

man's replacing Attilio at the tiller in *Suspense*, a correspondence or textual nexus noted here,<sup>3</sup> appear to be elusively meaningful. The sixteen-year-old's introduction to the sea in the one work and the old boatman's resolve to be useful in the other span Conrad's career from 1874 to his death in 1924. Assuming that to a degree the 'ancient fellow' in *Suspense* represents Conrad himself, his own death imminent,<sup>4</sup> then the figure of the old boatman in his last novel, unfinished, may be Conrad's attempt at a submerged metaphor and a personal statement: a metaphor and a statement to the effect that his own hand was still capable of continued use.

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<sup>3</sup> Another nexus would be the presence of a superannuated man aboard the boat in *A Personal Record*. A retired pilot who, through professional courtesy, was permitted to accompany the watch in their boat, he told the boy Conrad that he had seen Napoleon as a child and later been at the Battle of Trafalgar. 'He was the oldest man in that crew, and I was... its temporarily adopted baby'. *A Personal Record*, as cited, 298–300.

<sup>4</sup> Almost fifty years ago Manfred Mackenzie, 'Fenimore Cooper and Conrad's "Suspense"', *N&Q*, n.s. x, no. 10 (Oct 1963), 373–5, emphasized the 'mood of expected death' in *Suspense* and proposed the influence of *The Prairie* on its opening pages. *The Prairie* has this mood and Mackenzie linked Conrad's own anticipated death at the time of writing *Suspense* to the death of the aged Natty Bumppo in Cooper's sequentially last of the Leatherstocking series. He did not mention the 'ancient fellow', the old boatman in Conrad's novel, but could have.

### ARNOLD BENNETT AND THE MAKING OF *SWEENEY AGONISTES*

T. S. ELIOT'S *Sweeney Agonistes*, first published in the *Criterion* in 1926–7, then issued as a book in 1932, has a tangled compositional history.<sup>1</sup> The John Davey Hayward Bequest at King's College Archive in Cambridge preserves

drafts, fragments, and working papers associated with the poem, but this material is undated. As such, and with the paucity of other documents to provide context, scholars charting the development of *Sweeney* have often been reduced to guesswork. Eliot himself might have confused the issue further by declaring in 1936, somewhat dismissively, that *Sweeney* was 'written in two nights between ten o'clock and five in the morning, "with the aid of youthful enthusiasm and a bottle of gin"'.<sup>2</sup> As we shall see, Eliot's version of events might apply to the fragments of *Sweeney* as they exist in published form, but it certainly does not accord with the project as a whole. The recent publication of the second volume of *The Letters of T. S. Eliot* shows the extent of Eliot's project through time, and puts us in a position to date these fragments more precisely. Moreover, the letters reveal the extent of Arnold Bennett's curious role in the poem's composition. Previously, evidence attesting to Bennett's involvement was limited to an entry in his journal from 1924. There are twenty-three letters in the new volume that refer to *Sweeney*, with recipients including Ezra Pound, Virginia Woolf, Wyndham Lewis, and the poet's mother between 1923 and 1925.<sup>3</sup> Nine of those letters are to Bennett, revealing their various face-to-face meetings and correspondence while the poem was being written.

The first of these letters is a single-line note agreeing to a meeting, dated 11 October 1923; the editors note, 'To discuss [*Sweeney Agonistes*], among other matters' but there are no other substantial indications of the subject to be discussed.<sup>4</sup> Nine months later, on 13 July 1924, Eliot writes to Bennett, 'I am sorry to trouble you, but I have a scheme in view concerning which yours is the only advice which would be of any help'.<sup>5</sup> Here the editors

<sup>2</sup> Eliot told the story to Maura Laverty in an interview for Irish Broadcasting, itself summarized by A. Walton Litz, Introduction to Eliot's 'Tradition and the Practice of Poetry', *T. S. Eliot: Essays from the Southern Review*, ed. James Olney (Oxford, 1988), 10.

<sup>3</sup> T. S. Eliot, *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 2*, ed. Hugh Haughton and Valerie Eliot (London, 2009), 207, 213, 223, 226, & 255.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 465.

<sup>1</sup> The poem was first published in two parts; the first, 'Fragment of a Prologue', in *The Criterion*, iv (4) (Oct. 1926), 713–18, and the second, 'Fragment of an Agon' in *The Criterion*, v (1) (Jan. 1927), 74–80. The two fragments were later brought together in a book published by Faber and Faber: T. S. Eliot, *Sweeney Agonistes* (London, 1932).

cite Bennett's (even later) journal entry, of September 10 1924. The journal reads:

T. S. Eliot came to see me at the Reform Club last night, between two of my engagements... He said he... was now centred on dramatic writing. He wanted to write a drama of modern life (furnished flat sort of people) in a rhythmic prose 'perhaps with certain things in it accentuated by drum-beats'. And he wanted my advice. We arranged that he should do the scenario and some sample pages of dialogue.<sup>6</sup>

Critics have been aware of this scrap of information for some time, but have been divided about its significance. Barbara Everett, for instance, holds that the meeting was not as 'purposeful' as it is sometimes made out to be (she cites Carol Smith's *T. S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice*).<sup>7</sup> True, Bennett records that the discussion ranged over other matters (contributions to the *Criterion*, the 'Virginia' school of fiction). The evidence of the letters, however, confirms that the visit was just as purposeful as we might have imagined. The content of those early conversations remains obscure, but it seems safe to say that *Sweeney Agonistes* began to coalesce properly in Eliot's imagination just after the middle of 1924.

Before the second volume of the Eliot letters, scholars had been forced to make various surmises due to a basic lack of information. Hans Hauge took up the question of Bennett's involvement in 1991, asking, 'Is it likely that Bennett's role in connection with *Sweeney Agonistes* is comparable to Pound's in connection with *The Waste Land*?'<sup>8</sup> On the basis of the new evidence we are examining, and in the opinion of Hauge himself, the answer is clearly not. The Bennett/Pound analogy is something of a straw man, in any case. No serious critic has mounted that kind of argument, but the breadth of possible speculation about the

extent of Bennett's involvement indicates just how little has been firmly established about it in past scholarly efforts.

Having rather wilfully misread the journal entry to support his 'non-purposeful' account of it, Hauge declares a propos of Bennett's dinner with Eliot that, 'To say that "On the Eve: A Dialogue" was the result of the conversation makes much more sense than to say it was *Sweeney Agonistes*'.<sup>9</sup> The point is reiterated later on: 'To sum up, Eliot did not come to Bennett in order to discuss playwriting'.<sup>10</sup> In fact, he did; at least in part, as is borne out by the continued correspondence between Bennett and Eliot.<sup>11</sup> The same is true for Hauge's other assertion, that the drafts sent for Bennett's perusal were for *On the Eve* rather than what became the *Sweeney* fragments; On 23 October 1924, Eliot describes the work he has received back from Bennett as a 'play'.<sup>12</sup>

An examination of the manuscript in the John Davey Hayward Bequest shows that the *Sweeney* materials were subject to some editorial intervention. The first title page and typescript scenario are annotated in lead pencil, in a hand that is not Eliot's own. The changes made by whom we will think of for now as 'the lead-pencil editor' are minor and finally inconsequential, given that the published poem takes a different title, and its two fragments correspond to portions of the scenario untouched by the editor's hand. On the title page, Eliot's proposed name, 'Pereira, or, The Marriage of Life and Death: A Dream' is cancelled and replaced with 'The Superior Landlord', a phrase describing Sweeney himself taken from the next page of the scenario.<sup>13</sup> Eliot had included an 'odd ballet interlude' intended as a direct counterpoint to the action of the play itself.<sup>14</sup> The editor cancels this

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 149–50.

<sup>11</sup> Hauge does his argument no favours with his patronizing dismissal of Vivienne Eliot's authorial contribution to *On the Eve*: 'The only reason that I can think of why Eliot would revise a prose sketch of his wife's is that then he would have something to show to Bennett', 150.

<sup>12</sup> *The Letters of T. S. Eliot Vol. 2*, 520.

<sup>13</sup> King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge. *The Papers of the Hayward Bequest of T.S. Eliot Material*.

<sup>14</sup> Christine Buttram, 'Sweeney Agonistes: A Sensational Snarl', *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. David Chinitz (Maldon, Oxford and Southern Gate, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Arnold Bennett, *The Journals of Arnold Bennett: 1921–1928*, ed. Newman Flower (London, Toronto, Melbourne & Sydney, 1933), 51–2.

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Everett, 'The New Style of *Sweeney Agonistes*', *Yearbook of English Studies*, xiv (1984), 248.

<sup>8</sup> Hans Hauge, 'Arnold Bennett and T. S. Eliot: What Happened to *Sweeney Agonistes*?' *T. S. Eliot Annual No. 1*, ed. Shyamal Bagchee (Houndmills, Basingstoke and London, 1990), 145.

interlude entirely, with an arrow connecting it to the first paragraph of the play's part 2, and the comment 'Query: too close together?'<sup>15</sup> Finally, the last three lines of the play have another character, 'The Tenant Downstairs', waking in his bed at 8 a.m. to find that the whole action of the play (in which he had a tangential role) was his dream. This section is also cancelled.

Michael Sidnell has also offered his own alternate date for the *Sweeney* typescript scenario, which is a crucial part of the story of the poem's composition, in his *Dances of Death: The Group Theatre of London in the Thirties*.<sup>16</sup> In a letter of 9 February 1934, Eliot commented to Hallie Flannigan that 'I cannot tell you when or whether there will be more of *Sweeney* but in any case I hope to begin something new of the same kind as soon as I have finished with a dramatic pageant which is to be produced in the early summer.'<sup>17</sup> Sidnell's hypothesis is that Eliot took up the poem once again in 1934, well after the *Criterion* publication of the fragments and after the appearance of *Sweeney Agonistes* as a book, and that the typescript scenario comes from this time. Much of Sidnell's reasoning depends on circumstantial coincidences, but his one textual point of evidence is that the scenario includes the line 'Badinage between Sweeney and Doris, leading up to conversation of Fragment II.'<sup>18</sup> According to Sidnell, 'The scenario was obviously written not only after the writing of the fragments but after Eliot had decided that they *were* fragments and so, probably, after *Sweeney Agonistes* was published as "Fragments of an Aristophanic Melodrama".'<sup>19</sup> Admittedly, the reference to 'Fragment II' is troubling; but Sidnell does not consider the possibility that the scenario

could have been written roughly contemporaneously with the dialogue, and perhaps for the express purpose of showing Bennett. Nor does he account for Eliot's own handwritten label on the first title page: 'Early typescript'. Finally, it is apparent that a 'fragmentary' work might have been what Eliot had in mind from the outset of his project. The alternate title page amongst the draft typescripts includes the hypothetical titles 'Fragment of a Melocomic Minstrelsy' and 'Homage to Aristophanes: A Fragment', with a handwritten note signed by Eliot reading 'My typing probably precedes the fragments themselves'.<sup>20</sup>

The letters exchanged between Eliot and Bennett in 1923–24 allow us to go some way towards clearing up these confusions. In a letter of 8 October 1924, Eliot describes the material that he will send to Bennett: 'I have five or six typed pages of dialogue, and a very brief scenario, which I should now like to submit to you.'<sup>21</sup> I think we are justified in following common sense here, and identifying the scenario mentioned in the letter with that preserved in the Hayward Bequest. Eliot's reference to 'five or six typed pages of dialogue' adds further credence to this hypothesis. The two fragments of dialogue in the Hayward Bequest, which were eventually titled 'Fragment of a Prologue' and 'Fragment of an Agon,' amount to 3 and 4 leaves respectively. Eliot's figures amount to more than either one alone, but less than the two together. Meanwhile, in the typescript itself the first segment of dialogue is labelled simply 'Prologue', while the second is already given its final title, 'Fragment of an AGON'.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that in its context, 'fragment' refers to the incompleteness of the scene (borne out by the scenario and manuscript outline), rather than the incompleteness of the piece as a *whole*. In other words the typescript scenario does not necessarily postdate the dialogues; indeed, on the evidence of the letters, it was likely composed roughly simultaneously with them.

<sup>15</sup> *The Papers of the Hayward Bequest of T.S. Eliot Material*.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Sidnell, *Dances of Death: The Group Theatre of London in the Thirties* (London and Boston, MA, 1984); Sidnell repeats his theory in 'Aesthetic Prejudice in Modern Drama', *Modern Drama: Defining the Field*, ed. Ric Knowles, Joanne Tompkins, and W. B. Worthen (Toronto, ON, Buffalo, NY, and London, 2003), 24.

<sup>17</sup> Cited in Sidnell, *Dances of Death*, 323.

<sup>18</sup> *The Papers of the Hayward Bequest of T.S. Eliot Material*.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Sidnell, *Dances of Death: The Group Theatre of London in the Thirties*, 264.

<sup>20</sup> *The Papers of the Hayward Bequest of T.S. Eliot Material*.

<sup>21</sup> *The Letters of T. S. Eliot Vol. 2*, 505.

<sup>22</sup> *The Papers of the Hayward Bequest of T.S. Eliot Material*.

The central question, then, is the extent of Bennett's influence over *Sweeney Agonistes*. Whatever that influence consists of, it will have been transmitted in two ways: through conversations Bennett had with Eliot between October 1923 and December 1925, and through Bennett's direct responses to the draft Eliot supplied him in October 1924. My hypothesis, based on a conservative interpretation of the evidence at hand, is that the draft synopsis, the scenario, and the dialogue were all written broadly simultaneously, in the period between Eliot's reference to having 'mapt out Aristophanic comedy' in a letter to Pound of 3 September 1923, and the letter to Bennett of 8 October 1924 offering his drafts for comment.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, on the basis of those drafts having been exchanged, I wish to identify Arnold Bennett as the lead-pencil editor of the *Sweeney* materials at King's College.

Having described those editorial interventions in detail, we can see that Bennett's edits were relatively minor; certainly not comparable to Pound's interventions in *The Waste Land*. The substantive changes that Bennett made to the scenario were never implemented, as they concerned segments of the work that were yet to be composed. However, whatever advice Bennett gave to Eliot in conversation is impossible to reconstruct. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that Eliot made significant progress with *Sweeney* after Bennett read his drafts, as the published fragments are virtually identical with the typescript. That said, a consequence of my argument is that one of the alternative titles to *Sweeney Agonistes* from the drafts, 'The Superior Landlord', does not in fact belong to Eliot. Rather than being an early, provisional title<sup>24</sup> later to be superseded by *Sweeney Agonistes*, as has been asserted by some critics,<sup>25</sup> it is in fact an editorial

suggestion that Eliot rejected. In 18 April 1925, Eliot used *Sweeney Agonistes* himself in a letter to Bennett, and from then on the title stuck.<sup>26</sup>

It could be argued that the evidence behind my interpretation of *Sweeney Agonistes'* textual history is almost as circumstantial as that relied on by earlier, dissenting critics. Indeed, it must be allowed that in the absence of a proper graphological comparison between the *Sweeney* material at King's and some of Bennett's own writing, little can be said with absolute certainty. However, I have examined samples of Bennett's handwriting myself to establish at least the prima facie plausibility of the editorial marks on the *Sweeney* typescripts belonging to Bennett's hand. 'The Superior Landlord' is written in lead pencil on the title page of the *Sweeney* typescript in capital letters. The script shows a very high degree of regularity both in the size of the letters themselves as well as in the size of the spaces between them. Each letter is as high as it is wide. In letters of 10 August 1920, to Charles Huntington, and 20 February 1925, to Marie Stopes, Bennett writes his name in capitals above the letterhead, in a script that shares each of these characteristics with the title on the *Sweeney* transcript.<sup>27</sup> The resemblance is strong enough, in my opinion, to justify in combination with the circumstantial evidence contained in the Eliot letters, the assertion that the lead-pencil editor of the *Sweeney* typescript was indeed Arnold Bennett.

Given how limited these written editorial interventions are, Eliot's response to Bennett is surprising; we might surmise that Bennett dispensed much verbal advice during his (at least) two face-to-face meetings with Eliot in those years. Eliot's letter dated 23 October 1924 reads, 'I am writing to tell you that I am reconstructing my play according to all of your suggestions. I was tremendously encouraged by seeing you, and finding that you thought the thing worth going on with.' He goes on, 'There is no one else in London whose opinion on such an attempt would

<sup>23</sup> *The Letters of T. S. Eliot Vol. 2*, 209 & 505.

<sup>24</sup> Eliot's own early, discarded titles include 'Homage to Aristophanes: A Fragment', 'Fragments of a Melocomic Minstrelsy', and 'Pereira: or The Marriage of Life and Death, A Dream'. See *The Papers of the Hayward Bequest of T.S. Eliot Material*.

<sup>25</sup> For instance, *T. S. Eliot's Drama: A Research and Production Sourcebook*, ed. Randy Malamud (Westport, CT, and London, 1992), 35; Buttram, '*Sweeney Agonistes*: A Sensational Snarl', 181.

<sup>26</sup> *The Letters of T. S. Eliot Vol. 2*, 634.

<sup>27</sup> The British Library, *Stopes Papers*, Mss. Add. 58497, ff. 120 & 124.

mean so much to me.' Then, in an uncharacteristic effusion, Eliot writes

I cannot tell you how grateful I am, and how fully I realise the privilege of having the counsel and guidance of a man like yourself, and how highly I appreciate your generosity in giving your time and attention to teaching me. In any case, I shall feel that the play will be as much yours as mine; but if I cannot make a good thing of it... it will be final evidence of my dramatic incapacity.<sup>28</sup>

Eliot's lavish praise of Bennett stands in stark contrast to the devastating portrait given of him as 'Mr. Nixon' in Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*. Indeed, Mr. Nixon delivers a sneering put-down of the poetic vocation: "And give up verse, my boy, / "There's nothing in it".<sup>29</sup>

Thus, these letters raise an essential question about the genesis of *Sweeney Agonistes*: why Bennett? In his critical opinions as well as his literary practice, Bennett was no friend of the avant-garde. It may be hard to imagine just what Eliot hoped to learn from him, but we must bear in mind that Bennett, despite his usual reputation as a novelist, enjoyed significant popular success as a dramatist. It is plausible to think that Bennett was the most successful working playwright in London with whom Eliot was acquainted.<sup>30</sup> David Chinitz has made a compelling argument about Eliot's attraction to dramatic form generally, characterizing two competing forces that animate his drama as, 'the vanguardist impulse toward austerity, "poetry," and frank ritualism; and the populist or theatrical impulse that urges avoidance of anything that smacks of "literature".'<sup>31</sup> Not to put too fine a point on it, the latter impulse might be what Eliot was hoping to cultivate in his collaboration with Bennett. Summarizing reaction to Eliot's later forays into verse-drama, Chinitz writes 'Eliot

had run afoul of the postromantic ideology that pits literary professionalism and popular acclaim against aesthetic seriousness and critical esteem: he had pandered to the "rabble" by seeking a large public for his plays.'<sup>32</sup>

Naïve and untenably élitist as that ideology might seem in our time, it was certainly a factor in Eliot's critical reception and poetic practice, as Chinitz demonstrates so compellingly. Bearing this in mind, as well as Eliot's comment that the play's failure would demonstrate his 'dramatic incompetency', it is not unreasonable to suggest that Eliot regarded Bennett's advice as a guide to the tastes of a contemporary mass audience. Whatever Eliot's motive in soliciting Bennett's advice, their correspondence sheds indispensable new light on the process of composition behind *Sweeney Agonistes*, and clarifies much of the speculation that has surrounded it in the past.

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<sup>32</sup> Chinitz, *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide*, 130.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE JUNIPER-TREE STORY FOR ELIOT'S ASH WEDNESDAY, SECTION II

THE folktale 'The Juniper Tree' is one that the Grimm brothers included in their initial collection published in 1812. It is the story—a fairy tale—of a small stepson who is killed by his cruel stepmother, then butchered and his body parts cooked as a meal of black puddings and served to the unwitting father.<sup>1</sup> It is the second story referred to by B. C. Southam in his *Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot* (6th edition, 1994, 226), where Southam writes concerning the juniper tree mentioned in *Ash Wednesday* (Section II) as follows, in order to elucidate the tree allusion in the line, 'Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree': *juniper-tree*: cf. the Biblical story of Elijah. Jezebel

<sup>28</sup> *The Letters of T. S. Eliot Vol. 2*, 520.

<sup>29</sup> Ezra Pound, *Personae* (New York, 1950), 194.

<sup>30</sup> Appropriately enough, Bennett's play *What the Public Wants* was revived at the Everyman in October 1923. The play tells the story of a middlebrow publisher who makes a fortune by 'giving the public what they want,' but whose desire to be accepted by the intellegensia ruins him. 'The Theatres,' *The Times*, October 22, 1923.

<sup>31</sup> David E. Chinitz, *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (Chicago, IL, and London, 2003), 129.

<sup>1</sup> An international tale, the juniper-tree fairy tale is tale-type 720 in Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *Types of the Folk-Tale* (Helsinki, 1964), where it carries the label *My mother slew me; my father ate me*.