what that aspect then connects to (if actuality gives, what does it give? if actuality is given, what gives it?).

“A sense of emotional warmth” and “A feeling of trust” are objective genitives, too, but each also has an additional, partitive aspect. Concepts like “emotional warmth” and “trust,” broad as they are, carve off relatively specific domains from the broader realms of possible complements, in a way that more sweeping complements like “actuality” and “reality” do not. The partitive genitives insists on the distinction of a particular sense (of emotional warmth) and a specific feeling (of trust) over against all other senses and feelings. In contradistinction, “A

tendency to action” and “An acceptance by the mind” read as tautologies, or as internal accusatives. What could accept if not a mind? What would be intended if not some form of action?⁵ As objects, “action” and “mind” are to a large degree foreshadowed by “tendency to” and “acceptance by,” just as “to strike” always already implies “a blow.” In this sense, the grammar of these two phrases simultaneously enacts, and refuses to enact, a connection: enacts because there is an obvious, inseparable link between the verb and its complement, and refuses to enact because this inseparability overrides the very idea of connection, which usually indicates a relation between two entities that *could* have been otherwise autonomous.⁶

In short, these phrases demonstrate synonymy and homogeneity at a conceptual level—all concern connection—but they display fragmentation and disunion in their grammar. If connection were a place, any one of these phrases might lead us to it, but one would intersect from the south, one the west, etc. The result is the same, the experience entirely different. Why, then, are the phrases grouped together? What, finally, do they have in common? The preliminary answer is that they are all possible synonyms for the “nature of belief,” as set down by I.A. Richards in the middle of a lengthy, unpublished set of notes on belief, which he entitled “Notes on Belief-Problems for T.S.E.” T.S.E., of course, refers to T.S. Eliot.⁷ The “starting point” for the notes, as Richards says, is “the fact that I do not know what is the sense of the word believe.”⁸ A belief is, Richards goes on to say, an “uncontrollable” entity, “peculiarly mutable” and “unsusceptible to measurement + comparison.”⁹ It is so because it is a radically abstract concept. To ask what a belief is would be like asking what a thought is. As colors do to their objects, these sorts of abstractions typically cleave to specific manifestations, such as “I believe it is raining.” Richards is inquiring into the nature of a belief without this necessary cleavage: divorced from specification in some sort of exemplarity. To accomplish this inquiry, Richards undertakes a form of phenomenological *epoché*, or what he calls “introspection,” whereby he “attempts to discover the nature of belief by reflecting on states of mind when we are (as it appears to us) believing something.”¹⁰ In so doing, Richards eidetically reduces his critical attentions, excising both the particularities of the person believing and the thing believed; what is left, after this reduction, is the “faculty” or “state” of belief *eo ipso* which Richards hopes to explicate. A reduction to belief *eo ipso* matches with the paradoxical grammar of “Connection” as just analyzed, given that this term and its fellow synonyms lack specification as to what does the connecting and what is connected to; the ambiguous grammar of “Connection” and its fellow synonyms is intended as an inflection of ambiguities that arise in the contemplation of what a belief might be.

(It cannot be emphasized enough how much the idea of analyzing a belief *eo ipso* departs from the epistemological methodologies that dominated only a few decades earlier. Bertrand Russell, looking back on the heady inventions of early atomistic philosophy undertaken by himself and G.E. Moore at Cambridge around the turn of the century, wrote that “Realists such as Dr. Moore and myself have been in the habit of rejecting the content [of belief], while retaining the act and the object.” He went on to categorize a project like Richards’s introspective inquiry into the nature of belief itself, or a project which kept just the “content” of belief, as “idealist.” One of Richards’s main tasks is to find a way to do just that—analyze the content of a belief in and of itself—while avoiding the charge of being an idealist. Russell, in the same essay, falls in line, to a certain extent, with the spirit of Richards’s project, by rejecting a “realist” emphasis on “act” and “object” in preference of studying what he calls belief’s “presentations” in and of

themselves. The connection between this concept of presentations and Edmund Husserl's phenomenology is not insignificant.)¹¹

II. *The phenomenology of concepts*

What of these synonyms? As he considers what solutions to the problem of belief his introspective *epoché* might reveal, Richards quickly arrives at a realization that the only methodologically-sound approach would be an analysis of how belief states are communicated, or how we “describe them in words.”¹² Nothing else about the faculty or state of belief suggests itself as concrete enough to anchor the introspective project. As the synonyms show, there appear to be emotional, intellectual, and actional components to believing, but none of these components sits still for phenomenological analysis, without the aid of some form of descriptive activity, which manifests as the synonyms themselves. Richards's turn to description at this point likely has a number of inspirations, Russell not least among them.¹³ Most important, given the phenomenological or introspective character of the notes, is Husserl's embrace of description as a critical practice for phenomenological labor.¹⁴ As Husserl says, phenomenology is a “descriptive science,” whose descriptions become comprehensible “morphologies” of otherwise incoherent abstractions, like states of consciousness; descriptions “approach more or less closely” to these states “without ever reaching them.”¹⁵ Phenomenological description pays a price of conceptual limitation to receive a reward of *something like* the original abstraction, which will, in its now-limited form as description, sit still for phenomenological analysis.¹⁶ Husserl has no qualms with the fact of this limitation, because he is, especially in his later work, invested in the possibility of “universal descriptions”: descriptions so vast and comprehensive that they account for everything that is—idealist abstractions as well as physical facts—thereby delivering concepts to the phenomenological observer *sans* limitation.¹⁷

There is a certain spirit to Husserl's idea of a “universal description” that Richards clearly shared. His embrace of C.K. Ogden's Basic English, which hoped to encompass what English is through “word lists” and sets of structural principles, demonstrated a commitment to the idea that organic and conceptual wholes, like a language, could be effectively comprehended through a proper descriptive apparatus.¹⁸ There are also a number of moments in Ogden and Richards's early work when the two attempt to define an abstract concept through the brute-force application of large quantities of description—by generating reams of synonyms, or related phrases, or sub-definitions. The classic example is their description of “meaning” in *The Meaning of Meaning*, for which they provide sixteen definitions, with dozens of further sub-definitions.¹⁹ They do the same thing with the word “beauty” in *The Foundations of Aesthetics*, providing sixteen numbered synonyms and definitions. Richards's “synonyms for belief” cannot help but feel of a piece with the same tendency: toward amassing descriptions that might be substantial enough to hold a candle to the multifarious variety of the concept they hope to describe.

However, in the notes on belief, Richards expresses a certain embarrassment over descriptive practices, especially over the fact that there will always be some unavoidable core of difference between “the description of belief” and “belief itself.” The introspective observer of belief-states will be left with the task of extrapolating what belief *is like* from behind a wall of descriptive language, around the corner of which it will be impossible to peek and catch a glimpse

of what belief in fact *is*, in its pre-descriptive form. Description, paradoxically, becomes the only way to demonstrate what belief might mean; yet, description, in its guise as just the likeness of what it stands for, also becomes the final obstruction between introspection and its object—belief *eo ipso*. Description is a likeness that both delivers and obstructs identity. In full awareness of that idea, Richards specifies that each synonym is intended as a “metaphoric” recourse for attempts, inevitably doomed, to describe or stipulate how the “faculty” of belief functions and what, in fact, it is *like* to arrive at a belief and to dwell in a moment of believing.²⁰

Having composed his list of metaphoric synonyms for belief, each constituting belief as some form of connection, Richards entertains with great interest the next step in his phenomenological analysis of belief, which he conceives as a “semantic” analysis of the synonyms themselves. This interpretation takes form in Richards’s attention to how each metaphor *means* belief by constructing itself as a synonym *for* belief.²¹ Semantics, here, stands in as phenomenology’s avatar in the contemplation of linguistic features, doing for language what phenomenology does for states of consciousness, like believing. This may seem like an idiosyncratic point, but Husserl himself positioned a concept of meaning, especially as it applies to “signification,” at the heart of his phenomenology of consciousness.²² In fact, when Husserl translates the noun-form of his core phenomenological concept of intentionality (*Intentionalität*) into a verb, as in “I *intend* toward an object,” he does so by using the verb “to mean” — *meinen* or *vermeinen*.²³ (In a bit of lexical serendipity, *vermeinen* also means “to believe.”) So an attention to meaning, as Richards calls for in his use of the term “semantics,” is not out of line with the phenomenological spirit of his notes; but, it *does* seem to be the case that, in calling for a semantics, Richards accepts as unavoidable the obfuscatory nature of description, rather than combating it. He re-doubles his phenomenological efforts, commencing with a close examination of the very words that are blocking a direct look at belief itself. Close, semantic attention to the way in which the synonyms both construct and obstruct what belief is becomes a last resort for Richards’s phenomenological analysis. The initial paragraphs of this chapter were an overture toward teasing out what a semantic analysis of the synonyms’ grammar might reveal. And what *does* it reveal?

III. *The science of semantics*

Like many subfields in philology and linguistics—Bell’s phonetics, de Courtenay’s phonology, Schleicher’s morphology, Reisig’s semasiology, Peirce’s semiotics, Lady Welby’s significs, Saussure’s semiology, and so on—semantics designates an ancient subject of philological and philosophical inquiry that was neither systematically codified nor (in some cases) even named until the mid to late 19th century, with the burgeoning of linguistic sciences.²⁴ Along with the aforementioned semasiology, significs, semiology, and semiotics, semantics contributed to an especially strong, turn-of-the-century surge of interest in the ways in which language can carry meaning. The term *sémantique* began circulating through the writings of French linguists as early as the 1870s; its origins are typically attributed to Michel Bréal, who defined it as “the Science of Significations.”²⁵ Unlike certain other linguistic subfields like phonetics and morphology, which from their outsets had clear roles in both the anthropological and historical strains of linguistics, semantics and related discourses intrinsically bend more towards nebulous philosophy and theory, due to a shared subject matter with fields like epistemology, philosophy of

language, and philosophical logic. Bréal's use of the word "science" should be read as a move to raise semantics above this philosophical fray, to a level of similar rigor and practicality as possessed by, say, phonetics.²⁶ Bréal, for instance, originally conceived semantics as a body of "laws" that could collectively guarantee the correspondence of words and objects.²⁷ The story of the earliest years of semantics is, in large part, about the failure of semantics to match the standard that Bréal had imagined for it.

A fundamental part of said story plays out in semantics' attempts to define what it was meant to analyze. What *is* meaning? Neither the question nor the thorny issues engendered in asking it are far off from those raised in Richards's introspective inquiry into belief. Linguistic subfields concerned with the problem of meaning, like semantics, have eternally struggled with precisely the question of what meaning is. No other linguistic or philological subfield encounters, on a regular basis, quite the same degree of "indeterminacy," to take a word from Richards's notes, in its object of study.²⁸ A linguist like Edward Sapir, asked to demonstrate what morphological change is, could point, say, to shifting patterns of morphemes in American Indian "substantivals" across a certain historical period.²⁹ Otto Jespersen, asked about phonetics' object of study, could show a history of phonetic change that registered in obvious and apparent shifts in how the English language deployed certain vowel configurations.³⁰ Both of these linguists, and many others like them, could display their findings through bodies of evidence that anybody could see or hear: changes of spelling, fluctuations in pronunciation, variations among prefixes and suffixes, and so on. These subfields effortlessly operate scientifically—they are the biology and chemistry of language, with practical applications in the study of concrete and even physical facts (as in phonetics' concern for the movement of muscles in the tongue). They are also embedded in what Ferdinand de Saussure would call "diachrony": these subfields find it easy and necessary to develop their theories within contexts of historical change over time. They often arrive at "synchronic" conclusions about the state of a language at the present moment, but they always do so upon a fundament of diachronic accounting for historical precedent.³¹

Bréal hoped that semantics might do for the problem of meaning what his fellow linguists had done for phonetics, morphology, etc. Thus, he sought to track historical principles for "how the meaning of words is determined."³² The implication, as Ogden and Richards observe about Bréal's semantics at the beginning of *The Meaning of Meaning*, is that meaning, at some level, is a "fixed" quantity, and thus readily available for scientific analysis.³³ They quote from the following passage in Bréal's *Essai de Sémantique*:

Substantives are signs attached to things: they contain exactly that amount of truth which can be contained by a name ... For this name to be accepted it must, no doubt, originally possess some true and striking characteristic on one side or another.³⁴

The idea is that, with the right scientific orientation and the sufficient accumulation of evidence, how and why words mean what they do could be substantively discussed. Whence, however, the evidence? Here arises semantics' quintessential dilemma. How to provide as substantial a body of evidence for a change of meaning, when meaning itself (unlike a phoneme, morpheme, syntagm, syntax, etc.) has no inherent physical manifestation as either sound or symbol? How can there be a *science* of an abstraction? And how can there be a diachronic account of an abstraction's

evolution over time? Bréal responded to such queries by developing a two-pronged analysis, beginning with etymology, buttressed by what he called a theory for the “deterioration of words.”³⁵ Etymology attempts to explain the meaning of a present-day word based on the meanings of its precursors; Bréal, to choose one of his many examples, tracks the root of “to invite” to the Latin “*invitiare*.” Even a non-specialist can see the shared “*invit-*,” which is just as obvious as, say, a shared phonetic structure might be. This is, as Bréal notes, the classical method of accounting for meaning, as set forth in Plato’s *Cratylus*, wherein Socrates parses the etymologies of dozens of words in order to argue “that names do possess some sort of natural correctness” with regards to their objects.³⁶ Bréal accepts Socrates’s point of view, but he also extends it by attending to how the meaning of a word has deviated, or “deteriorated,” with regards to its roots. Thus, he says:

The Latin *invitiare*, which expresses the same idea, is a derivative of *invitus*. It began by signifying “to do violence.” But an excess of politeness caused it to be employed on occasions which, from the time of Cicero, gave it the meaning of “to invite.”³⁷

By bringing together the definition of a word, the definition of its root, and attention to the “deterioration” of the relation between the two definitions, Bréal arrives at what he takes to be a “scientific,” diachronic methodology for determining significational meaning.

In his first review of *The Meaning of Meaning*, Russell ascribed ideas like Bréal’s to a deep, pre-historic era in man’s relation to meaningfulness, writing that: “The natural man—i.e. the savage, the medicine-man, the priest—imagines that there is an essential and natural connection between a word and what it means.”³⁸ There is, by this definition, a “primitive and ultimate” connection between words and things, which figures like Bréal hoped to make more palatable to a modern audience by systemizing the nature of semantic connection—something that, heretofore, had come under the auspices of “verbal magic.”³⁹ Perhaps it was because of the indeterminable, yet quite large, historical interim between the coinage of a Latin or Greek root and the subsequent arrival of an English word dependent on that root. Or perhaps it was because of the decidedly *unscientific* assertions of causation involved in certain of Bréal’s conclusions concerning relations between roots and modern words, like “an excess of politeness caused...” Whatever the reason, linguists in Bréal’s time largely objected to his diachronic approach to meaning. Saussure wrote that a diachronic explanation “can only distort” a linguist’s judgment, and that it was like trying “to draw a panorama of the Alps as seen from a number of peaks in the Jura simultaneously.”⁴⁰ Just as the different panoramas, despite being of the same mountain range, would clash nonsensically when laid over top of one another, a diachronic view of meaning would provide disorienting and clashing perspectives on a word, its root, and definitional change over time. (This lays the ground for Saussure’s shift away from 19th-century historical linguistics generally.) Linguists, to avoid conflating their semantic panoramas, would have to theorize shaky causal relations between points of change—causal relations that can only be asserted, not proved, like Bréal’s idea that the current definition of “invite” arises from the euphemistic usage of the word in events like the assassination of Julius Caesar. This may well be a probable lineage for the definition, but is it objectively provable? Better, Saussure argued, to pick “just one point” from which to perceive the object of a semantic study.⁴¹ From such a “static,” or synchronic, position,

how can meaning be productively considered? Hermogenes, in his response to Socrates in *Cratylus*, suggests that meaning could be considered as a “confluence of correctness and agreement” with the words around it: as embedded in the grammatical structures, and patternings of words and sentences, in which it occurs.⁴² As Saussure says, this perspective on meaning emerges from the use of a language by its users, who construct it into revealing networks of confluences and patterns, in real time, rather than in retrospect.⁴³

Roman Jakobson has defined the distinction between Bréal’s semantics and Saussure’s semiology as the “tension between” interpretations of meaning as an “intrinsic unity” and meaning as a nexus of “contextual and situational” relations.⁴⁴ As shown in the example from Plato, this is an ancient distinction; linguists after the turn of the century do not invent it, but they do take it up with great fervor, and with certain key differences from classical models. To what effect? Throughout the history of philosophies of knowledge, truth, and meaning, the contextualism of Hermogenes has been a thorn in the side of the absolutism of Socrates; even in *Cratylus*, though Socrates ostensibly “wins” the exchange, he ends by declaring language too mutable to analyze, and he exits the dialogue by declaring his preference for the study of ontological underpinnings for language in metaphysics, rather than the study of language itself. In order to move beyond specifically Saussurean vocabulary, I will refer to Socrates’s (diachronic) stance on meaning as “correspondentist” and Hermogenes’s (synchronic) stance as “coherentist.” In using these terms, which rose to prominence in tandem with the burgeoning of semantics in the early decades of the 20th century, I also hope to suggest a subtle epistemological parallel.

Epistemology concerns conceptual apparatuses and forms of knowledge, whereas semantics concerns the meaningfulness of the significations that express those forms and apparatuses. It must be noted, first of all, that for philosophers and linguists working in the early 20th century, this was becoming less of a difference than it might initially seem. The early work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, for instance, offered a vision of epistemology that was largely premised on how our epistemes are modeled by referential structures. Knowledge, as with much else of our interior consciousness and even our metaphysics, was steadily shifting under the auspices of philosophies of language, as a result of so-called “analytic” trends in early 20th-century philosophy. C.K. Ogden captured this zeitgeist in an annotation to Russell’s second review (he wrote two) of Ogden and Richards’s *The Meaning of Meaning*, writing that: “Most *philosophical* problems are simple at bottom because they prove to be 90% *verbal* on proper analysis.”⁴⁵ Second of all, and more generally, epistemology’s central concern, which is to discover which aspects of knowledge are justified or true and which are not, is a clear primogenitive ancestor for the linguistic study of meaning in language. For, like meaning, justification and truth are abstractions, which resist obvious adjudication. (Many philosophers of meaning in the late 1910s and early 1920s were quick to draw parallels between the burgeoning of coherentist epistemologies and the advances being put forward by the various theorists and schools analyzing the nature of meaningfulness. Russell, in his second review of Ogden and Richards’s *The Meaning of Meaning*, emphasizes this intimate relation between the problematic objects of study in semantics and epistemology: meanings and truths, respectively. Another example comes from Alfred Sidgwick, who wrote, in his small contribution to the long-running “Meaning of ‘Meaning’” symposium in *Mind*, that “meaning depends on consequences, and truth depends on meaning.”)⁴⁶ We *know* that two and two equaling four is a truth, just as we *know* what the words “two” and “four”

mean, but any attempt to meta-cognize *how* we know either of those things will lead to trouble. This is because, when we inquire into a truth, as when we inquire into a meaning, there is no obvious, empirical bolster to any conclusion at which we might arrive. What is the nature of truth *eo ipso*? The question is of the same phenotype as the one semantics asks about meaning *eo ipso*, or the one Richards asks about belief *eo ipso*. None of these inquiries can easily drop anchor in objectivity. (This is a startling realization, as even something so abstract as a metaphysics will have a physics with which to compare itself.)

Coherentism, in its capacity as an epistemic horizon, has its roots in the metaphysics of Baruch Spinoza, George Berkeley, and G.W.F. Hegel, among others. The word “coherence” itself began to circulate as early as the 1880s, particularly in the writings of the British Idealists (namely F.H. Bradley) and their interlocutors. Russell originates the idea that coherentism could be a definite branch of epistemology in his early work on logic.⁴⁷ H.H. Joachim, a student of Bradley’s, defined the term as a “metaphysical” and “monistic” philosophy of truth, in which truth is the upshot for an array of epistemic modica.⁴⁸ In other words, coherentist truth is invented and maintained by coherences within its contextual apparatus, just as a semantician’s meaning, by Hermogenes’s and Saussure’s lights, is produced by assemblages of smaller semantic parts that cohere into a meaningful semantic whole. It is a synchronic, systematic kind of truth, premised on moments of coming-together between various epistemic factors, which collectively sponsor truthfulness. The result is a theory of truth that does not need the world, or that thinks up its own world, according to which aspects of knowledge can guarantee themselves and generate further, new truths based on the sheer fact of their own coherence with one another. In the example of two and two equaling four, coherentism would explain the truthfulness of the statement by appealing to the proper arrangement of the equation along with basic laws of arithmetic. Moritz Schlick shows how figures like Wittgenstein expanded this into a broader epistemic and linguistic program for truth and meaning:

Thus, whenever we ask about a sentence, ‘What does it mean?’, what we expect is instruction as to the circumstances in which the sentence is to be used; we want a description of the conditions under which the sentence will form a true proposition, and of those which will make it false. The meaning of a word or a combination of words is, in this way, determined by a set of rules which regulate their use and which, following Wittgenstein, we may call the rules of their grammar, taking this word in its widest sense.⁴⁹

This is in complete contrast with correspondentism, in which an aspect of knowledge is made truthful by some direct connection with the world. Correspondentism would explain two and two equaling four by pointing to two sets of two objects in the world and showing that, in bringing them together, they become four. The concept of correspondence has circulated in philosophical discourses for longer than coherence; early semanticians themselves made use of it to identify something like a Bréalian approach to meaning. Richards and Ogden, for example, write that “the root of the trouble” with meaning is that it “will be traced to the superstition that words are in some way parts of things or always imply things corresponding to them.”⁵⁰

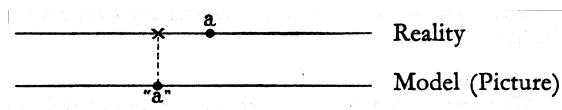
It is important to understand the role that philosophies of belief played in the development of coherentism, through their vital relations to theories of truth and meaning. After all, it was belief—not knowledge, not understanding, not judgment, and not truth or meaning—that Russell had christened “the central problem in analysis of mind,” describing it as “the most ‘mental’ thing we do, the thing most remote from what is done by mere matter.”⁵¹ Belief has, of course, always played a central role in processes of epistemic justification. It has long been an unavoidable waypoint on the path to truthful knowledge. And history has proven Russell essentially correct about the urgency surrounding belief in 20th-century philosophy. Wittgenstein, perhaps more clearly than any other 20th-century philosopher before him, demonstrated the fundamental obscurity at the heart of statements of belief, by showing that a statement like “A believes that *p*” does not necessarily enforce a connection between the proposition of belief and the object of belief. There is, in short, nothing sure about a belief’s true-false connection to the world, even though a belief (especially when considered as a feeling, or affective state, of commitment) can seem, by its very definition, to be synonymous with surety. In contradistinction to such felt surety about belief’s connection with the world, Wittgenstein showed that beliefs could no longer be relied upon to correspond to anything other than further beliefs. Having been stripped of its privileged correspondence with knowledge, belief becomes, like meaning and truth, one origin-point for coherentism.

It is, therefore, no surprise that Richards is reduced at many points in his notes on belief to juxtaposing the Sisyphean task of pinning down a useful theory of belief to the contemporaneous invention of theories of indeterminacy in quantum sciences; he calls belief “uncontrollable” and “peculiarly mutable” and “unsusceptible to measurement + comparison.”⁵² Richards turns to semantics to consider the question of belief, since semantics had, like epistemological accounts of belief, been steadily destabilizing anything like a reliable foundation for its object of study (in this case, meaning). To understand what a coherentist semantics might be like, some examples are necessary. Each of these was, in its own way, a blow to Bréal’s correspondentist vision. The first arrives in 1892, with Gottlob Frege’s proof of the perilous ease with which sense or meaning (*Sinn*) could be severed from referent (*Bedeutung*), in his example of the morning and evening stars.⁵³ Because these are, in fact, the same star, only called by different names, Frege shows that anything like necessary relations between words and objects can be eroded at core semantic levels, levels that figures like Bréal had hoped could sponsor necessary “laws” demarcating the relations between words and objects. What Frege’s star leaves behind is nothing like a necessary or law-bound relation between words and object, but rather a tracing of multiple possible associations between divergent senses, which take on meaning more through their contexts as descriptive capacities than through any stable or lawful reference to a particular object. Bertrand Russell eventually took up Frege’s idea, bringing it to its logical conclusion.⁵⁴ “Meaning” (Russell’s translation of Frege’s “sense” or *Sinn*) does not “denote” (his translation of Frege’s “referent” or *Bedeutung*) aspects of the world in and of themselves; rather, meaning denotes by participating in propositional networks of linguistic relations—networks that Russell designates “descriptions.”⁵⁵ Descriptions, for Russell, are composed of denoting phrases, none of which in and of themselves have any meaning: it is only when coordinated as description that smaller denotative gestures come to mean anything. Meaning is conjured through coherences between propositions and words in these descriptions, rather than correspondences between words and objects.⁵⁶ In such a model, the objective,

external, worldly referent (to return to Frege’s terminology) becomes an arbitrary and unreliable condition for meaning, a condition that can be largely dismissed in favor of semantic guarantees that descriptions can provide by and for themselves.

Russell’s turn to description, over against referent, as guarantor of meaning, and the concomitant rise of a coherentist semantics based on descriptions rather than referents, was only further reinforced in the years after “On Denoting.” Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) is of a piece with Russell’s idea, in that it was dedicated to the idea that all semantic troubles arose from the inherent arbitrariness of relations between linguistic signs and worldly referents. In Saussure’s system, as discussed earlier, what overcomes such troubles is recognition of the ways in which language coheres with itself, rather than how it corresponds with the world.⁵⁷ Even more important to Richards would have been Wittgenstein’s 1921 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, wherein was enlarged the 20th century’s general emphasis on coherentism into a broadly metaphysical project.⁵⁸ (I say that Wittgenstein would have been more important for a number of reasons, not least of all because Richards’s “Notes of Belief-Problems” were actually composed in a Tractarian style, clearly as an homage to Wittgenstein: 1.1, 1.12, 1.123, and so on. It is also the case that C.K. Ogden, Richards’s collaborator, directly oversaw and ultimately introduced F.P. Ramsey’s original translation of *Tractatus*, undertaken simultaneously with the composition of *The Meaning of Meaning*, which began to appear serially in Ogden’s *Cambridge Magazine* as early as 1920.)

For the young Wittgenstein, there was “the total reality” that is “the world,” just as there was “the totality of facts” that came to form the “logical space” of that world—this space is just the total collection of possible propositions that can be formulated about the world.⁵⁹ Rather than corresponding with the world, or rather than referring to the world, Wittgenstein conceived these facts as “a model” of that world: parallel, synchronous “pictures of the facts” that “we make to ourselves.”⁶⁰ Thereby, Wittgenstein envisions one metaphysical endpoint for the coherentist project, semantic or logical or epistemological or otherwise, in which speakers recognize themselves as operating within a sphere that perfectly models reality, but that never actually grasps or hooks onto that reality.⁶¹ The diagram above, from some of Wittgenstein’s earliest notes for *Tractatus*, demonstrates how this works.⁶² The model of reality and reality itself are matched through a shared notation as the variable “a.” However, each exists on a separate plane; the two planes parallel one another, never intersecting. The Model plane’s “‘a’ ” is given in quotes, which should be taken purposively: the Model’s “‘a’ ” is linguistic—it is a piece of language that, as the very young Wittgenstein put it in Russellian and Husserlian terms, “is only the *description* of a situation.”⁶³ This description adumbrates a possible connection with reality, but it cannot prove that connection: rather, as Wittgenstein says, it manifests a “shadow” that it then “casts upon the world.”⁶⁴ This shadow meets the plane of reality at the point marked “x,” which is close to, but not exactly equivalent with, reality’s “a.” This necessary gap between “x” and “a” is the essence of the difficulty with interpreting language’s meaningfulness as a property of its correspondence with the world, as demonstrated by Frege, et al. The gap can never be fully corrected, because users of language cannot see around their own descriptions to glimpse the world as it is prior to those descriptions.⁶⁵ This difficulty is the same one that Richards encounters in his introspective *epoché* of belief, wherein the phenomenological analysis of belief *eo*



ipso (as with truth *eo ipso* or connection *eo ipso*) leads ineluctably to the generation of descriptions of belief, which in turn may asymptotically approach belief (or truth, or connection) without ever actually intersecting it.

IV. *The semantics of semantics*

This play between the attempt to phenomenologize some abstract term or relation (truth, connection, belief) and the concomitant intervention of descriptive practices, which both abet and hinder the phenomenology, is the crux of semantics' problematic relation with its own object of study: meaning *eo ipso*. What is left of semantics by the time Richards turns to that word (in 1929) to describe what is necessary to understand belief? What might semantics even mean, after Frege et al.? Ogden and Richards's *The Meaning of Meaning* suggests itself as a platform on which to base an answer to these questions, partly because it appears (in 1923) on the heels of the trajectory through early semantics that has just been sketched, and also partly because it is Richards's longest sustained meditation on the problem of linguistic or signification meaning.⁶⁶ Ogden and Richards's book presented nothing like a correspondence theory of semantics; they were of the opinion that a semantics committed to direct correspondences between language and world is "the source of almost all the difficulties which thought encounters."⁶⁷ Nevertheless, their project often flirts with a Bréalian rhetoric of "science" and "empiricism" with regards to semantics; they subtitled the book "the science of symbolism," which recalls Bréal's definition of semantics as "a science of significations." John Paul Russo notes that Ogden and Richards's return to this sort of rhetoric is partially occasioned by their historical moment, coming on the heels of World War I and immersed in a long, slow process of secularization, leading to "profound uncertainty and loss of faith." As Russo goes on to say, Ogden and Richards "believe that survivors of the war must remake their world," and they believe that vital to that process of remaking would be a renewed understanding of meaningfulness.⁶⁸ On the one hand, Ogden and Richards's project is clearly conceived as carrying forward a coherentist lineage that originated in Frege, Russell, Saussure, and Wittgenstein. On the other hand, the linguistic arbitrariness of a philosophy like Saussure's and the linguistic solipsism of a project like Wittgenstein's could not help but feel like their coherentist predecessors had left them trapped between a semantic Scylla and Charybdis.⁶⁹

While *The Meaning of Meaning* has been received, and possibly was even conceived, as a book of coherentist semantics, it is also a book that is occasioned, to an extent, by "the failure" of that semantics, as it has been unsubtly and even "ignorantly" practiced by early 20th-century thinkers.⁷⁰ *The Meaning of Meaning* has something of a recuperative mission, according to which Ogden and Richards try to steer the leaky coherentist ship back to empirical lands—ergo the Bréalian rhetoric of science.⁷¹ And the most perilous shoal around which Ogden and Richards must navigate the ship is precisely one upon which their forbearers had wrecked: the definition of meaning *eo ipso*, divorced both from a subjective point of view to wager the meaning and an object on which the meaning is wagered. The problem, as Ogden and Richards identified it, was that coherentists, by "neglecting" or "leaving out" a robust account of meaning *eo ipso* in their semantics, had arrived at an incomplete theory, one with a sizable explanatory gap between a mind's meaningful intentions and the worldly referents to which meanings are attributed.⁷²

Ogden and Richards found this gap to be inherently unsatisfactory; however, the problem is not easy to resolve, because simply to reinstate meaning in its original position as a relation between signification and object would be to return to a correspondence theory of semantics. Even simply contemplating meaning *qua* meaning in a coherentist context can be a highly ambiguous enterprise, one that shares a number of affinities with difficulties encountered in the analysis of Richards's synonyms for belief, but on an even grander scale of paradoxicality. This is made clear from the book's outset, even in its title, which, like Richards's synonyms for belief, is based upon a nominalized verb ("meaning"), has neither agent nor referent (no sense of who or what does the meaning, and none of what is meant), and turns on a tricky prepositional phrase ("of meaning"). Meaning, as a gerund, partakes both of verbal and nominal aspects: it indicates both an ongoing process of arriving at meaning and what that process can reify into—a single, static meaning. The fact that "meaning" is modified by another "meaning" only exacerbates this ambiguity, as neither makes clear whether it identifies a process of meaning or the result of a process of meaning.⁷³ If both are a process, then the title is a grammatical *uroboros*: the first process of meaning points to the second process of meaning that points back to first process that points to the second process, and so on.

If the second "meaning" is a static meaning—some meaningful result of the first meaning's process of making, achieving, or recognizing meaningfulness—then the title is the quintessential example of an internal accusative, more tautological than either "A tendency to action" or "An acceptance by the mind." But, like these two synonyms for belief, the title's redundancy leads to an opacity of denotative scope. On the one hand, it reads like a strong metaphilosophical or even etymological goal: to determine what "meaning" might even mean after decades of challenges to anything like a positive, Bréalian account of meaningful relations between words and objects; in this light, the book could just as easily have been entitled "the semantics of semantics." This would align with Russo's strong reading of the second "meaning" as possessed of a "quasi-religious aura." Such a reading, which seeks to hierarchize the two meanings in the title—so that it must almost be pronounced "the meaning of *meaning*"—is one way of making sense of the title, while also asserting the seriousness of the book's semantic project.⁷⁴ Such a reading, in turn, fits with the definite article "the" that leads the title, whereof the meaning projected by the tautology claims a certain surety and fixity that the indefinite articles heading the synonyms for belief cannot. On the other hand, Russo's reading of the second "meaning" fails to compensate for what is finally a complete lack of difference between the first "meaning" and the second. In fact, because of its title, the book does not even have to be opened for readers to realize that Ogden and Richards were grappling with the same coherentist fate that Saussure et al. had predicted for any current or future semantics. Read in this way, meaning can, quite literally, only ever mean some other meaning, or otherwise can only be *of* itself. The second meaning is not special or "quasi-religious"; it is, rather, just another anonymous link in a chain of prior meanings, and meanings yet to come. In this case, rather than an *uroboros*, we run up against a semantic *mise en abyme*, in which meaning must be defined by yet another meaning, which must in turn be defined by yet another meaning, which must then be defined by another meaning—possibly, though not necessarily, *ad infinitum*. (The chain could, of course, end. To deny otherwise would be to smuggle Derrida into Saussure. The point is that the chain's end is indeterminable, not that it is inconceivable.)

Conceived from this *mise-en-abyme* perspective, the title—*The Meaning of Meaning*—reads more as a modernist play on the grammar of repetition, *a la* Gertrude Stein, than as a meta-philosophical project of “quasi-religious” seriousness. To finish fleshing out the grammar of the title, which is slowly revealing itself to be a kind of semantic Münchhausen trilemma, consider the “of.”⁷⁵ Because the title is a perfect internal accusative, the “of” effortlessly fills both subjective and objective genitive roles (what means?—meaning; what is meant?—meaning). Like the “of” in “A sense of reality” and “A giving of actuality,” the “of” in “the meaning of meaning” cannot be partitive, because “meaning” does nothing to partition or subdivide “meaning.” However, as if in an attempt to anchor their title in some degree of specificity or concreteness, and especially as if to correct for the complete lack of definition provided by their title’s initial “of,” Ogden and Richards subtitle the book: “A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism.” If the title shows just how little specificational work “of” can do, the subtitle performs an object lesson in just how specific “of” can get—what multifarious specifying effects it can proliferate.

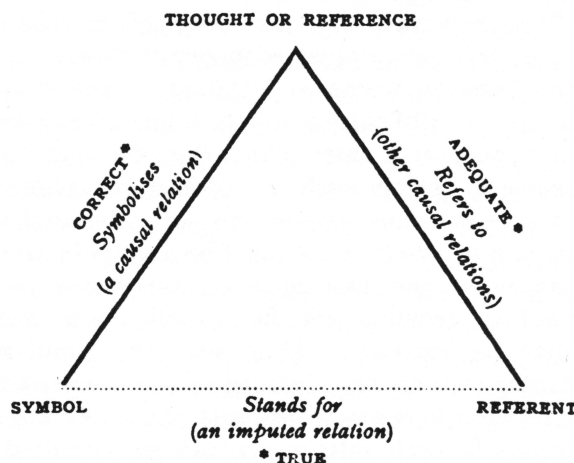
Each “of” in the subtitle is solidly an objective genitive and also plays an obvious partitive role in two separate chains directing “Study”: “of the Influence of Language” and “of the Science of Symbolism.” The subtitle counterbalances the broad ambiguity of the title with an orderly array of complements that read as touchstones and axioms for the project as a whole. The definitional scrupulousness of the subtitle uses its hierarchy of genitives to achieve a high degree of variety and, simultaneously, exactitude in the definition of what the book’s project will be. The way in which the genitives structure the subtitle into an array of interdependent definitions and sub-definitions, which cumulate into a description of the project as a whole, is of a piece with a categorical or axiomatic strain in Ogden and Richards’s early philosophy, as discussed earlier, in which the two rely heavily on analyzing and comparing chains of related or synonymous phrases—e.g., Richards’s synonyms for belief, the sixteen definitions of “meaning,” and the sixteen definitions of “beauty.” Their subsequent semantic analyses of these lists, which, as Richards shows in his notes on belief, mimic the phenomenological analysis of the originary conscious states that sponsor the lists, are at the core of their project, which seeks to investigate ways in which coherences between words alone can guarantee meaningfulness, without falling into sheer solipsism or relativism. In the case of the synonyms for meaning, the semantic analysis of such a list becomes a literal rendering of the book’s project: an analysis of the meaning of meaning. (The anthropological strain of *The Meaning of Meaning*, *a la* Malinowski, must be acknowledged here. These lists, for instance, also foreground a problem of historical usage; they are, after all, obviously colloquial phrases—phrases that document a quite synchronic array of linguistic usages, that, perhaps collectively, capture something of an anthropological picture of a meaning at a particular historical instant.)

The title has forbearers that can shed further light on the stakes of Ogden and Richards’s project. In 1920, there appeared in *Mind* a “symposium” of essays by prominent philosophers—F.C.S. Schiller, H.H. Joachim, Bertrand Russell—entitled “The Meaning of ‘Meaning’,” convened on the occasion of Bertrand Russell’s essay “On Propositions: What They Are and How They Mean.”⁷⁶ This particular grouping of thinkers is auspicious, because it brings together Joachim, a disciple of Bradley and something of a mascot for the coherentist movement in epistemology, with Schiller, a devout pragmatist. Russell’s original essay, on which the symposium was based, had argued for an “image”- or “thought”-based semantics, wherein

linguistic assertions of meaning—or, wherein words—would be predicated on some meaningful “image” occurring, or “presenting” itself, within a subject’s consciousness. (It is worth noting in passing that Russell, in his essay on which the symposium was based, analogized his analysis of meaning to similar issues in contemporaneous understandings of belief, thereby bridging, as did so many philosophers of the period, epistemology and semantics. Joachim, unsurprisingly, seizes on Russell’s points about belief in his contribution to the symposium.)⁷⁷ The symposium’s title captures the essence of Russell’s model in its very slight divagation from Ogden and Richards’s title, in that it cordons off its second “ ‘Meaning’ ” in quotation marks; Ogden and Richards, pointing out that these quotes “tell their own tale,” derisively remarked that the entire symposium seemed to have been “carried on ... in inverted commas.”⁷⁸ What “tale” is it that they tell? A tale in which one “Meaning” is thought and then another “ ‘Meaning’ ,” in quote marks, is verbalized—in that specific order. The idea immediately recalls Wittgenstein’s critique of correspondence epistemologies, in which reality’s “a” only manifests in the mind as a “picture” (here the overlap with Russell’s “image” is especially strong) of that reality, which is annotated as “ ‘a’ ”, in similar “inverted commas.” The problem, of course, is that such a model provides no way of auditing the match between “a” and “ ‘a’ ”, leaving the image or picture in a state of skeptical limbo about the correctness of its grasp on the world.

Ogden and Richards’s decision to remove the quotations from their title, *The Meaning of Meaning*, reads as an attempt to correct for the unfortunate dualism, and thereby correspondentism, implied in the symposium’s title and in Russell’s 1919 semantic model. Of course, in doing so they play up the paradoxicality of the phrase’s grammar—the tendency of “meaning of meaning” to oscillate between infinite regression and banal tautology—which the symposium’s original title somewhat alleviates (by making “meaning” and “ ‘meaning’ ” slightly different from one another, which gives a necessary iota of traction for the process of understanding the scope of the phrase). The question becomes: how do Ogden and Richards navigate this paradoxicality, and is such a navigation through coherentist paradoxes preferable to the much more obvious and accessible failures of correspondent theories of meaning? Is the former really preferable to the latter?

In hashing out an answer to these questions, it pays to attend with a greater generality to how Ogden and Richards’s semantic coherentism actually works. If the project is about meaning *eo ipso*, then what does it mean to be meaningful? Such a question cannot be made independent of another, which is: what does it take to be coherent? As the title’s varieties of redundancy make clear, though coherence is epistemologically preferable to correspondence, it remains a highly paradoxical choice, a choice whose only resolution seems to be an inherently unsatisfactory descriptive practice, which can superficially patch the gaps between self and world, without actually overcoming them. In an attempt to work around the paradoxes systemic to coherentist semantics, Ogden and Richards develop a method for triangulating meaning, rather than specifying it. Their diagram, below, summarizes this method.⁷⁹



Notice, first of all, that “meaning” does not appear in the triangle, which collectively comes to stand for it without directly emblemizing it as one of its sides or points. (Russell makes a big deal out of this fact in his first review of the book.)⁸⁰ Notice, too, that the triangle has no arrows indicating a specific path across its points; it is also perfectly equilateral, suggesting self-similarity amongst each of its representational facets. A classical model for meaning, one stretching back beyond even Socrates in *Cratylus*, might be structured like this: (internal) reference or thought → symbol → referent. Thus, by such a model, I would think of a dog, say the word “dog,” and refer to an actual, physical dog. This classical model could also be conceived as a circle, with the referent (the physical dog) reaching back around to instigate my internal reference to a dog, which then stimulates me to say “dog,” which, in turn, refers back to the physical dog that originally caused my thought.

Ogden and Richards alter the classical model in two ways. First, following in the steps of Saussure, they sever connection between symbol and referent, or language and world; like Wittgenstein in his model/reality diagram, they indicate this severance by using a dotted instead of a solid line—as they go on to say, symbol and referent have “no relevant relation other than the indirect one.” This captures the expected coherentist spirit of the project, which cannot admit anything like a necessary correspondence between symbol and referent. Ogden and Richards’s second alteration to the classical semantic model is more startling. It arises from their desire to rectify the necessary coherentist untethering of symbol from reference by means of rejecting Fregean relativism, Saussurean arbitrariness, and Wittgensteinian solipsism. The only possible way out of that thicket, they conclude, is to theorize a semantics that is an entirely causal process. Symbols become one of two things. They either become sheer, behavioral display: instead of being premised on a host of internal thoughts and feelings, they are based on causal reactions to given situations. Or they become purely cultural artifacts, coined and controlled in tandem by all members of a civilization. (For Richards, these are two sides of the same symbolic coin.) Meaning becomes the *demonstrated* effect of a symbol, its exhibition as causal chain of events, rather than some internal process that precedes that symbol. Meaning remains a series of coherences, but these coherences are demonstrated via causation, which can be monitored and tracked (whether as behavior or as culture).⁸¹

This turns meaning, as Ogden and Richards note, into a largely “contextual” activity; it also, significantly, makes meaning synonymous with “interpretation.” The following example clarifies what context and interpretation might mean here:

There is a well-known dog in most books upon animal behaviour which, on hearing the dinner-bell, runs, even from parts of the house quite out of reach of scents and savours, into the dining-room, so as to be well placed, should any kind thoughts towards him arise in the diners. Such a dog *interprets* the sound of the gong as a sign.⁸²

The gong is the symbol, being fed at the table is the referent, and the process of interpreting the gong as indicating the possibility of being fed is the reference (look again at the three points of Ogden and Richards's triangle). Interpretation exists, in the example of the dog, as the display of a series of actions, like running to the table, wagging, whining, etc.—Ogden and Richards describe this “clump” of actions as “an *external* context” of reference that provides the auspices for a symbol-referent relation, in this case the decision to run to the table. In this semantic model, the interpretive activity of the reference depends upon a variety of things. It could be attributed to interiorities: memories, associations, and conditionings. It could also be considered as “cultural,” which just means that the dog responds to its conditionings because that is what is done, given certain symbolic cues occurring in between a network of social beings. The key is that, in Ogden and Richards's model, all of this variety manifests as interpretative displays based on histories of repeated actions.

Note the reliance on the word “as” in the previous paragraph: the dog interprets symbols *as* referents; references manifest *as* interpretative activities; symbols relate to referents *as* interpretative processes of reference. Ogden and Richards's model is, on the one hand, a strikingly literal, empirical, and scientific depiction of semantics, based as it is on strictly observable semantic features which manifest according to rubrics imported from behavioral psychologies. There is no room, in such a model, for the “mysteries” introduced into semantics either by leaving the gap between symbol and referent unarticulated or by insisting on some direct correspondence to bridge that gap.⁸³ As suggested earlier, Ogden and Richards avoid both by triangulating semantics through a causal process of reference that indirectly adumbrates connections between symbol and referent, thereby giving the gap some articulation yet also simultaneously letting it be. On the other hand, as the ineluctable emergence of “as” into discussions of their model suggests, Ogden and Richards's triangle is also very much a figuration of meaning—completely *unliteral*.⁸⁴ This can be partly explained by the necessary indirection of the model: the avoidance of correspondence demands that it not communicate that “symbol *is* referent,” and the aversion to solipsism and relativism equivalently insists that it not say “symbol *is not* referent.” The only choice, besides direct relation and complete non-relation, is some degree of pseudo-relation, which is negotiated through a grammar of pseudo-identity.⁸⁵ What is left, in such a model, is a process of interpretation, which instantiates connections between the points of the triangle through an indirect figuratics: by laying over semantic identifications a metaphoric process depicting what that identity would be like, were it to pertain in fact. (Remember, Richards called his synonyms for belief “metaphors.”) Thus, the dog's interpretation of the gong *as* indicating the possibility of being fed stands in for an only-ever-implied identity: that the gong *is* a symbol that means being fed. It is only because of the latter's often being the case that the former can prove to be typically felicitous for the dog; and in point of

fact it is only ever the former (the process of interpretation) that the dog manifests, because at the end of the day there is nothing necessary about the connection between gong and food.⁸⁶

Plenty of critics have dismissed Ogden and Richards's semantic model because it is behaviorist, and they are right, to a certain extent, to do so. The model was conceived in light of, and in dialogue with, contemporaneous behaviorist ingresses into the linguistic sciences, not least of all Russell's 1921 *The Analysis of Mind*, which presented a semantic theory drawing heavily on John B. Watson's behavioral psychology, or what Russell called "'causal' theories" of mind (Watson eventually produced an influential and complimentary review of Richards's book).⁸⁷ B.F. Skinner cited Russell's second review of *The Meaning of Meaning* as what "introduced him to behavioral psychology" in the first place.⁸⁸ It is most likely because of Ogden and Richards's embeddedness in this now-shunned vein of psychological discourse that Umberto Eco, in his introduction to the most recent edition, can only muster the half-hearted claim that: "I believe *The Meaning of Meaning* is still worth citing, for some of its chapters, at least."⁸⁹ Behaviorism is an extreme threat to free will, and it is hardly a solution for intractabilities in our epistemology or even our semantics; there is a reason that the example here concerns a dog. However, appreciating the subtle figuratics implied by the indirectness of their semantic model—over against the project's otherwise overt externalism and scientism and literalism—along with this model's reliance on *interpretation* as the source of meaningfulness, rescues a valuable perspective on meaning from what is otherwise behavioral detritus. It is a perspective that, like Richards's list of synonyms for belief, borrows much from, while simultaneously providing a means of transcending, Husserl's embrace of description as a mechanism for coping with the inordinate abstraction of our basic concepts (like the idea of a meaning *eo ipso*). There is a commitment, in Ogden and Richards's model, to the idea that factuality delivered *as* an always-already interpreted figuration of that factuality can be sufficient, or even necessary, for understanding how we assign, and then navigate, meaningfulness in day-to-day experience.

V. *The question of belief*

This figural aspect of Ogden and Richards's model bears not only on the pair's philosophies of mind and language, but also on Richards's theories of art criticism and praxis, which were fomenting during the composition of *The Meaning of Meaning*. To understand the connection, a fuller appreciation of the concept of coherence is necessary—in terms of the coherentist epistemologies and semantics outlined above, but also just in terms of the broader notion of what it means to be coherent, or to make sense, at all. (Of course, these two aspects of coherence are very intimate with one another.) Richards's writings on coherence are various; most emerge during the 1920s and early 30s. As with many of his contemporaries' writings on coherence, in particular those of Russell, the subject for Richards became something of a point for the copulation of numerous discourses circulating in early analytic philosophy, as well as semantics (discourses that might otherwise have remained distinct, or incoherent, in relation to one another). In *Mencius on the Mind* (1932), coherence is cast in raw epistemological terms, as a precondition of truth, which is conceived "*not* as a matter of correspondence between our observations and something they observe ... but as a matter of coherence or consistency among the items belonging to the system or hypothesis which is being developed."⁹⁰ (Later, Cleanth Brooks would show just how important this epistemic notion would go on to be for literary

explication; simultaneously, he would demonstrate just how tightly bound the topic was to the subject of belief. More on this below.)⁹¹ This rather sparse epistemological definition is fleshed out by associations Richards draws between it and the program of literary analysis developed in *Practical Criticism* (1929). These associations principally arise through a shared vocabulary of “sincerity,” which Richards defines as: “to act, feel or think in accordance with ‘one’s true nature’.”⁹² Sincerity, with its connections to human emotion and judgment, animates the otherwise lifeless idea of epistemic coherence, by circumscribing it in terms of a principle of felt internal consistency, or a practice of (self)awareness and (self)evaluation. This becomes the basis for Richards’s nascent methodologies of close reading; it also plants the seed for his detailed analysis of semantic coherence, here called “coalescence,” in *Coleridge on Imagination* (1934). Therein, coalescence becomes the generative principle of meaning, which is just the upshot of a subject and an object coming together: “The coalescence of the two is that knowing (making, being) activity we have been considering.”⁹³ Meaning, as inflected through an interpretive practice, becomes about coalescences—coherences—between what the mind finds and what it does: a play of esemplastic invention and objective discovery.

Underlying the various schema in which coherence plays a role for Richards is the concept of belief, with which this chapter began. Richards’s struggle with defining belief, and his exceedingly idiosyncratic solution to that struggle, offers a crucial platform from which to base a broader inquiry into coherence as a value for artist and critic both. Recall that Richards’s “Notes on Belief-Problems” were dedicated to T.S. Eliot; Eliot is, at this point, an ideal figure to bring into focus. More than any other modernist artist, Eliot was tapped into the coherentist turn in philosophy.⁹⁴ By 1929, he had known Richards personally for almost a decade, though the two did not meet or correspond regularly until the spring of 1926, when Eliot was lecturing at Trinity.⁹⁵ It is well known that Richards held Eliot’s poetry in great esteem, especially in the 1920s: he described *The Waste Land* as “major poetry” in *Principles of Literary Criticism* and, going a step further, called Eliot the “best poet of my generation” in *Science and Poetry*.⁹⁶ Eliot had similarly glowing things to say about Richards in his letters and in his reviews of Richards’ books.⁹⁷ Eventually, however, their opinions of one another took a mildly acrimonious turn. For the most part, this manifested as relatively petty remarks about, say, the poor quality of each other’s prose style.⁹⁸ However, such trivial negativity ultimately had its corollaries in a number of larger intellectual disagreements, which were ever cordial, yet in many ways completely intractable. Perhaps their most significant disagreement was on the subject of belief. As John Constable notes, their disagreement’s public element came to prominence with Richards’s *Science and Poetry*, which appeared in 1926, but privately it had begun to gestate as early as 1923, when Richards and Ogden published *The Meaning of Meaning*; it continued until at least 1935, when Richards released a revised edition of *Science and Poetry*.⁹⁹

Their disagreement centered, first and foremost, on how to handle discontinuities between belief’s divergent connotations in different contexts, and most especially on the encroachment of some of these connotations on others. These contexts included, as Eliot categorized them in a letter to Richards, “philosophical, theological, and scientific belief.”¹⁰⁰ As the 20th century unfolded, it was becoming more and more difficult to tell exactly which of these types of belief provided the auspices for any given statement of belief: more problematic to know whether “I believe” might be intended to have traction in facticity, religiosity, logic, or some other system in which a vocabulary and grammar of belief might typically be deployed. This was

an especially acute condition for Eliot, who converted to Anglicanism in 1927 and became, from that point on, quite devout.¹⁰¹ Because of the strength of his own beliefs, Eliot's experience of his century's post-war pull toward secularism and science took on a special urgency that was inflected through his discussions about belief with Richards.¹⁰² Belief had become, Eliot worried, merely the handmaiden of "tenable scientific hypotheses," giving them their first "provisional assent."¹⁰³ And scientific claims were not the only threat to belief; new conceptions of belief in analytic epistemology and logic, *a la* Wittgenstein, were also a danger. Wittgenstein himself, in describing the effects of his proof that all beliefs are indeterminate with regards to truth, wrote that: "This shows that there is no such thing as the soul."¹⁰⁴

For someone like Matthew Arnold, who experienced a similar "crisis of belief" in his own time, this encroachment of scientific onto religious belief was cast as an essentially conceptual problem, which would be resolved in a rising tide of poetry: "most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry."¹⁰⁵ Differently, what troubled Eliot was not that science and logic undermined belief, so much as that they did so while retaining the language of belief: scientists and logicians still said "I believe," but their semantic intentions were entirely different from what a theologian's "I believe" might be. Rather than create their own language for technical senses of believing, these disciplines co-opted a language of belief while completely disavowing the original force of that language. This created, at the turn of the 20th century, complete uncertainty—or indeterminacy, per Richards—about what degree of seriousness a person happened to be engaging by a statement of belief. Richards, perhaps because of his exchanges with Eliot, clearly understood that this was a serious impediment to any modern understanding of belief. He begins his notes for Eliot by writing that: "If I ask myself 'Do I believe this or that?' I do not know what question I am asking."¹⁰⁶ At the heart of Richards's attempts to analyze, and perhaps resolve, precisely this problem are his concepts of statement and pseudo-statement, which were intimately connected to his thinking on belief. They were defined as follows:

This brief analysis may be sufficient to indicate the fundamental disparity and opposition between pseudo-statements as they occur in poetry and statements as they occur in science. A pseudo-statement is a form of words which is justified entirely by its effect in releasing or organizing our impulses and attitudes (due regard being had for the better or worse organizations of these *inter se*); a statement, on the other hand, is justified by its truth, *i.e.*, its correspondence, in a highly technical sense, with the fact to which it points.¹⁰⁷

William Empson, Richards's student, later fleshed out this explanation of pseudo-statements by describing them as "a series of stimuli imposed on the organism of the reader."¹⁰⁸ René Wellek echoes Empson in defining them "as a sort of emotional therapy, or the work of a pattern of impulses."¹⁰⁹ Richards gives the following as examples for subjects about which a pseudo-statement might be written: "about God, about the universe, about human nature, the relations of mind to mind, about the soul, its rank and destiny."¹¹⁰ Pseudo-statements on topics such as these are in the domain of poetry. Statement, on the other hand, is the linguistic tool of science,

which is a discipline that produces real “truth,” about which Richards shows his pragmatist colors in claiming that: “On the whole true statements are of more service to us than false ones.”¹¹¹

To what might Eliot reject in such an idea?¹¹² Keep in mind that Richards does not make his points in a historical vacuum; in fact, he makes them largely in service of a historical point, which is that western societies formerly conducted most all their beliefs through what modern individuals would recognize as pseudo-statements, whereas now what Richards calls statement dominates the expressive landscape. He writes:

pseudo-statements which are pivotal points in the organization of the mind, vital to its well-being, have suddenly become, for sincere, honest and informed minds, impossible to believe as for centuries they have been believed. The accustomed incidences of the modes of believing are changed irrecoverably; and the knowledge which has displaced them is not of a kind upon which an equally fine organization of the mind can be based. This is the contemporary situation.¹¹³

Something about modernity has ineluctably changed, and the primary symptom of this change, that Richards can discern, is a shift in the contexts in which people typically engage beliefs: now more scientific, or statement-oriented, than religious. Where does that leave pseudo-statement? R.P. Blackmur has interpreted Richards, on the score of pseudo-statement, as “wanting to get rid of belief” altogether: to give belief over, essentially, to statements of science and logic.¹¹⁴ Richards is more subtle than that, since he distinguishes between belief as an epistemic operator, negotiating between truthfulness and falsehood, and belief as an emotion or feeling of assurance—belief as faith or commitment. The former is no good for pseudo-statement because it is scientific language, and the latter is no good because religion and superstition have both largely fallen out of the modern picture of the world (thankfully, for Richards). But this does not mean that pseudo-statement does not harness belief; on the contrary, pseudo-statements are never not about beliefs, but the beliefs they express are “impossible to believe as for centuries they have been believed.” Pseudo-statement, thus, identifies a new mode, or category, or “faculty” of belief.¹¹⁵ It is more about a shift in *how* one talks about believing than it is in what, or what not, one believes.

What, then, is this new faculty of belief? What is pseudo-statement? On the one hand, it is a term of art for something that has always already been happening: statements about God, or about souls, or about human nature have always coursed through our vernacular. On the other hand, pseudo-statement is something that could never have happened before, because, according to Richards, what makes a statement “pseudo” is that it expresses beliefs about these things without also conferring a real faith in them. It is a recognizable language of belief without the true commitment of belief. Thus, what Richards identifies is more interesting than it seems at first: it is a particularly modern (or even modernist) use of language, wherein a speaker deploys beliefs that in earlier eras had been vigorously held, but that now serve merely “poetic” purposes: rhetorical, emotional, aesthetic.¹¹⁶ A pseudo-statement becomes, when conceived along these lines, a statement of belief that is *just* the grammar of belief, without the feeling of commitment to

truth that belief had once demanded. With that seachange in mind, why *not* make a list of synonyms for belief that are all metaphors? For Richards, attention to the semantics, or the figuratics, of such a list seemed the only way to get at what belief could do in the 20th century. This recalls Friedrich Nietzsche's somewhat earlier declaration that truth, in his age, had become nothing more than "a moveable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms."¹¹⁷

Many of these issues come to a head in Richards' *Science and Poetry*. It was Eliot who first called that book "an essay in The Grammar of Belief."¹¹⁸ Although Eliot evidently read *Science and Poetry* with care, his relation to the book was rife with confusion and misunderstanding. In his review of the first edition in 1927, he seems to have struggled to grasp the concept of pseudo-statement, writing to Richards in October 1935, on receiving his copy of the revised edition:

I find the discussion on page 65 and thereabouts a little confusing ... I take it that what you mean by a pseudo-judgment is quite different in nature from an ordinary false judgement. That is to say a scientific judgement which happens not to correspond with the facts. The question then arises in what way true and false can be applied in pseudo-judgements. I presume that anyone making a pseudo-judgement has an alternative of one or more pseudo-judgements which he rejects because they seem to him false. Furthermore, are all pseudo-judgements of the same kind?¹¹⁹

Eliot's misunderstanding is telling, and it stems from the shared vocabulary of belief between statement and pseudo-statement. Because of this shared vocabulary, Eliot makes the mistake of collapsing the grammar of pseudo-statement into the rubrics of statement. That is, a pseudo-statement becomes a kind of stillborn, or simply false, statement. By this reading, pseudo-statement, like statement, has an objective—some drive toward "truth," fueled by an act of believing—as well as an object: some hopefully "true" fact or principle to which the objective points. But, as Richards says in a reply to Eliot, pseudo-statements are "ambiguous" and possessed of "inexhaustible meanings"; therefore, they transcend basic dichotomies like "true" and "false." He continues:

whereas we all know how to find out what a statement says, we don't know (in any similar way) how to find out what Pseudo-Statements offer to us (not *say*; they don't say anything in any sense in which statements do). Or rather, with Pseudo-Statements, the process of finding out is a process of experimental growth and is the same as acceptance or rejection, as the case may be.¹²⁰

In effect, pseudo-statements discard statements' teleological orientation toward truth, and they also are relieved of the grammatical onus of carrying a subject and an object together in a certain way, or even carrying them at all. They *say* nothing.

Walter Benn Michaels has claimed that, according to this definition, Richards intends for pseudo-statement to require "that belief be suspended."¹²¹ With Eliot's confusion in mind, I

would tweak that claim to say that pseudo-statement actually upholds or emphasizes belief, while suspending the need for both a believer and a thing believed. What is left is a nebulous middle term: a tenuous relation, without *relatum* or referent. Thus, no pseudo-statements assert a concrete believer-believed connection, but all are inherently *about* the process of believing itself: all are about the experience of dwelling in a state of belief that has no logical or grammatical necessity to commit to any particular object, at least not by expected true-false indices. It is specifically this belief *eo ipso* that Richards construes as “inexhaustible,” and this inexhaustibility is what Richards seeks to get hold of by the list of synonyms in his notes for Eliot. What a suspension of this sort leaves behind is a kind of linguistic simulacrum, or a language that does not denote: belief’s grammar, rhetoric, figuration, and semantics in and of and for themselves.¹²²

Immediately it must be noted that this is an uneasy definition. It muddies the waters of belief, rather than clears them. It has led, at times, to a nihilism about belief, with Eliot claiming, after connecting some of Richards’s scientific points with those of Russell, that: “Mr Russell believes that when he is dead he will rot; I cannot subscribe with that conviction to *any* belief.”¹²³ Almost a decade later, Richards echoes Eliot’s move to deny belief altogether, writing that: “I suggest, then, that there may be reasonable ground for not wishing to Believe anything.”¹²⁴ More often, however, Richards’s ideas about belief as it manifests in pseudo-statement lead both him and Eliot to chase a positive theory: to pursue definition for the status of this thing called belief. And because pseudo-statement, as detailed above, projects belief *sans* the necessity of subject and object, Eliot and Richards are free to contemplate the *how* of belief, rather than the *what*—as Richards says, “The how of the believing has changed.”¹²⁵ He expands on that point in his notes for Eliot, when he writes:

Historically, men seem to have been too much obsessed by the dependent questions: ‘What should I believe?’ and ‘For what reasons, or on what grounds?’ to notice the (basically) prior question: ‘What are we doing when we believe?’¹²⁶

The how of the believing is resolved in, among other things, the grammar of belief. What Richards calls for is attention to the languages with which belief is deployed. Science is one such language; logic is another. Poetry, however, has its role as a special case, serving as the chalice for pseudo-statement, and, synonymously, standing in for a separate mode of belief that Richards calls, in his notes for Eliot, “introspective.”

Pseudo-statement is not just about a new language of belief; it is about a new, modern kind of poetry, which trades in this new language: this new tendency to encode beliefs in grammatical and semantic practices, while disavowing both epistemic truth and religious faith as *telo*i for those practices. It is no wonder that, soon after Eliot’s conversion, Richards wrote of his poetry: “There is something a little ridiculous, at least, in admiring only the rhythms and ‘word harmonies’ of an author who is writing about the salvation of his soul.”¹²⁷ As soon as more primal signatures of belief manifest in a poem—beliefs endowed in Eliot’s case with a religious faith—Richards becomes uncomfortable analyzing those signatures. Given Richards’s discomfort with Eliot’s religious verse, it is unsurprising that the core of Eliot and Richards’s exchange about belief occurs before the publication of Eliot’s overtly religious *Ash Wednesday* (1930) and after the publication of *The Waste Land* (1922). During this eight-year period, Richards found Eliot’s

poetry, especially *The Waste Land*, to be the most amenable site for copulating his earliest models for close reading with his desire to formulate “a semantics of belief.” These were, for that brief period of time, equivalent enterprises.

¹ This epigraph comes from I.A. Richards's preface to his volume on Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *Coleridge on Imagination* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1934), xi.

² There are some exceptions to the last point. "Adhere" will never take an object, for example, so it is not particularly interesting that it does not have one now. More interestingly, each "of" — there are four of them — structures a prepositional complement that behaves *like* a direct object. A sense of trust, for example, must mean that I sense trust. Though transitive sentences like that one can be implied from the "of" complements, the fact that they are set forth here in an intransitive form still begs certain questions about their grammar, questions generated specifically by grammatical circumstances surrounding "of," which behaves differently in each case, as will be discussed.

³ Reflect on the difference between "A feeling of trust washes over me," in which a more verb-like "feeling" designates an active process of coming to feel, and "I had instilled a feeling of trust," in which a more noun-like "feeling" indicates the end result of some prior process of coming to feel. A clearer example would be the different senses of "a crossing": as in "my ship approaches a crossing [a general point at which ships can cross] of two sea lanes" and "I undertook a crossing [a specific attempt at crossing] of the two sea lanes."

⁴ What is sensed? Reality. What senses? It would be absurd to answer reality, since sensation implies consciousness and reality is not conscious. Thus, it is an objective genitive. What is given? Actuality. There is an objective valence to the "of." But also answer the question: what gives? Actuality can be the answer. It makes semantic sense to say that actuality has given something: actuality gives form; actuality gives life; actuality gives an anchor in the world. Therefore, the "of" has a subjective valence, in addition to its objective one.

⁵ Here I restrict the definition of intention to its colloquial usage by everyday speakers of English. This restriction will exclude intention as a technical term in phenomenology, where it can, and often does, imply things other than actions, like the directing of attentions (i.e. I intend toward an object). Of course, in this scenario intention itself becomes an action, so it is not totally beside the grammatical point.

⁶ Ultimately, the issue here is one peculiar to the upper reaches of synonymy between verbs and nouns. You cannot have a blow without a strike, and vice versa. You cannot sing without a song, and you cannot have a song unless you sing. And so on. Neither a song, nor singing, could be autonomous of the other, because they are almost precisely synonymous. Most verbs have a clear internal accusative that can be extracted from their grammar. I would argue, by extension, that every verb has a *spectrum* of internal accusatives, each of which fits more or less tightly with the verb that generates it. Thus, "A tendency to action" is, I would say, less perfectly an internal accusative than "sing a song," because action is not a literal synonym of tendency. But, I would argue that the phrase is still on a spectrum of internal accusatives, as is "An acceptance by the mind," because it is the case that almost all tendencies involve action, or even are themselves actions, and that acceptance identifies a mental act and thus always implies a mind.

⁷ Richards wrote these notes in February 1929, in a notebook that is now designated by Magdalene College as Notebook 3. In total, the notes comprise 15 densely-scrawled pages. The list of definitions of belief appears on a page numbered by Richards as 6. Helpfully, John Constable has transcribed a significant portion of the notes, namely 3.0 to 4.621. Cf.: John Constable, "I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot, and the Poetry of Belief," *Essays in Criticism* (1990), 235-

238. The portion I focalize here comprises sections one and two, which occur prior to Constable's transcription.

⁸ Richards, "Notes on Belief-Problems for T.S.E.," 4.

⁹ Richards, "Notes on Belief-Problems for T.S.E.," 6.

¹⁰ Ibid. at 5. Edmund Husserl infrequently designated certain phenomenological activities as "introspection." Cf.: Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, vol. 2 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1989), 98. Daniel Dennett, looking back on phenomenological philosophy, has broadly famously categorized the entire tradition as "introspection." Dennett, *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 154.

¹¹ Russell, Russell, "On Propositions: What They Are and How They Mean," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1919), 25-6.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ There will be much more to come on Russell's theory of descriptions as set forth in his 1905 essay: "On Denoting," *Mind* 14.56 (October 1905).

¹⁴ Richards had paid close attention to Husserl's philosophy since the early 1920s. Cf. his and C.K. Ogden's leading entry on Husserl in the important "Appendix D" in: *The Meaning of Meaning* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1923), 269-272.

¹⁵ Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, vol. 1 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983), 166-167.

¹⁶ Ibid. at 312.

¹⁷ Husserl, *Cartesian Mediations* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 50.

¹⁸ C.K. Ogden, *Basic English: A General Introduction with Rules and Grammar* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1932).

¹⁹ Ogden and Richards, 186-187

²⁰ Ibid. at 6.

²¹ Richards twice repeats his idea that a "semantics of belief-synonyms" would be the logical next step, even writing out the idea on the left-facing page of the notes, which otherwise is blank. Ibid. at 7.

²² "If, as phenomenologists, we exclude all our positings, the volitional phenomenon, as a phenomenologically pure intentive mental process, still retains its 'willed as willed,' as a *noema belonging peculiarly to the willing: the 'volition-meaning,'* precisely as it is a 'meaning' in this willing ... We said, 'the meaning.' This word suggests itself in all these contexts, just as do the words 'sense' and 'signification.' To the *meaning* [*Meinen*] or intending to [*Vermeinen*], then, corresponds the meant [*Meinung*]; to *signifying*, the *signification*." Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, vol. 1, 233. As far as the term "semantic" (*semantisch*) itself, Husserl made no use of it in *Ideas*, but it plays a prominent role in the much earlier *Logical Investigations*, where Husserl uses it to identify the "universal" aspect of language's meaning, as opposed to the contextual aspects of its meaning. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, vol. 1 (New York: Routledge, 1970), 219. C.K. Ogden and Richards reject this usage, and its concomitant translation into a broader theory of linguistic meaningfulness, in their entry on Husserl in the "Appendix D" to *The Meaning of Meaning* (269-272).

²³ On *meinen* and *vermeinen*, cf. fn. 16. Notice also, in the first quote in that note, how meaning resides partially between a kind of conscious essence and a signification signature: it functions

concurrently within conscious and with linguistic realms. Less often, Husserl will use the verb “*intendieren*.”

²⁴ The term “linguistics” itself first rose to prominence in middle to late 19th-century discourses, though it has Germanic and French origins dating to the late 18th century. Of course, the study of language pre-dates the term linguistics in the study of philology, a term that originates in the early decades of the 18th century. It bears noting that the break between philology and linguistics was by no means clean. Friedrich Nietzsche, for one, continued to refer to himself as a philologist (even an “old philologist,” or *alte Philologe*) until his death in 1900, though he was trained at Leipzig, where Saussure also studied, in the 1860s, by many key figures in the procreation and dissemination of the early linguistic sciences (*Sprachwissenschaft*). Cf. *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 30.

²⁵ Michel Bréal, *Semantics: Studies in the Science of Meaning* (London: William Heinemann, 1900), 8.

²⁶ The focus here, for time’s sake, will remain on semantics. However, other philosophies and linguistic subfields on the subject of meaning, at the time, also professed similar goals. Lady Welby’s signification would be a good example, in which the study of meaning is specifically cast as a “scientific” task. Cf. Victoria, Lady Welby, *What is Meaning?: Studies in the Development of Significance* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1903), *passim*. Charles Sanders Peirce, especially in his later work, went even further than Welby, by claiming not just that semiotics is scientific but that science is semiotic, or founded on a theory of signs. Cf.: “An Outline Classification of the Sciences,” in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 2 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 258-262.

²⁷ Cf. Bréal’s opening chapters detailing “the intellectual laws of language”: Bréal, 11-38.

²⁸ Richards, “Notes on Belief-Problems for T.S.E.,” 6. Richards means “indeterminacy” to harmonize with that word’s usage in contemporaneous science, as in Werner Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle.

²⁹ Edward Sapir, “The Problem of Noun Incorporation in American Language,” *American Anthropologist*, 13, 2 (April-June 1911), 250-282.

³⁰ Otto Jespersen, *Articulations of Speech Sounds Represented by Means of Alphabetic Symbols* (Marburg: N.G. Elwert, 1889).

³¹ “Likewise *synchrony* and *diachrony* will designate respectively a linguistic state and a phase of evolution.” Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (Peru, Illinois: Open Court, 1998), 81. Saussure puts forward the novel opinion that late 19th-century and early 20th-century linguists have spilled too much ink on diachronic processes, ignoring all the while synchronic manifestations of language as a static entity in present usage.

³² Bréal, 99ff.

³³ Ogden and Richards, 2, 32.

³⁴ Bréal quoted in Ogden and Richards, 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.* at 102.

³⁶ Plato, *Cratylus*, in *Complete Works* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1997), 109, 103. For Bréal’s discussion of *Cratylus*, cf. the end of his section “How Names are Given to Things,” 172-177. In *The Meaning of Meaning*, C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards view the discussion of meaning in *Cratylus* as having serious connotations for modern semantics. They write that: “It is ...

unfortunate that the dialogue, *The Cratylus*, in which [Plato's] views on language are set forth, should have been so neglected in modern times." Ogden and Richards, 33.

³⁷ Bréal, 103.

³⁸ Russell, "The Mastery of Words," *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, vol. 9 (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 135.

³⁹

⁴⁰ Saussure, 82.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Plato, *Cratylus*, 103.

⁴³ Saussure, 89-90.

⁴⁴ Roman Jakobson, "Language in Operation," in *Language in Literature* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1990), 58-59.

⁴⁵ Ogden's annotations to Russell review are in: Russell, "The Meaning of Meaning," *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, vol. 9 (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), n520.

⁴⁶ Russell, "The Meaning of Meaning," 138-9; Alfred Sidgwick, "Statements and Meaning," *Mind*, 30, 119 (July 1921), 285.

⁴⁷ Cf. certain passages from his 1905 essay "The Nature of Truth," in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, vol. 4 (New York: Routledge, 1994), 504-505

⁴⁸ H.H. Joachim, *The Nature of Truth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), 148.

⁴⁹ Moritz Schlick, "Meaning and Verification," *The Philosophical Review* 45.4

⁵⁰ Ogden and Richards, 14. On the history and varieties of correspondence theories, cf.: Gerald Vision, *Veritas: The Correspondence Theory and Its Critics* (Cambridge: MIT University Press, 2004).

⁵¹ Russell, "Belief," in *The Analysis of Mind*, 231-252 (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1921), 231.

⁵² Richards, "Notes on Belief-Problems for T.S.E.," 6.

⁵³ "If we now replace one word of the sentence by another having the same reference, but a different sense, this can have no bearing upon the reference of the sentence. Yet we can see that in such a case the thought changes; since, e.g., the thought in the sentence 'The morning star is a body illuminated by the Sun' differs from that in the sentence 'The evening star is a body illuminated by the Sun.' Anybody who did not know that the evening star is the morning star might hold the one thought to be true, the other false. The thought, accordingly, cannot be the reference of the sentence, but must rather be considered as the sense. What is the position now with regard to the reference? Have we a right even to inquire about it? Is it possible that a sentence as a whole has only a sense, but no reference? At any rate, one might expect that such sentences occur, just as there are parts of sentences having sense but no reference." Gottlob Frege, "On Sense and Reference," in *Meaning and Reference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 28.

⁵⁴ Russell has his own homebrewed vocabulary that I will take pains to align with the lexicon that most other philosophers of meaning at the time were using. This can lead to some clunky phrasing, but it is crucial to be clear about how Russell's ideas fit with Frege's, etc.

⁵⁵ Russell conceives of two paths to meaning. One is through a sense-data theory: through our impressions of the world as taken in by our sense organs. The other he defines as description,

which indicates a method of reaching meaning through constructing networks of denoting phrases: “For example, we know that the centre of mass of the Solar System at a definite instant is some definite point, and we can affirm a number of propositions about it; but we have no immediate *acquaintance* with this point, which is only known to us by description. The distinction between *acquaintance* and *knowledge about* is the distinction between the things we have presentations of, and the things we only reach by means of denoting phrases” (479). Cf. also: Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 117.

⁵⁶ Cf.: “This is the principle of the theory of denoting I wish to advocate: that denoting phrases never have any meaning in themselves, but that every proposition in whose verbal expression they occur has a meaning.” Cf. also: “A denoting phrase is essentially *part* of a sentence, and does not, like most single words, have any significance on its own account.” Russell, “On Denoting,” 480, 488. Ogden and Richards were clear that they perceived a connection between Russell’s and Frege’s ideas, writing that: “The distinction which Frege makes between meaning (*Sinn*) and indication (*Bedeutung*) is roughly, though not exactly, equivalent to Mr Russell’s distinction between a concept as such and what the concept denotes” (274).

⁵⁷ Ferdinand Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (Peru, Illinois: Open Court Publishing, 1983); Jonathan Culler, in his book on Saussure, provides a good example of how Saussure’s semantic coherentism works when he describes how a pupil learns what “brown” is: “However many brown objects we may show him, our pupil will not know the meaning of *brown*, and will not be able to pass our test, until we have taught him to distinguish between brown and red, brown and tan, brown and gray, brown and yellow, brown and black ... And the reason for this is that ‘brown’ is not an independent concept defined by some essential properties but one term in a system of color terms, defined by its relations with the other terms which delimit it. Jonathan Culler, *Ferdinand de Saussure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), 35.

⁵⁸ Michael Potter has noted that Wittgenstein “struggled” with certain very early (pre-*Tractatus*) impulses towards correspondentism. Potter goes on to illustrate how Wittgenstein resoundingly objects to this impulse in *Tractatus*, and that he mollifies this objection slightly in his later work, though the ratio of logical abstraction to intentional psychology in his thinking on epistemology may shift across different sets of notes. Michael Potter, *Wittgenstein’s Notes on Logic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 219.

⁵⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. F.P. Ramsey and C.K. Ogden (Routledge: New York, 1922), 2.063, 1.1, 1.13.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* at 2.12, 2.1.

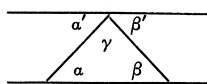
⁶¹ The way language functions in relation to reality in the *Tractatus*—how language moves alongside or parallels the world with identifying with it or corresponding to it directly—is quite similar to David Chalmers’s reading of human consciousness as paralleling physical facts, yet not directly identifying with them. He terms this process of running parallel without identification “supervenience.” Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), *passim*.

⁶² Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914~1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 30e.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ In *The Blue Book* (68), Wittgenstein presents something like a companion to this intersection model, revising it into a coherentist as opposed to a correspondentist diagram:



In the original model/reality diagram, Wittgenstein demonstrates the failure of a direct correspondence between a mind's intention to mean something and the realization of that meaning as being the case based on the facticity of the world. In such an enterprise, Wittgenstein shows, there will always be some gap between the intended meaning (“*a*,” with the quotes emphasizing the propositionality of the model, or in other words its basis in language) and the meaning in fact (*a*), as the model's intentionality, flying blind, strikes the world at a point (*x*) close to, but never assuredly directly correspondent with, the objective match for the meaning as intended. In the modification of that early diagram, Wittgenstein replaces the correspondentist line with a coherentist triangle. Imagine in this diagram that, like in the diagram on the right, the top line represents reality and the bottom a mind's propositional model of that reality (statements of belief about how and what certain things mean—we are really skirting along a border between epistemology and semantics now). Rather than asserting a direct correspondence between the mind and the world, or the model and reality, the triangle allows for degrees of coherence based on rudimentary geometric principles, which indirectly come to guarantee or assert meaningfulness. Thus, in the diagram on the left, α and α' designate angles that are equivalent, because the parallel lines assure that the segments of the triangle meet at a precisely mirrored orientation; β and β' match in the same way. The indirect matches between the angles at the triangle's apex and the angles at the triangle's base replace the attempt—inevitably doomed—at a direct correspondence between the two parallel lines.

⁶⁶ Most of *The Meaning of Meaning* appeared as a series of essays published in Ogden's *Cambridge Magazine* starting in the summer of 1920. The book was contracted in 1921 and worked on by Richards in tandem with *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924). The book, as originally published, was 544 pages, nearly a third as long as subsequent editions. Cf.: John Paul Russo, *I.A. Richards: His Life and Work* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 114; on the *Cambridge Magazine* pieces, cf.: Richards, “Letter to Mary Anne Richards, 1 December 1920,” *Selected Letters of I.A. Richards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 25.

⁶⁷ Ogden and Richards, 12.

⁶⁸ Russo, 113.

⁶⁹ And, in fact, Ogden and Richards roundly critiqued Saussure and Wittgenstein, as well as Frege and Russell, at different points throughout the book. Cf. 5n, 89, 161-162.

⁷⁰ Cf. the section entitled “The failure of Semantics,” beginning on page 2.

⁷¹ This turn to empiricism takes its most literal form in *The Meaning of Meaning* in the frequent anthropological points about the function of meaning in a variety of different languages and cultures; it was precisely this anchor in anthropological observation that Ogden and Richards admired about Bréal's semantics. I will not focus on the anthropological side of Ogden and Richards's arguments, which likely stemmed from Ogden, who went on to work on technical linguistic projects with a sociological, anthropological, practical bent, like Basic English. Russo, for one, confirms that the book's “theoretical orientation” came from Richards, while its parts on “the history of language and social science” came from Ogden. Russo, 97.

⁷² Ogden and Richards, 6, 9.

⁷³ Cf. fn. 4 on the different senses of “crossing” and “feeling.”

⁷⁴ Russo, 113.

⁷⁵ The Münchhausen trilemma is an ancient problem in epistemology centered around a fable in which the Baron von Münchhausen pulls himself out of a swamp by yanking upward on his own hair. The trilemma arises whenever we ask “how do I know something to be true” or “how do I prove that something is true?” To make it applicable to semantics, simply alter the questions to say “how do I know that something means *this*” or “how is something meant?” The trilemma asserts that there are only three recourses for answering such questions, each equally unsatisfactory. The first is to provide a series of proofs or evidences of the meaning that has been claimed; the proofs and evidences will then require further proofs and evidences. An infinite regress, which is what I am calling *mise en abyme*. The second is to provide an explanation of some claim for meaning in terms already present in what is being explained, as in “to be a cheater means to cheat.” The presence of “cheat” on both sides of the meaning equation creates a self-referential circle. This is what I am calling *uroboros*. The third is to assert an ontological rock-bottom for claims of meaning by identifying certain definitional axioms: atomic units of *a priori* meaning that do not themselves need any further semantic guarantees for their own meaningfulness. As detailed next, this third option plays out in the uses of “of” in the title and subtitle of Ogden and Richards’s book.

⁷⁶ F.C.S. Schiller, H.H. Joachim, and Bertrand Russell, “The Meaning of ‘Meaning’: A Symposium,” *Mind*, 29, 116 (October 1920), 385-414. Russell, “On Propositions: What They Are and How They Mean.” The *Mind* symposium continues to receive responses and counter-responses, both from its original contributors and from new ones, for years after the October 1920 publication of the original papers.

⁷⁷ Russell, “On Propositions: What They Are and How They Mean,” 24-36. H.H. Joachim, “The Meaning of ‘Meaning’: A Symposium,” 405.

⁷⁸ Ogden and Richards, 134, 160.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* at 11.

⁸⁰ Russell, “The Mastery of Words,” 136.

⁸¹ Behaviorism begins, at this point, to rear its head. For a good account of the behaviorist underpinnings of *The Meaning of Meaning*, cf.: David West, *I. A. Richards and the Rise of Cognitive Stylistics* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 65-67. It is worth noting, on this score, that this period of semantic analysis (approximately 1919-1923) saw many other philosophers of meaning charged with behaviorism, as these philosophers struggled to devise new semantic theories that transcended both correspondentism and pragmatism. Cf. also: Richard F. Kitchener, “Bertrand Russell’s Flirtation with Behaviorism,” *Behavior and Philosophy*, 32, 2 (2004), 273-291.

⁸² Ogden and Richards, 56.

⁸³ *Ibid.* at 293; Wittgenstein, in describing his diagram of reality and “model” also refers to the gap between “x” and “a” as “mysterious” (30e).

⁸⁴ On this point, it is worth mentioning Erich Auerbach’s “Figura,” wherein interpretive practices are intimately tied to modes of figuration. Auerbach, “Figura,” in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 11-78.

⁸⁵ It is, of course, impossible to make this point without recalling Richards's concept of pseudo-statement.

⁸⁶ On this score, the pragmatist might offer a simple test for meaning: does the dog get fed in the present case of feeding? But this approaches meaning in reverse, as a quality of something that has already happened. It is much easier to distribute meaningfulness when looking back on past experience, even in the very near past.

⁸⁷ Russell, *The Analysis of Mind* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1921). Russell, "The Meaning of Meaning," 141. John B. Watson, "[Review of] *The Analysis of Mind*," *Dial*, 72 (1922) 97-102.

⁸⁸ Skinner is quoted in: W. Scott Wood, "Introductory Comments," *Journal of Experimental Analysis of Behavior*, 45 (1986), 107.

⁸⁹ Umberto Eco's introduction to: Ogden and Richards, v.

⁹⁰ Richards, *Mencius on the Mind* (Westport: Hyperion Press, 1964), 96.

⁹¹ Cleanth Brooks, "Implications of an Organic Theory of Poetry," in *Literature and Belief* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 53-79.

⁹² Richards, *Practical Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935), 289.

⁹³ Richards, *Coleridge on Imagination* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1934), 51.

⁹⁴ For one thing, he studied under Russell—and had tempestuous personal relations with him—between 1910 and 1920. Lyndall Gordon, *T.S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 71, 120, 123. He also, of course, studied the British Idealists, namely F.H. Bradley, who was one of the points of origination for metaphysical theories of coherence, theories that ultimately translated into epistemic and semantic coherentisms.

⁹⁵ Richards, inspired by Eliot's poetry, apparently sought him out for a brief interaction in a bank in 1920: Russo, 273; Eliot, "To I. A. Richards 19 January 1926," in *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, vol. 3 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 37, 49, 62, 96; Gordon, *T.S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 221.

⁹⁶ Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1924), 197n; *Science and Poetry* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1926), 91. Richards also wrote a short, glowing essay on Eliot's poetry in 1926: Richards, "The Poetry of T.S. Eliot," *The Living Age* (April 1926), 112-114.

⁹⁷ Eliot, *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, vol. 3, 399, 414.

⁹⁸ Eliot wrote in a letter in 1925 that: "I have read some of the chapters of Richards' book [*Principles of Literary Criticism*], but cannot read very much yet. I found it hard going; it is badly organized, and I find that uncoordinated short chapters very boring" (*The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, vol. 2, 589). He followed up publicly on that sentiment in a review of *Science and Poetry* for *The Dial* in March 1927, wherein he described it as "a milestone, though not an altogether satisfactory one ... Mr Richards had difficult things to say, and he had not wholly mastered the art of saying them" (Eliot, "Literature, Science, and Dogma," *The Dial*, 82, 3 (March 1927), 239). Richards never returned a public salvo for the criticism, but he did write the following at the end of his copy of *Ezra Pound: Selected Poems*, which Eliot edited and introduced: "Must 'come out' about Eliot's *prose*. His unfortunate inability to comprehend what he is implying; what he must be taken as intending to assume ... these things I am persuaded are not in Mr Eliot's mind

so much as in his *prose style*” (Richards quoted in: Constable, 223). Constable points to another bit of marginalia in Richards’s copy of Eliot’s *Homage to John Dryden*, wherein Richards writes that: “One has to forgive T.S.E. a good deal *per page* of his *prose*” (Constable, 224).

⁹⁹ Constable, 227.

¹⁰⁰ Eliot quoted in Constable, 233.

¹⁰¹ Perhaps Eliot’s longest sustained mediation on something like the grammar of belief, in the specific context of his religious beliefs, is his essay “Religion and Literature,” in *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot* (New York: Mariner Books, 1975), 97-106. This essay has sponsored some very general categorizations of Eliot’s and Richards’s approaches to poetry, such as R.P. Blackmur’s claim that: “Richards took instinctively to the twinning of science and poetry, Eliot twinned poetry and religion.” Cf.: Blackmur, “In the Hope of Straightening Things Out,” *The Kenyon Review*, 13, 2 (Spring 1951), 309. I don’t think either can be so easily placed in relation to a dyad. In general, in this chapter I am more interested in Eliot’s theorization of a more general concept of what belief could be than of what he wrote about his own personal beliefs, or his relation to religion. Belief is a term that becomes problematic for modernists not because of its relations to religiosity, but because it had such a wide variety of usages in different contexts, each of which was help in a tension with relation to every other.

¹⁰² There is, of course, a huge literature on this subject—the so-called “death of God” and the 20th century’s “disenchanted” turn away from religion to science—to which I have no intention of contributing in any broad sense. Two very recent books on the subject do a good job of explaining the stakes of this particular seachange for western culture: Peter Watson, *The Age of Atheists* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014); Terry Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014). The most seminal, recent study of the subject is: Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2007). Much recent work on this subject has sought to trouble the typical narrative of disenchantment. One example would be Michael Lackey’s book on how modern fascism exploited essentially theological platforms of belief to generate the fullest commitment of their citizens: Lackey, *The Modernist God State* (New York: Continuum, 2012).

¹⁰³ Eliot, “A Note on Poetry and Belief,” *The Enemy: A Review of Art and Literature*, 1 (January 1927), 15.

¹⁰⁴ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 143.

¹⁰⁵ Brooks, 77. Matthew Arnold, “The Study of Poetry,” in *Essays in Criticism: Second Series* (London, 1921), 3.

¹⁰⁶ Richards, “Notes on Belief-Problems for T.S.E.”

¹⁰⁷ Richards, *Science and Poetry*, 2nd ed. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, Ltd., 1935), 65.

¹⁰⁸ William Empson, “Emotions in Words Again,” *The Kenyon Review*, 10, 4 (Autumn 1948), 590.

¹⁰⁹ René Wellek, “Philosophy and Postwar American Criticism,” *Comparative Literature Studies* (1963), 5.

¹¹⁰ Richards, *Science and Poetry*, 66.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* at 65.

¹¹² There is an issue, of course, with the prefix “pseudo,” which seems to imply something lesser than a fully-realized statement. Apparently, as Richards reveals in a letter, Eliot thought it “a

pity” that Richards had called them pseudo-statements, a sentiment with which Richards, at least in his exchange with Eliot, agreed. He suggests “myth” as another possible term, but points out that this too will have a negative connotation. Helen Vendler, agreeing that “it is unfortunate” that the term pseudo-statement “was widely misunderstood” as negative, points out that Richards meant the term scientifically, as in “pseudopod.” For Richards quotes, cf.: Constable, 228; Vendler, “Teaching I: I. A. Richards,” *The American Scholar*, 49, 4 (Autumn 1980), 503.

¹¹³ Richards, *Science and Poetry*, 66-67.

¹¹⁴ Blackmur, 309.

¹¹⁵ Richards, “Notes on Belief-Problems for T.S.E.,” 6.

¹¹⁶ This is tied up with Richards’s thinking on what might be called, to use Max Weber’s term, the “disenchantment” of the world. Eliot took Richards to task on this issue in his review of *Science and Poetry*, where he wrote: “I do not suppose that he imagines that Homer believed in the ‘historicity’ of all the monkey-shines of the Olympian troupe; and Ovid, who rather specialized in anecdotes of divinities, could hardly be cited as an example of Roman fundamentalism ... what right have we to assert what Dante believed, or *how* he believed it? Did he believe in the Summa as St Thomas believed in it, and did even St Thomas believe in it as M Maritain does? And how dependent is Dante upon the ‘magical view of nature’?” (Eliot, “Literature, Science, and Dogma,” 239). A very similar critique appears in Eliot’s short essay “A Note on Poetry and Belief”: “The point at which I disagree with Mr. Richards is this ... He speaks as if, up to a certain moment, perhaps about sixty years ago, the world had lain dreaming placidly in religious faith, and had then waked suddenly (perhaps hit by the ‘snowball of science’ of which he speaks) ... It would be rash to say that the *belief* of Christina Rossetti was not as strong as Crashaw, or that of Crashaw as strong as that of Dante” (16). Part of Eliot’s frustration likely comes from the primal view Richards had of religion, which he attached to superstition and a “Magical View” of the world filled with “Spirits and Powers.” For Richards, a religious worldview seemed to have been specifically pantheistic. Cf.: Richards, “A Background for Contemporary Poetry,” *The Criterion*, III, 12 (July 1925), 511-528. This idea of “magic” would likely have doubly annoyed Eliot because it became, between roughly 1925 and 1933, somewhat associated with poetry. A good example would be Wyndham Lewis’s “Pure Poetry and Pure Magic,” which first appeared in a volume of *The Enemy* to which Eliot also contributed his essay “A Note on Poetry and Belief,” quoted above, which was intended as a response to the Richards’s essay about the so-called “Magical View.” This was also the essay in which Richards claimed that Eliot’s *The Waste Land* had effected “a complete severance between his poetry and *all* beliefs,” a distinction that was meant to position Eliot as the most modern, or least magical, of poets (Richards, 520n). This comes a couple years before Eliot’s conversion, but nonetheless at a time when religion would have been enough on Eliot’s mind that such a distinction would have felt as unfortunate to him as that of a “magical” poet, as his response to Richards ultimately makes clear.

¹¹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, “Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” in *Philosophy and Truth*, Daniel Breazeale, ed. (New York: Humanity Books, 1993), 84.

¹¹⁸ Eliot, “Literature, Science, and Dogma,” 239.

¹¹⁹ Eliot quoted in: Constable, 227.

¹²⁰ Richard, *Selected Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 96.

¹²¹ Walter Benn Michaels, "Saving the Text: Reference and Belief," *MLN*, 93, 5 (December 1978), 790.

¹²² John Paul Riquelme finds something similar not just in Eliot's definition of belief but, indeed, throughout all his poetry, which he claims displaces "voice" for "style." Style by itself brooks no object, purpose, or function: it is language that exists not just as grammar but for grammar. The structure of style's presentation is all that is left. It is not instrumental, and it is not functional. It is a relation without the need of relating anything. Cf.: Riquelme, *Harmony of Dissonances: T. S. Eliot, Romanticism, and Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 78. Cf. also Sharon Cameron's criticism of Riquelme's reading in: Cameron, *Impersonality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 233n.

¹²³ Eliot, "Literature, Science, and Dogma," 239.

¹²⁴ Richards, "What is Belief," in *Poetries: Their Media and Ends* (The Hague: Mouton De Gruyter, 1974), 240. Note that Richards and Eliot have different reasons for their very brief flirtations with nihilism. Eliot's most likely emerges out of honest confusion over Richards's terms; it likely serves a rhetorical purpose. Richards sometimes moves to discard belief altogether because he feels that it cannot ultimately be separated from doctrines of superstition: the taint of religion. Without clarity about what kind of belief is being used in any given circumstance, Richards would (sometimes) rather throw out the baby with the bathwater, so to speak, than have non-rigorous utterances of semi-theological beliefs occur in scientific contexts, and scientific beliefs infect non-scientific arenas, like religion and art.

¹²⁵ Richards, *On Science and Poetry*, 66n.

¹²⁶ Richards, "Notes on Belief-Problems for T.S.E.," 4.

¹²⁷ Richards, *Complementarities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 31.

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