

Magdalena Sawa

ORCID: 0000-0002-0410-1832

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin
sawka@kul.lublin.pl

“You and I”: The Fragmentation of the Writing Self and the Tradition of Modernism in T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and Gabriel Josipovici’s *Moo Pak*

Abstract: This article undertakes as its subject the parodic relation between Gabriel Josipovici’s novel *Moo Pak* and T.S. Eliot’s debut and most famous poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” Rewriting “Prufrock” into a new reality and a fictional mode becomes an occasion for Josipovici to question Eliot’s “Impersonal theory of poetry” and advance his own dialectical vision of the creative process as well as his Modernist aesthetics. Josipovici’s reinterpretation of Eliot’s youthful masterpiece shows both works as stories of artistic creation illustrating their authors’ critical convictions.

Keywords: T.S. Eliot, “Impersonal theory of poetry,” “Prufrock,” G. Josipovici, *Moo Pak*, Modernism

1. Introduction

T.S. Eliot was one of the most influential men of letters in the twentieth century. Already in 1964 Hugh Kenner noted that “scholarship has barely omitted to scrutinize a line” (ix) of Eliot’s poetic output while his critical thought set new standards of literary analysis within New Criticism. Assigned to the position of a classic in his own lifetime, Eliot was in danger of “becoming simply another monument, frozen in a fixed idea of his achievement” (Moody 1994: xiii). This, however, never really happened due to the peculiar quality of his art, criticism as well as private life which all eschew elucidation. Inspiring, ambiguous, and at times impenetrable, Eliot’s words still excite interest and critical reaction. This article purports to study

Gabriel Josipovici's novel *Moo Pak* as a contemporary parodic transformation of Eliot's debut and most famous poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." By rewriting "Prufrock" into a new reality and a fictional mode, Josipovici complies with Eliot's prescription for good poetry, according to which "Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different" (Eliot 1921: 114). An accomplished British writer, playwright and literary critic as well as an unflinching advocate of Modernist cause, Josipovici does use the original, monologic structure of *Moo Pak* to pursue his own goals. While interrogating Eliot's assumptions concerning the idea of impersonal poetry, he lays bare the predicaments of the Modernist writing self as well as his own aesthetics.

2. Josipovici's dialectical method

Josipovici's views on Modernism developed gradually in *The Lessons of Modernism* (1977, 1987), *Writing and the Body* (1982) and *On Trust: Art and the Temptation of Suspicion* (1999) until they finally crystallized in *What Ever Happened to Modernism?* (2010), where in between the lines of a systematic discussion of Modernism Josipovici laments the fact that Modernist achievements have so soon passed into oblivion and that contemporary literary practice bears no trace of their grandiosity and insight. In all Josipovici's critical studies Eliot's poetry is frequently evoked to corroborate the author's arguments. It seems, however, that Josipovici's attitude towards Eliot's output follows Harold Bloom's pattern: "One can fight a long war against T.S. Eliot's criticism and still confess a lifelong fascination with his best poems" (Bloom 2011: 1). In the preface to *The Lessons of Modernism* Josipovici formulates his aim in reaction to Eliot's "Impersonal theory of poetry" elucidated in the seminal essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and pronounced there in the form of such radical statements as the following: "The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (Eliot 1921: 47) or "[T]he more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates" (48). For all its definiteness, the "most commented-on essay in English in the 20th century" (Good 1988: 137) is perceived as "not the most accessible" (Atkins 2010: 49) and the idea of impersonality as ambiguous (Salingar 1996: 448). This is mainly due to the fact that such asseverations as "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of *personality*, but an escape from *personality*" (Eliot 1921: 52–53) are immediately followed by a comment which puts in doubt what was previously so forcefully asserted: "But, of course, *only those who have personality* and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things" (53). As James E. Miller Jr. aptly notices, to contend that poetry provides an escape from personality is equivalent to admitting that personality plays a significant, though

hidden, role in its composition (2005: 5). In a more radical commentary, Graham Good accuses Eliot’s critical text of being too personal and autobiographical: “The whole essay is a personal confession disguised as impersonal doctrine. It is a piece of ventriloquy: the suffering poet speaks through the mouth of the doctrinal critic, impersonating his impersonality” (139). Eliot himself softened his stance with time, calling “Tradition and the Individual Talent” “the most juvenile” (1980: 9) of his essays and “a product of immaturity” (10). Notwithstanding its occasional “unsatisfactory phrasing” (Eliot 1934: 15) and aesthetic idealism, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” remained a programmatic essay for Modernism and shaped critical tastes for years to come. Predicated upon Browning’s tradition of authorial detachment from the speaking persona in dramatic monologues, Eliot’s critical thought and poetic practice established objectivism as a literary standard.

The emergence of Eliot’s depersonalized vision of the creative process is commonly viewed by critics as “an anti-subjectivist reaction to Wordsworth’s emphasis on an emotional response to an experience” (Badenhausen 2004: 40). Since, however, in his seminal study *What Ever Happened to Modernism?* Josipovici includes Wordsworth in a group of early artists whose works voice grave Modernist concerns, he would not probably subscribe fully to Bloom’s conviction that Eliot’s procedure is to refute this Romantic poet (2011: 107). Josipovici seeks main reasons for Eliot’s radicalism in the evolution of the notion of the self which since the seventeenth century was invariably construed in the Western culture as autonomous, integral and continuous (Brown 1989: 2) until Modernist thinking exposed its decentered and inherently fragmentary nature. There is a clear ironic undertow in Josipovici’s elucidation of the post-Renaissance idealism: “The self is seen as a stronghold, clearly bounded, well defended by powerful walls, buttressed by possessions. When the self thinks, it looks inwards, shutting out the confusions of the great world beyond the fortress in order to focus more clearly on what goes on within. If the self is an artist it signs what it makes and identifies it both as possession and as his gift to the world” (1987: x). Inasmuch as Josipovici perceives the development of Eliot’s impersonal theory of poetry as a natural reaction to this utopian image of the self, which the Modernists must have seen as “philistine, bourgeois, repressive and self-indulgent” (Josipovici 1987: x), he does not deem depersonalization possible and even calls it “another kind of romantic dream” (1987: x). His view of the creative process is a dialectical one: “The truth is that there is a constant dialectic between the pain and fear occasioned by the shedding of the self and the pleasure to be had in the making of what is other than the self” (xi). Further in *The Lessons of Modernism* Josipovici clarifies his standpoint in the following words:

Unless we recognise that there is a dialectic at work here, that poem and writer are not two separate entities, though they are not one [...] we are likely to fall into the trap of reading literature as though it consisted merely of aesthetic objects created for our disinterested contemplation. Whereas what distinguishes the writers I have mentioned is the doggedness of their pursuit not of beauty but of truth. (27)

Apart from reinforcing the claim that the creative process involves dialectic balancing between the author and her work, this quotation clearly indicates that the nature of the creative process affects the ultimate artistic product. This holds true for Modernist art which invariably entails a constant dialectic between silence and game, where silence pertains to the fallibility of language in representing reality and thus futility of all expression whereas game refers to the recognition of the arbitrariness of artistic creation and its exploratory potential. This Modernist aesthetics developed by Josipovici in reaction to the life and art of such great Modernists as Proust, Kafka or Pessoa became also his own.

Approaching the condition of drama, Josipovici's experimental texts depend mainly on the dynamism of dialogic exchange or, less frequently, long monologic tirades of the protagonists. This formal minimalism serves to underscore the problem of language and its communicative as well as representational unreliability. The majority of Josipovici's novels (and some of his short stories), in which the action is perceived as purely linguistic (Wolf 2014: par. 5), is consistently characterized by inconclusiveness and a pervasive obscurity. Paradoxically, despite the prevalence of speech, voice and dialogue in Josipovici's works, they are unable to yield conclusions, provide solutions or secure communication, being destined thus to epistemological silence. In such a case, the structural and game-like complexity of Josipovici's works becomes a means whereby silence can be transcended and a distant echo of a meaning — "an inscrutable beyond" (Wolf 2014: par. 14) — tentatively suggested. It is worth noting that Josipovici's notion of game is not tantamount to postmodernist playfulness, constant deferral of meaning or even negation of its existence altogether. It corresponds rather to Modernist employment of ambiguity in the style of Kafka: "The authority of his ambiguities absolves life of a *particular* meaning without absolving him of the quest for it" (Hassan 1982: 23). Eliot's critical thinking may also prove useful in expounding Josipovici's logic of silence and game. As a remedy to the dissociation of sensibility, the notion of objective correlative seems to make the best of the separation of thought and feeling. Born in the process of intense intellectual elaboration,¹ a poetic image is supposed to evoke an emotional response. In what may seem to be his own method of overcoming the body/mind split, Josipovici allows his readers to sense a meaning in his complex compositions but never to know it for certain. If Josipovici's prime aim in *The Lessons of Modernism* is to demonstrate "how complex and fraught with ambiguity is the relation between silence and game, and between self and other" (xi), it is nowhere better realized than in *Moo Pak*, a contemporary equivalent of Eliot's youthful masterpiece.

Greatly impressed by the innovative character of "Prufrock," Pound declared that Eliot "modernized himself *on his own*" (qtd. in Mayer 2011: 194) and his first published poem is viewed as reflecting the process. Before its publication in

¹ Some critics consider Eliot's images over-intellectual (Matthiessen 1972: 30).

the June 1915 issue of *Poetry: a Magazine of Verse*, the poem underwent several revisions as a result of which the parenthetical subtitle “Prufrock among Women” was eliminated and the original epigraph taken from Dante’s *Purgatorio* substituted with the *Inferno* quotation. The most drastic alteration, not only in terms of size, concerned the removal of 33 lines out of a 38-line fragment known as “Prufrock’s Pervigilium,” which Eliot added to the original manuscript in 1912 only to delete it later on the advice of his friend and a poet, Conrad Aiken (Miller 2005: 152). An extended description of a night foray into a city, the passage is characterized by strong emotional entanglement as well as the presence of a unified and unself-conscious “I” of the speaking persona (Mayer 2011: 193). While analyzing the relation between this newly discovered section² and the final version of “Prufrock”, Nicholas B. Mayer sees the exclusion of “Pervigilium” as an intentional eradication of the “I” experience and thus as Eliot’s first exercise in depersonalization before the theory was fully formulated in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (194). This observation makes “Prufrock” not only Eliot’s best known poem but also the most consequential one. Drawing upon numerous tensions inherent in what seems to be the epitome of Eliot’s achievement, Josipovici brings to light in *Moo Pak* all that is valid to him in the creative process and his own aesthetics. Furthermore, this little novel can be construed as an early illustration of Josipovici’s views on Modernism (his process of modernization against post-modernist tendencies) fully articulated sixteen years later in *What Ever Happened to Modernism?*

Josipovici’s vision of Modernism is unconventional:

Modernism needs to be understood in a completely different way, as the coming into awareness by art of its precarious status and responsibilities, and therefore as something that will, from now on, always be with us. Seen in this way Modernism [...] becomes a response by artists to that ‘disenchantment of the world’ to which cultural historians have long been drawing our attention. (2010: 11)

As indicated in the definition, Josipovici situates the beginning of Modernism in the distant time of the 16th century. Far from enthusiastic about the Humanist emphasis on the expansion of human capacities and the declarations of the Protestant Reformation to emancipate the European populace from a superstitious understanding of the world, Josipovici conceives of both movements as responsible for the authority crisis which has dominated the artistic imagination ever since. Thus, his interpretation of Albrecht Dürer’s engraving *Melancholia I* (1514) diverges from the commonly accepted one in which melancholy is perceived as the indication of genius. Resigned and dejected, Dürer’s figure is paralyzed not by sleep but by an intense and, as it seems, pointless and unproductive process of thinking:

² “Prufrock’s Pervigilium” was published in 1996 in a collection of Eliot’s early, unpublished drafts *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909–1917*.

For while the desire to create seems to be the most natural thing in the world, something we are all born with, what is it in a world without sure relation to either tradition or authority but a meaningless self-indulgence? (26)

In a similar way, Miguel de Cervantes, whose presence behind the composition of *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615) is never concealed, makes an impression of a solitary individual burdened with a host of decisions for which he cannot find any justification. In Kierkegaard's diagnosis of the modern world, on which Josipovici's understanding of Modernism rests, the 19th century man is viewed as overburdened with anxiety, bred by the abundance of freedom. Examples of artists struggling with the need to write and the feeling that all creation is pointless and arbitrary multiply in Josipovici's study:

What is afflicting Mallarmé, Hoffmannstahl, Kafka and Beckett is the sense that they feel impelled to write, this being the only way they know to be true to their own natures, yet at the same time they find that in doing so they are being false to the world — imposing shape on it and giving it a meaning which it doesn't have — and thus, ultimately, being false to themselves. (72)

This peculiar understanding of Modernism and the nature of Modernist artists' creative impasse informs Josipovici's aesthetics, the dialectical suspension between the ideal and the real, necessity and possibility, silence and game.

3. *Moo Pak* as a parodic transformation of “Prufrock”

Moo Pak is a story of two friends, an elderly writer, Jack Toledano, and his companion, Damien Anderson. During their frequent walks through London parks, Jack shares with Damien his views on a wide array of subjects: the great apes and their relation to man, the nature of language, Swift, madness, death and many others. In the course of reading, it becomes clear that Jack's loquacity is meant to conceal a serious writer's block he suffers from in the process of writing a book on Moor Park, an estate embodying, as we learn, an exceptionally rich history. The building used to be the home of Sir William Temple and his secretary Jonathan Swift. Later it housed a lunatic asylum, a code-breaking center during World War II, an institute for the study of primate behavior and a secondary school. As Jack finally abandons what was supposed to be his *magnum opus*, the project comes into existence in the form of Damien's memoir of his meetings with Toledano. Although promoted in the blurb as “a moving tale of friendship”, *Moo Pak* only deludes the reader with its apparent simplicity. In her incisive study of the novel in *Echoes and Mirrorings: Gabriel Josipovici's Creative Oeuvre* — the only monograph of Josipovici's fiction and drama written so far — Monika Fludernik shows her awareness of numerous complexities underlying Josipovici's original composition. It is only towards the

end of her analysis, however, that she shortly entertains the idea of what constitutes the central ambiguity of the novel — its “radical ambivalence of levels of reality” (2000: 88). Fludernik’s suspicions that what is represented in the novel should not be seen as an objective description of an external reality are definitely right. Her idea, however, that what we read in *Moo Pak* can be viewed as a projection of a madman’s mind seems underdeveloped and lacking consistency. Unless we recognize that the image of a madman recurring in Toledano’s reflections — “The man in the white straitjacket hurling himself at the white padded walls of his cell” (Josipovici 1994: 138), the story of a chimpanzee struggling with the imposed gift of language and identity as well as the theme of Swift’s fear of commitment to either of the two beloved women in his life, Stella and Vanessa, are nothing else but metaphoric representations of creative mind’s anguish, Fludernik’s interpretation, merely suggested in her study, can never be justified. A closer inspection of Jack’s ruminations can shed more light on the nature of the ontological ambivalence operating in the novel.

As he himself admits, Jack has many imaginary friends with whom he likes to walk and talk, such as Dante, Stevens, Kafka or Proust: “I can walk with them whenever I want, he says, they always have the time to accompany me, they will never plead a prior engagement or a piece of work that must be finished and they expect nothing in return” (Josipovici 1994: 43). A question arises then whether Damien should not be regarded as one of such fanciful constructions. Furthermore, at one point in the novel Jack fantasizes about what he is going to do once he has brought his great oeuvre to completion:

I can see myself already, he said, walking the streets and parks of London, talking to myself or inventing interlocutors to talk to, charming deferential people who listen and ask and show an interest, or sitting at my desk and writing about our walks and talks because I can no longer make anything that will stand up. (Josipovici 1994: 134)

What he visualizes resembles closely the situation in *Moo Pak*. Finally, it is interesting to analyze certain textual features of the book. It opens with the following sentence: “On Tuesday I received a note from Jack Toledano asking me to meet him today at the Star and Garter in Putney at the usual time, wrote Damien Anderson” (Josipovici 1994: 9). What makes this introduction quite peculiar is the fact that Damien’s discourse, which is supposed to be the framing narrative, is subordinate to the perspective of some extradiegetic narrator (“wrote Damien Anderson”). Moreover, the initial “I” easily yields to the dominating personality of Jack Toledano whose observations on virtually anything are faithfully quoted by Damien in the form of unadorned “he said.” It is not until the very end of the book that the situation changes again with Damien resuming the “I” position, necessarily accompanied by “he wrote.” Eventually, the discourse becomes so palimpsestic that the reference for both pronouns seems fluid and interchangeable: “I had known, I think, he wrote [...]” (Josipovici 1994: 150). The interpretative alternative which

unfolds as the book nears the end is that Jack and Damien are two aspects of a single consciousness and that Damien's narratorial commentaries are subordinate to Jack's overarching discourse. What further supports such an interpretation is the book's peculiar structure. Unlike Josipovici's other novels in which the action hinges upon neat and clearly delineated dialogues, this one, devoid of chapters, paragraphs and clear dialogue markers, partakes of stream of consciousness (Jack's imaginary conversations). To make things more complicated, however, this uninterrupted flow of text may as well be considered a faithful rendering of human speech (Damien's account of his meetings with Toledano) and as such a negation of the entirely internal perspective in the novel.

When asked about Prufrock's mysterious companion, Eliot identified him as a friend of presumably male sex (Miller 2005: 5). Yet, at some other occasion, he claimed that "Prufrock was a man of about forty, and in part himself, and that he was using the theory of the split personality" (Donoghue 2011: 99–100). It seems thus that both Eliot's "Prufrock" and Josipovici's *Moo Pak* owe their attractiveness to the central ambiguity of the internal and external perspective, to the creation of a memorable image of a compulsive walker, trudging along the city, solitary and perplexed by his own ineptitude and advanced age. Inasmuch as the phrase "in part himself" may, and actually did, intensify speculations about how much of Eliot's life actually permeated into his own verse, Josipovici is quite explicit about his involvement in the creation of *Moo Pak*. Apart from numerous biographical details which abound in the novel, the imposition of some higher consciousness on Damien's discourse ("wrote Damien Anderson") may as well point to an extratextual control of the real author. Bearing in mind, however, that "poem and writer are not two separate entities, though they are not one," Josipovici consistently frustrates the reader's desire to read the book as an autobiography by providing false information (resigning from the post of a University lecturer or having children).

Critical speculations aside, Eliot's advocacy for depersonalization and objective detachment is clearly visible already in the title of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," where the romantic emotional effusion is sharply contrasted with and derided by the dry and unromantic name of the hero. The source of this strange, funny and mysterious name was traced to a furniture shop sign in St-Louis, Eliot's birthplace, though the poet never confirmed that information: "The savor of that act had faded from the memory of the sexagenarian London man of letters who wrote to a mid-century enquirer that his appropriation of the now-famous German surname must have been 'quite unconscious'" (Kenner 1964: 3). The uncertain origin of this weird name invites a linguistic analysis as a result of which "frock" is viewed as corresponding to Prufrock's social stiffness while the fraction "pru" is recognized as a fragmentary spelling or a phonetic indication of the word "prude" and as such an additional emphasis on Prufrock's sexual inhibitions (Miller 2006: 120). On the whole, the juxtaposed elements in the title of "Prufrock" promise light

and ironic entertainment, whereas the very name of the hero, in the style of Victorian dramatic monologues, especially as practiced by Browning and Tennyson, is meant to stress that “the personage is expressly not the author” (Badenhausen 2004: 32).

As for Josipovici’s novel, its title is almost as puzzling as Prufrock’s name. It is also easily amenable to a linguistic dissection whose results closely relate to those discussed above. Just like “frock” in “Prufrock,” the word “moo” is the only meaningful unit in the whole title and as such a humorous reference to the animal world, amply discussed in the book. Actually, *Animal Language* is an alternative title Toledano is considering for his work-in-progress. Eventually, *Moo Pak* turns out to be a misspelling or an amateur phonetic transcription of Moor Park by an illiterate schoolboy. Moor Park (and its disfiguration), as Toledano explains, provides him with what his aesthetics requires: it is a contradiction in terms, a dialectical combination of nature and culture, speech and writing, content and form, or one might want to add, silence and game: “A park is precisely what is not moor, nature, and has become park, civilisation. A moor, he said that day in Epping Forest, is nature without boundaries. A park, on the other hand, is precisely the imposition of boundaries, it makes human what was once natural” (Josipovici 1994: 122). Thus avoiding the alienating and labyrinthine atmosphere of the city as well as the Romantic natural open spaces he prefers to walk London gardens: Hyde Park, Richmond Parks, Kew Gardens, Regent’s Park or the London Zoo.

George Williamson is right when he claims that “The epigraph is never to be ignored in Eliot, for while it is not an essential part of the poem, it conveys hints of the significance or even genesis of the poem” (1955: 58). The passage extracted from Dante’s *Inferno* aptly introduces the problem of the inability to communicate the private hell each of us harbors, and thus the problem which seems to lie at the heart of Prufrock’s torment. “Me cry there,” the words which serve as the epigraph to Josipovici’s novel, show a similar encapsulating power. They were signed, as Toledano explains, by Bertrand Russell at the sight of a photograph of a chimp resisting a bathtub scrub. Referring to the problem of linguistic communication, central to both “Prufrock” and *Moo Pak*, they also try to comment beyond it. Strange as it may seem, this short phrase “Me cry there” and its peculiar chimpanzee grammar is revealing about something essentially human and typically Modernist:

In fact, he said, I am just beginning to understand me cry there and see that it is in fact the central theme of the book [...]. For the curious thing about feeling is that we do not feel here, we feel there, and even when we cry it is more perhaps at the sense of the dispersal of the self which is simply what life is, but which we usually keep from ourselves, than at any one thing, however painful, which has happened to us. As we cry he said we sense our dispersal and crying lets us accede to that dispersal and in crying we learn to accept it and live with it. Dispersal is what I have always written about. But to write is to bring together, so that what we want to do and we do never match up but come into inevitable conflict as soon as we start. (Josipovici 1994: 139)

The dispersal of the self, which Jack Toledano so movingly discusses, relates again to the central ambiguity of both Eliot's and Josipovici's works: the mysterious division of the speaking persona into "You and I," repeated in *Moo Pak* on page 105, when Jack addresses his companion directly. In the long history of "Prufrock's" criticism it has been given various names: dismembered personality (Douglass 2011: xxiii), bifurcated self (Douglass 2011: 4) or homo duplex (Sigg 1989: 77), and emphasized the importance of "Prufrock" as a valuable study of various conflicting aspects of human psyche. Eliot's interest in the problem of the self was encouraged by the influence of the philosophy of William James³ and F.H. Bradley⁴ who responded in their writings to the collapse of self-wholeness as "a normative assumption [...] of most cultural discourse up until the Modernist movement" (Brown 1989, 2). Echoing Eliot's and, in general, Modernist interest in science,⁵ the process can be described as follows:

As the classical atom, which had been the foundation of traditional physics, dissolved into its mysterious parts, so the unitary self, which had been the final hero of post-Renaissance literature, began to dissolve and disintegrate. And just as the new quantum physics evolved its arcane terminology of 'indeterminacy', 'complementarity' and 'uncertainty', so Modernism developed its rarified experimental discourse to map the fragmentary realities of selfhood. (Brown 1989: 6)

The Modernist discourse, poetic or otherwise, chose to represent the disintegration of the Modernist self as intense self-consciousness and self-objectification, whereby the self becomes its own object of study. In his article "Catalyzing Prufrock," already briefly alluded to above, Mayer discusses Eliot's text as a dramatization of this process in the image of Prufrock studying or operating upon his own self — "a patient etherized upon a table." The final stage of this dramatization shows the emergence of Prufrock/Eliot as a poet who overcomes the disparity

³ Josipovici's elucidation of the epigraph "Me cry there" bears close resemblance to a quotation from Alphonse Daudet's *Notes sur la Vie* discussed by William James in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lecture VIII "The Divided Self and the Process of its Unification" (133): "The first time that I perceived that I was two was at the death of my brother Henri, when my father cried out so dramatically, 'He is dead, he is dead!' While my first self wept, my second self thought, 'How truly given was that cry, how fine it would be at the theatre.' I was then fourteen years old (1)."

⁴ Following Donald Childs' argumentation in "Etherized upon a Table: T.S. Eliot's Dissertation and Its Metaphorical Operations" and "Knowledge and Experience in 'The Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock'," Mayer claims that it is possible to study the relation between Bradley's philosophy and Eliot's poetry already in "Prufrock" even though the poem was written four years before Eliot completed his dissertation "Experience and the Objects of Knowledge in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley" and two years before he started to read Bradley. The fact that the image of an etherized patient recurs in Eliot's dissertation clearly implies that the poet was aware of the connection between the poem and Bradley's philosophy and that "Prufrock" may have influenced Eliot's understanding of Bradley's reasoning (Mayer 2011: 184).

⁵ For a detailed discussion of the usage of scientific terminology in Eliot's criticism see Badenhäusen 2004: 50–53.

in Bradley’s philosophy between the immediate and intellectual experience, feeling and thought, by means of his “new art emotion”:

According to the logic of Eliot’s depersonalization theory, the emotional residue of the man cannot be in the final product. The ‘Pervigilium’ is thus the necessary corpse-like “patient” or manuscript papers created as ‘Prufrock’ is written — as Prufrock is catalyzed into ‘Prufrock.’ The patient reminds Prufrock he has become the depersonalized poet of ‘Prufrock’ just as the ‘Pervigilium’ papers remind us how ‘Prufrock’ was written. (Mayer: 193–194)

As a story of its own creation as well as a portrayal of the formation of an impersonal poet for whom the words “It is impossible to say just what I mean!” are not an expression of lament but his artistic credo (Mayer 2011: 194), “Prufrock” strongly implicates the person of the real author in the interpretation of the poem. Rather than giving voice to his emotions and feelings, it becomes a practical illustration of Eliot’s incipient critical views.

Written much earlier than Mayer’s article, Josipovici’s fictional rendition of “Prufrock” seems to presuppose this less popular, though not entirely original,⁶ interpretation of the poem as a story of artistic creation. Featuring a troubled writer, *Moo Pak* is a very subtle dramatization of the process of its own coming into existence, of “a constant dialectic between the pain and fear occasioned by the shedding of the self and the pleasure to be had in the making of what is other than the self.” In other words, it is a story of a Modernist writer striving to overcome his most vexing insecurities. Unsupported by any authority (God, tradition, his own genius), his goal dispersed among multiple possibilities, Toledano appears as a creative soul suffering from a debilitating self-doubt. His situation can be nicely encapsulated in the words of Walter Benjamin, which, though used by Josipovici to talk about Prufrock, were originally intended for a novelist: “The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others” (1968: 87). In the tenuous psychological drama of *Moo Pak*, Damien Anderson comes to represent Toledano’s friendly other, his growing trust in what needs to be said and done, “trust in the material, trust in our abilities, trust in the act of making itself” (Josipovici 1999: 3). The dialectic synthesis of trust and suspicion, “of chaos and order, of confusion and clarity, of the desire to let go and the need to control” (Josipovici 1994: 144) does finally take place in the shape of the book we are reading, Josipovici’s most ambitious dialectical project — *Moo Pak*.

⁶ Mayer mentions two critical texts which study Prufrock as a poet: Rafey Habib’s *The Early T.S. Eliot and Western Philosophy*, and David Spurr’s *Conflicts in Consciousness: T.S. Eliot’s Poetry and Criticism*.

4. Conclusions

In his transformation of Eliot's "Prufrock" into a contemporary novel, Josipovici promotes his dialectical aesthetics by referring, in a quite superficial manner, to the most salient elements of the text: the title, the epigraph and the poem's central themes. He also preserves in the structure of *Moo Pak* the central ambiguity of ontological levels which allows for reading both Eliot's poem and Josipovici's novel as a friendly conversation, a psychological struggle or a metafictional reflection on the process of artistic creation. As it is usually the case with this extraordinary writer, Josipovici is most appreciated when technical complexities are used to uncover "the increasingly humanistic and emotionally charged levels" of his fiction (Fludernik 2000: 193). Therefore, his implicit polemic in *Moo Pak* with Eliot's notion of depersonalization should not be taken at face value as concerning some quantitative measurement of the author's presence in his own work, or autobiographical precision. What truly matters is the fact that behind every work of art there is a man, thinking, feeling, selecting his material and making decisions. "But it is not the book I have wanted to write about," Damien Anderson concludes his part, "it is the man" (Josipovici 1994: 151). Echoing Prufrock, Josipovici sees the Modernist artist as "no prophet," as an ordinary man, deprived of any privileged access to the truth about himself or the world. Accordingly, the only truth art can express about itself and the artist is the struggle in the process of creation and that is what both Eliot's "Prufrock" and Josipovici's *Moo Pak* are all about. Or maybe they are just simple tales of friendship?

References

- Atkins, D.G. 2010. *T.S. Eliot and the Essay*. Waco: Baylor University Press.
- Badenhausen, R. 2004. *T.S. Eliot and the Art of Collaboration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Benjamin, W. 1968. *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Bloom, H.E. 2011. *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: T.S. Eliot*. New York: Infobase Publishing.
- Brown, D. 1989. *The Modernist Self in the 20th Century English Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Donoghue, D. 2011. "Beginning." In: Bloom, H. (ed.). *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: T.S. Eliot*. New York: Infobase Publishing. 95–112.
- Douglass, P.E. 2011. *T.S. Eliot, Dante, and the Idea of Europe*. Newcastle upon Thyme: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Eliot, T.S. 1921. *The Sacred Wood*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- . 1934. *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy*. London: Faber and Faber.
- . 1980 (1933). *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Fludernik, M. 2000. *Echoes and Mirrorings: Gabriel Josipovici's Creative Oeuvre*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Good, G. 1988. *The Observing Self: Rediscovering the Essay*. London: Routledge.

- Hassan, I. 1982. *The Dismemberment of Orpheus*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- James, W. 2002. *Varieties of Religious Experience*. London-New York: Routledge.
- Josipovici, G. 1987. *Lessons of Modernism and Other Essays*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- . 1994. *Moo Pak*. Manchester: Carcanet.
- . 1999. *On Trust: Art and the Temptation of Suspicion*. New Haven-London: Yale University Press.
- . 2010. *What Ever Happened to Modernism?* New Haven-London: Yale University Press.
- Kenner, H. 1964. *The Invisible Poet: T.S. Eliot*. New York: The Citadel Press.
- Matthiessen, F.O. 1972. *The Achievement of T.S. Eliot: An Essay on the Nature of Poetry*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Mayer, N.B. 2011. “Catalyzing Prufrock.” *Journal of Modern Literature* 34:3. 182–198.
- Miller, J.E. Jr. 2005. *The Making of an American Poet: 1888–1922*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Miller, M.A. 2006. *Masterpieces of British Modernism*. London: Greenwood Press.
- Moody, D.E. 1994. *Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Salinger, L.G. 1996. “T.S. Eliot: Poet and Critic.” In: Ford, B. (eds.). *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature: From James to Eliot*. London: Penguin Books.
- Sigg, E. 1989. *The American T.S. Eliot*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Williamson, G. 1955. *A Reader’s Guide to T.S. Eliot*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Wolf, W. 2014. “‘Revealing what cannot be spoken’ — Gabriel Josipovici’s Short Stories as Illustrations of Transcendental Negativity.” *LISA* 12:2. n.p.