The Passage He Did Not Take:
T. S. Eliot and the English Romantic Tradition

by
Jian Zhang

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ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

Abstract

T. S. Eliot's inheritance from the English Romantic period has been increasingly recognized. Yet enmity against him also amasses as more and more critics have come to see him, not as the beginning of a new poetic movement, but simply as a successor. It seems that recent criticism has accepted, and in some cases has exaggerated, Eliot's relation to the Romantics to the exclusion of some fundamental differences. And also Eliot's poetry has suffered from violent and unfair readings because valuation has been affected by the way critics look at Eliot's tradition.

This study seeks to show that Eliot's apparent relation to the Romantics only testifies to the deep disparity between them. To this purpose, it places Eliot's works in a close comparison with his immediate predecessors: Tennyson and Swinburne, and with the High Romantics: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats. It has found that Eliot's references to Tennyson had a marked difference before and after his encounter with the work of Laforgue. It has also found that, although Eliot shared Swinburne's interest in French symbolism and Elizabethan-Jacobean drama, the result of the influence on him was totally different. The comparison with the Romantics has brought to the surface some interesting relations between The Waste Land and In Memoriam, between 'Ash-Wednesday' and The Fall of Hyperion, and between The Prelude and the Four Quartets. Yet disparities exist in the strategy, the aim and the effect of Eliot on the one hand and the compared authors on the other. It has shown that behind Eliot's apparent similarities with the Romantics lie his real influences: Dante, Laforgue, Baudelaire, Donne, Marvell, Chapman, Tourneur, Andrewes and so on.

The plays show no traces of the Romantics. Yet instead of being a return to classical or Elizabethan drama, they were actually imitations of the current stage with superimposed metaphysical messages and therefore lost the vitality and interest which characterize Eliot's poetry. However, on the whole, Eliot's works have imaginative power and efficacy which cannot be denied. They require the reader's sympathy and a radically different way of reading. The conclusion examines Eliot's own views on originality and contends that his originality is not a matter of whether he had borrowed from his predecessors but what he had done with them.

Preface

My interest in T. S. Eliot backdated to my undergraduate years at University of Nanjing, China. It was in 1984 that I first encountered a volume entitled Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot. I was immediately attracted by 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and The Waste Land: the latter was already translated into Chinese. When I received the FCO award from the British Council in 1984, I decided to come to Britain to do a project on T. S. Eliot. However, it was when I arrived in Glasgow in October, 1985 that I realised, to my surprise, that an enormous amount of work was already done. The published items alone would fill a library.

Later, an eminent scholar asked me, after he got to know I was working on T. S. Eliot, 'Is there still anything new to be done'? The question has been with me ever since that time. It is true that the archaeological work has almost been completed and the sources have almost been exhausted, but still I feel that previous criticism created new problems as it solved old ones. For example, Harold Bloom wrote in 1971, of a passage of 'Ash-Wednesday', that it is 'a simple, quite mechanical catalogue of clean Catholic contradictions, very good for playing a bead-game but not much as imaginative meaning' (The Ringers in the Tower p200). And two years later, the editors of the Oxford Anthology of English Literature referred to Eliot and others as 'the various fashionable modernists whose reputations are now rightly in rapid decline' (volume II p1279).

Such remarks are common among a certain group of critics, but their misjudgment is due not so much to personal antagonism as to a special critical procedure. These critics have invariably attempted to describe Eliot as a Romantic or post-Romantic. They have applied to him a set of standards derived from the study of Romantic poetry. And to yoke Eliot to the Romantic tradition seems a way to diminish his achievement too because, when regarded as a Romantic, Eliot is always found to be deficient or unable to match up to the High Romantics. He is always found to be a minor Romantic or a

Romantic manqué. Thus a fair valuation of Eliot's achievement depends on a good understanding of his poetry and of his tradition.

The aim of this study is to re-trace Eliot's tradition and then to revaluate his poetry. It attempts to do this through a special perspective. In 'The Jolly Corner', a story which Eliot appreciated, Henry James described a man who went back to America, after years of life abroad, to visit his childhood home but who found himself unable to drive away the thought of what he might become if he had always stayed home. In The Family Reunion, Eliot also imagined Harry's return to Wishwood as an inevitable meeting with the other Harry who had stayed back and was never changed, as himself, by travel and experience. But the childhood home 'will not be a very *jolly* corner'. In 'Burnt Norton', Eliot continues this meditation on the what-might-have-been, the 'passage which [he] did not take' and the 'door which [he] never opened'. The idea of returning to the cross-road and making a different choice always fascinated him.

In 1908, or thereabout, the direction of Eliot's intellectual development was determined when he chose to study Dante, Laforgue, Elizabethan dramatists, and the metaphysical poets. These, as we now know, constitute his tradition. In view of his fascination with the what-might-have-been, the alter ego, it will be interesting and, as I shall show, illuminating to examine the course which he did not take, to study his relation to the tradition he rejected, and to imagine the poet he might have been if he had made a different choice. Although only a 'perpetual possibility ... in the world of speculation', this alter ego is an interesting comparison to the poet Eliot finally became.

A study like this opens up new channels and takes one to untilled areas, which I shall leave to the text itself to demonstrate. However, like all students of Eliot, I am indebted to many critics who written on this subject in the last sixty years. The especially useful books have been listed in the bibliography at the end of this thesis. During my years as a research student, I have received much help and guidance from my supervisor Professor Philip Hobsbaum. His great patience and stimulating supervision played a

vital part in the completion of this study. I owe to Mr. Richard Cronin for help and advice at the early stage of my research. Thanks should also be extended to Robert Crawford for the opportunity to rehearse some of my views at the 'T. S. Eliot Centenary Conference' (Glasgow 1988), to Professor Henry Wong for interest and practical help, to Bob Neil for lucid exposition of the basic concepts of Christianity, to Richard Mertens and Chankil Park for friendly and fruitful discussions, and to Tom Mitford for careful proof-reading. I should like to express the warmest thanks to my wife Shizhen Chen, to whom I dedicate this work, for her invaluable support during my years of research. Without her encouragement and practical help, it would have been impossible to carry the work through to its end.

Abbreviations

ASG	After Strange Gods (London 1934)
CPP	Complete Poems and Plays (London & Boston 1969)
EAM	Essays Ancient and Modern (London 1936)
FLA	For Lancelot Andrewes (London 1928)
ICS	The Idea of a Christian Society (London 1939)
NDC	Notes towards the Definition of Culture (London 1948)
OPP	On Poetry and Poets (London 1957)
SE	Selected Essays (London 1932)
SW	The Sacred Wood (London 1920)
TCC	To Criticize the Critic (London 1965)
UPUC	The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (London 1933)

Contents

I. Eliot's Analysis of Romanticism

I

A study of Eliot's relation with Romanticism may conveniently start with a discussion of his own view of Romanticism. The topic is so well-known now that it seems there is little left to say.[1] Yet the process by which Eliot arrived at this intellectual stance requires some examination because it is vital for a good understanding of his tradition. It seems to me that Eliot's anti-Romanticism rose out of a strong dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs in literature and art. In 1914, just after he arrived in England, he wrote to Conrad Aiken that something had gone wrong with English letters and concluded that 'it is a low time for poetry'.[2] In 1918, he wrote to his cousin Eleanor Hinkley making more or less the same point: 'Standards of good writing in English are deplorably low'.[3]

Not only did Eliot declare his discontent, but he also sympathized with those who shared his discontent. Reviewing Stephen Leacock's Essays and Literary Studies for the New Statesman in 1916, he found behind the author's trans-Atlantic humour a positive and formidable point of view: 'Mr. Leacock has exposed some of the essential faults of American education, some of the reasons for the insolvency of American literature'.[4] To Eliot, what America was suffering was the advanced stage of a disease which was also beginning to threaten Europe. In a 1919 review of Frederick E. Pierce's Currents and Eddies in the English Romantic Generation, he gave his warm consent to the author's view that the Romantic age was 'a period of intellectual chaos'. 'It leads us to speculate', he went on, 'whether the age, as an age, can ever exert much influence upon any age to come; and it provokes the suspicion that our own age may be similarly chaotic and ineffectual'.[5]

The problem which Eliot found with Georgian poetry and criticism seems to be emotionality and the lack of discipline. Of these problems he traced the cause to the previous century. 'Romanticism stands for *excess* in any direction', he said in his 1916

Oxford University Extension Lectures on 'Modern French Literature'. 'It splits up into two directions: escape from the world of fact, and devotion to brute fact. The two great currents of the nineteenth century -- vague emotionality and the apotheosis of science (realism) alike spring from Rousseau'.[6]

Then he outlined Rousseau's career as a 'struggle against (1) *authority* in matters of religion, (2) *aristocracy* and *privilege* in government. His main tendencies were (1) exaltation of the *personal* and the *individual* above the *typical* , (2) emphasis upon *feeling* rather than *thought* , (3) humanitarianism: belief in the fundamental goodness of human nature, (4) depreciation of *form* in art, and glorification of *spontaneity* . His faults were (1) intense egotism, (2) insincerity'.[7]

This criticism, as we now know, bears a strong resemblance to the thought of Irving Babbitt, whose lectures on 'Literary Criticism in France with Special Reference to the Nineteenth Century' Eliot attended at Harvard in the year of 1909-1910. It was perhaps after attending this course, whose main argument was to be published in Rousseau and Romanticism, that Eliot understood Romanticism as individualism, personality, 'inner voice', anarchy, and Protestantism. It was also perhaps at this time that he formed the view of Rousseau as the 'eternal source of mischief and inspiration'.[8] Since Rousseau, Eliot wrote in 1918, 'the flood of barbarism has left very few peaks [of literary achievement]. It is difficult to be civilized alone'.[9]

Babbitt was also sensitive to the malaise of his time. In Literature and the American College, he exposed a bankruptcy of principle in American education and in general criticism. To him, the individualism and the moral-intellectual impressionism, which pervaded writings at the turn of the century, was a direct result of this bankruptcy of principle. 'With the spread of impressionism', Babbitt wrote elsewhere, 'literature has lost standards and discipline, and at the same time virility and seriousness; it has fallen into the hands of aesthetes and dilettantes, the last *effete* representatives of romanticism...'[10]

Anti-Romanticism, in a sense, had grown with Eliot's up-bringing. Born in St. Louis, Missouri, but of New England stock, he always considered himself a New-Englander in St. Louis.[11] The special Puritanical temperament of New England writers is obvious in him. Calvinism and his family rules of self-denial and hard work were like commandments handed down by the Moses-like grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot.[12] With ideals like these, it would be hard for Eliot to swallow the emotional individualism and self-aggrandisement of the Romantic period. Summarizing Paul Elmer More's views published in The Drift of Romanticism, Eliot wrote in 1916:

> The present age is a period of drift, license, and irresponsible emotionality. Since the time of Rousseau, men's attitude toward life has vacillated between two points of view which are really complementary and which flourish in the same soil; on the one hand materialism and utilitarianism, tending toward brutality; on the other hand sentimentalism, humanitarianism. In art, these two tendencies find their expression in realism and romanticism; in refusing to refine upon Nature, or in refusing to handle it at all. In politics, the complementary tendencies are despotism and democracy. Both sides of the contrast -- in art, in philosophy, in politics, in morals -- are the expression of impatience against all restraint, against the unavoidable limitations of life and the necessary limitations of civilization, are expressions of belief in the undisciplined imagination and emotions.[13]

Circumstances also predisposed Eliot to Classicism rather than Romanticism. In 1914, Eliot arrived in England and met Pound, a fellow American poet who did not have a high opinion of the Romantic period. Through Pound, T. E. Hulme's Speculations exerted some influence on Eliot's intellectual development. Hulme, to an extent, confirmed Eliot's view of Romanticism and helped him to see more clearly than ever before that the classical point of view is 'essentially a belief in Original Sin' and that

'after a hundred years of romanticism, we are in for a classical revival'.[14]

Classicism was a French ideal of this time. Through Babbitt, and perhaps also through Hulme, Charles Maurras's *Action Française* communicated its enthusiasm to Eliot. Maurras's classicism in every sense resembled that of Babbitt and More: it consists of an 'intellectual conservativism' and a 'distrust in the undisciplined human nature'. Maurras exerted his influence chiefly in French politics, in his heroic attempt to restore the French monarch, but he did not lack literary interest. Years later Eliot said, 'The influence of Babbitt (with an infusion later of T. E. Hulme and of the more literary essays of Maurras) is apparent in my recurrent theme of Classicism versus Romanticism'.[15]

Eliot's anti-Romanticism flourished in The Sacred Wood, his first book of literary criticism, in which he asserted in a stark statement: 'There may be a good deal to be said for Romanticism in life, there is no place for it in letters'.[16] Given these views, it is not hard to understand the excitement with which he welcomed the following statement from Arnold:

> The English poetry of the first quarter of this century [meaning the nineteenth], with plenty of energy, plenty of creative force, did not know enough. This makes Byron so empty of matter, Shelley so incoherent, Wordsworth even, profound as he is, yet so wanting in completeness and variety.[17]

II

'The only cure for Romanticism', Eliot said, 'is to analyse it'.[18] And, different from that of others, his analysis concentrates on literature and is conducted within a historical compass. The Romantic period is judged typically in comparison and contrast with other periods, ie, his ideal periods. His criticism of Romanticism is accompanied by a passionate admiration for the Elizabethan-Jacobean age.

The comparative study of English versification at various periods is a large

tract of unwritten history. To make a study of blank verse alone would be to elicit some curious conclusions. It would show, I believe, that blank verse within Shakespeare's lifetime, was more highly developed, that it became a vehicle of more varied and more intense feeling than it has ever conveyed since; and that after the erection of the Chinese Wall of Milton, blank verse has suffered not only arrest but retrogression. That the blank verse of Tennyson, for example, a consummate master of this form in certain applications, is cruder (*not* 'rougher' or less perfect in technique) than that of half a dozen contemporaries of Shakespeare; cruder, because less capable of expressing complicated, subtle, and surprising emotions.[19]

Eliot's account of the literary history starts with the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. This is a period which he, after Grierson, was determined to champion, presenting his effort as the discovery of a lost tradition. According to him, the lesser Elizabethan dramatists and the metaphysical poets of the following age, though not usually regarded as major poets, show the kind of sureness and maturity which characterize great poets. Donne's 'A Valediction', which has since become a classic, offers an example:

On a round ball
A workeman that hath copies by, can lay
An Europe, Afrique, and an Asia,
And quickly make that, which was nothing, All,
So doth each teare,
Which thee doth weare,
A globe, yea world by that impression grow,
Till thy tears mixt with mine doe overflow
This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so.

The bold metaphor, the balance, the irony and the sureness are the qualities Eliot

admired -- qualities which earned for such poems the name of metaphysical poetry. All these are again found in Lord Herbert's 'Ode':

So when from hence we shall be gone,
And be no more, nor you, nor I,
As one another's mystery,
Each shall be both, yet both but one.

This said, in her up-lifted face,
Her eyes, which did that beauty crown,
Were like two starrs, that having faln down,
Look up again to find their place:

While such a moveless silent peace
Did seize on their becalmed sense,
One would have thought some influence
Their ravished spirits did possess.

The same kind of excellence is again exhibited by Marvell who, according to Eliot, often mixes seriousness with levity:[20]

Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife,
Thorough the iron gates of life.

It is with great admiration and delight that Eliot presented these passages to his readers, with all the freshness of a new discovery. What earned his deepest appreciation is the special sensibility they display: the sensibility which is able to make 'direct sensuous apprehension of thought'. The examples show that their authors' thought was felt 'as immediately as the odour of a rose'. In Donne, especially, a thought was an

experience and it modified his sensibility; and in Herbert and Marvell, there was a 'recreation of thought into feeling', an incorporation of erudition into sensibility.[21]

Eliot considered this period to be the highest development of English poetry, 'which we have perhaps never equalled'. Then, a little later, poetry began to slip down a slope. And Massinger was the harbinger of the deterioration:

> Massinger's feeling for language had outstripped his feeling for things; that his eye and his vocabulary were not in co-operation... And, indeed, with the end of Chapman, Middleton, Webster, Tourneur, Donne we end a period when the intellect was immediately at the tips of the senses. Sensation became word and word was sensation. The next period is the period of Milton (though still with a Marvell in it); and this period is initiated by Massinger.[22]

The subsequent poetry is marked off by a clear-cut difference, which Eliot expressed by the following theory:

> The poets of the seventeenth century, the successors of the dramatists of the sixteenth, possessed a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience. They are simple, artificial, difficult, or fantastic, as their predecessors were; ...In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered; and this dissociation, as is natural, was aggravated by the influence of the two most powerful poets of the century, Milton and Dryden.[23]

The language in the ensuing ages, Eliot argued, became more refined but the feeling more crude. The Romantic poets were directly under the influence of Milton and they all exhibited the same defects as Milton: bombastic diction, abstract thought, and crude feeling. 'They thought and felt by fits, unbalanced'. The attempts which Shelley and Keats made to stop the deterioration were unsuccessful. Poetry deteriorated.

Eliot was especially unkind to the Victorian and the *fin-de-siècle* periods, which he

regarded as the bottom of the decline. The characteristic of these poets is that they excluded everything that was not immediately related to the experience they were describing. The poetry of Tennyson aroused one emotion at a time and lacked the kind of balance which characterizes the metaphysical poetry:

One walked between his wife and child,
With measured footfall firm and mild,
And now and then he gravely smiled.
The prudent partner of his blood
Leaned on him, faithful, gentle, good,
Wearing the rose of womanhood.
And in their double love secure,
The little maiden walked demure,
Pacing with downward eyelids pure.
These three made unity so sweet.
My frozen heart began to beat,
Remembering its ancient heat. [24]

Browning's 'knowledge of the particular human heart is adulterated by an optimism', Eliot said, 'which was proved offensive to our time'.[25]

No, when the fight begins within himself,
A man's worth something. God stoops o'er his head,
Satan looks up between his feet -- both tug --
He's left, himself, i'the middle; the soul wakes
And grows. Prolong that battle through his life!

The morbidity in the language, as Eliot termed it, grew towards the end of the century into the poetry of Swinburne who resorted entirely to elusive music or pure sound for his effect.[26] Finally, it was in Eliot's time, the early twentieth century, that hope of recovery appeared in the French symbolists and the English modernist poets,

whose poetry recalled the essential quality of the metaphysical poets.

In this account of English literary history, the literary hierarchy has been disturbed and re-organised. Anti-Romanticism is delivered through historical analysis and perceptive reading. As an account of history, it indeed fulfils the 'large tract of unwritten history' which Eliot talked about in 1919. It indeed reached 'some curious conclusions' as he predicted. It proved, as he himself said in 1927, that the generation of Shakespeare 'did not feel and think exactly as people felt and thought in 1815, or in 1860, or in 1880', but they 'felt and thought as we felt and thought in 1927'.[27] This new literary history gives us a clear and new vision of historical development, fusing history with criticism in an exciting and interesting way and describing the development of poetry from beginning to end in a continuous narrative.

III

Enthusiasm having subsided, there is anxiety. In his review of English poetry, Eliot was guilty of what he accused Herbert Read of: 'casting out devils'.[28] Under his criticism, Wordsworth's theory of 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' is rejected as 'an inexact formula'. Shelley is regarded as an immature poet with 'views of an intelligent and enthusiastic schoolboy'. Byron is relegated to a good story-teller, 'a Scottish poet', and 'a boyhood enthusiasm'.[29] These and many others are excluded from Eliot's canon of great poets, much to the bewilderment and even to the anger of some later critics.

The crucial questions concerning Eliot's literary history are whether the 'dissociation of sensibility' did happen and what was the role of Milton and Dryden during and after the crisis. Eliot's essay caused many efforts and many attempts to be made to prove its hypothesis. Archaeological work had been carried out in almost every part of seventeenth-century life; and every document left over from that period was brought forward for meticulous scholarly examination. Still, not enough evidence was found for the 'dissociation of sensibility'.

The assumption underlying the theory seems to be the separation of thought and

feeling. According to this assumption, sensibility -- man's perception of the world -- consists chiefly of two functions of the mind: thought and feeling. Feeling is the function with which we sense the outside world; thought is the function with which we rationalize the data collected by feeling. Artistic representation, ideally, comes from a balance between these two functions. In any act of perception, too much intellect will result in abstraction; and insufficient application of it will result in disorder. 'Men ripen best through experiences which are at once sensuous and intellectual', Eliot says; 'certainly many men will admit that their keenest ideas have come to them with the quality of a sense-perception; and that their keenest sensuous experience has been "as if the body thought" '.[30]

When the 'dissociation of sensibility' took place in the seventeenth century, according to Eliot, thought and feeling were separated. The mind withdrew into either thought or feeling; the two could no longer co-operate together. This affected our way of thinking and caused what he terms 'the morbidity of the language'. As far as it goes, this theory sounds quite plausible. The problem is that it lays all its weight on literary evidence. If it is to be proved, it must draw on all human knowledge; it must sustain examination in all fields of intellectual activity. This is exactly where Eliot failed.

Even in the field of literature it is not wholly without problems. The issue of Milton was a very hot topic of controversy.[31] To place the responsibility wholly on Milton seems to be exaggerating the fault and influence of one man. The argument leads to conclusions which are neither fair nor sound. By 1947, Eliot had modified his position:

> I believe that the general affirmation represented by the phrase 'dissociation of sensibility' ... retains some validity ; but I now incline to agree with Dr. Tillyard that to lay the burden on the shoulders of Milton and Dryden was a mistake. If such a dissociation did take place, I suspect that the causes are too complex and too profound to justify our accounting for the change in terms of literary criticism. All we can say is, that something like this did

> happen; that it had something to do with the Civil War; that it would even be unwise to say it was caused by the Civil War, but that it is a consequence of the same causes which brought about the Civil War; that we must seek the causes in Europe, not in England alone; and for what these causes were, we may dig and dig until we get to a depth at which words and concepts fail us.[32]

In this re-consideration, the theory becomes elusive. Eliot simply evades the question of verification by historical fact and admits that it cannot be proved. As several critics pointed out, the theory is almost 'useless historically', because the time of the crisis can be placed almost anywhere in history according to the system the historian has chosen to work with.[33] As far as we are concerned, Eliot's theory can be taken only for what it is worth: it is a personal history, introducing personal preferences; it is designed to defend his own poetry and justify his own taste; it is a metaphor which offers quick explanation and easy understanding in the realm of literary criticism; and it is, as F. H. Bradley said, a 'finding of bad reasons for what we believe upon instinct'.[34]

IV

In considering Eliot's tradition, critics are faced with two difficult choices. They have to ask themselves whether Eliot is a metaphysical poet or a Romantic poet. Early critics, following Eliot's own testimony, had attempted to find his connection with seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry and nineteenth-century French symbolist poetry. F. R. Leavis, in his study of the new bearings in English poetry, found that certain qualities which were common to the poetry of Donne and Marvell reappeared in Eliot's poetry.[35] Cleanth Brooks, having distinguished the romantic metaphor from the modern metaphor, said that 'the significant relationship between the modernist poets and the seventeenth-century poets of wit lies here -- in their common conception of the use of metaphor'.[36] F. O. Matthiessen, having suggested the peculiarity of the seventeenth-century mind, said that 'it is not accidental that the same people who respond to Proust

and Joyce have also found something important in Donne'. This is probably because 'the jagged brokenness of Donne's thought has struck a responsive note in our age'.[37]

But, as Eliot's historical thinking was gradually shown to be problematic, critics began to see the matter in a wholly opposite way, rejecting Eliot's own pronouncements and regarding him as a part of the Romantic tradition. So, in the next decade, a critical reaction came in. Frank Kermode, for example, had tried to demonstrate that the symbolist aesthetic which Eliot and Yeats espoused had its roots in Romantic literary theory.[38] Robert Langbaum saw Romanticism as a modern tradition and for him, Romanticism 'as literature's reaction to the eighteenth century's scientific world-view ... connects the literary movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries'.[39] Such a view was also developed by Richard Foster, Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom.[40] These critics have all tried to subsume Eliot into the Romantic movement and Frye has a typical statement to summarize their argument:

> Romanticism ... is the first major phase in an imaginative revolution which has carried on until our own day, and has by no means completed itself yet... This means that everything that has followed Romanticism, including the anti-Romantic movements in France and England of fifty to sixty years ago, is best understood as post-Romantic. Many aspects of Romanticism become much more clearly understood if we look forward to what later writers did with them. In particular, I find that the major works of Joyce, Eliot, Proust, Yeats, and D. H. Lawrence provide essential clues to the nature of literary trends and themes that began with the Romantics.[41]

To me, such remarks are disconcerting. Whatever relationship Joyce and others might have to Romanticism, it is hard for anyone acquainted with Eliot's work to be reconciled with the idea in such remarks. Eliot may be wrong about the literary history, but is he also wrong about himself? To me, he understood his own situation and his own historical position better than many of his critics. Furthermore, what shall we do about

his professed anti-Romantic position? Unless one is to call him a liar or think he was dishonest, one cannot describe him as a Romantic or even a post-Romantic. And to do so is to misunderstand his real effort and his true achievement.

More recently, critics have tried to dismiss Eliot's anti-Romanticism as only a tactical gesture, a means to establish himself by attacking others' poetry. George Bornstein argues that Eliot had projected his own fears into the Romantic poets and that in rejecting the Romantic poets he was rejecting his own problems. From such a premise, he has undertaken to establish the relation of Yeats, Eliot and Stevens to the Romantic tradition by regarding Eliot's anti-Romanticism as merely a 'transformation' of Romanticism.[42] Gregory Jay, using psychoanalysis and Bloom's theory of influence, argues that Eliot's apparent reaction to Romanticism only gave away his unconscious repression. He went so far as to suggest that Eliot was influenced by the Romantics to a considerable extent and that his reluctance to acknowledge it is only a symptom of his 'anxiety of influence'.[43]

We concede that Eliot's view of Romantic poetry is unsound; and that his judgment is affected by personal needs. But, since he had such antipathy to Romanticism, it will be hard to validate the proposition that he had been influenced by Romantic poets to any significant extent. It seems to me that Eliot's relation with Romanticism is a negative one. Yet it will be interesting to examine Romanticism as the choice Eliot did not make, to study the ways he avoided it, and to see if by rejecting Romantic poetry he had created a poetry different yet equally potent. The reason that the earlier critics fell short of being convincing is that they tended to exclude Romantic poetry altogether in their discussion of Eliot. They took it for granted that Eliot had nothing to do with the Romantic poets. But he had.

He had been influenced by Byron, Shelley and Swinburne in his teenage years and was aware of the Romantic poets throughout his career. Not only do his juvenile poems bear marks of his imitation of Tennyson, Keats and Rossetti, but his mature poems

contain lines which are reminiscent of certain Romantic poets. And seen in the Romantic context, his difference and his achievement will be much clearer. The following study will try to avoid the prejudices of both the earlier and the later critics and will not shy away from bringing Eliot and the major poets of the Romantic tradition together in a close study. And a fairer conclusion, I hope, will emerge.

Notes to Chapter I:

1. See, for example, Herbert Howarth, Notes on Some Figures Behind T. S. Eliot (Boston 1964), Chapters 5 & 6, and J. D. Margolis, T. S. Eliot's Intellectual Development 1922-1939 (Chicago & London 1972), Chapters 1 & 3.

2. Eliot, The Letters of T. S. Eliot, ed. Valerie Eliot (London 1988) p69

3. Ibid. p228

4. Eliot, 'Mr. Leacock Serious', New Statesman vii (29 July 1916) pp404-05

5. Eliot, 'The Romantic Generation, If It Existed', Athenaeum (18 July 1919) p616

6. The syllabus of these lectures have been compiled and published by Ronald Schuchard. See 'T. S. Eliot as an Extension Lecturer', Review of English Studies (New Series) xxv (May & August 1974) p165.

7. Ibid. p165

8. Eliot, 'Leibnitz's Monads and Bradley's Finite Centers', Monist xxvi (Oct. 1916) p566

9. Eliot, 'Marivaux', Art and Letters ii (Spring 1919) p81

10. Irving Babbitt, The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts (Boston 1910) p. xiii

11. See Eliot, 'Preface' to This American World by Edgar Ansel Mower (London 1928) pp. xiii-xiv

12. See Eliot, 'American Literature and American Language', TCC p44. Herbert Howarth has reported William Greenleaf Eliot as saying, 'Children who have been early taught the lesson of obedience to their parents, can easily learn the higher lesson of obedience to God. It is, in both cases, the respectful and reverential submission to authority, under the sense of duty' (Howarth [1964] p14). Eric Sigg also has a good chapter tracing the influence of Calvinism and family background on Eliot's views of self, impersonality and discipline. See The American T. S. Eliot (Cambridge 1989) pp28-29

13. Eliot, 'An American Critic', New Statesman vii (24 June, 1916) p284

14. T. E. Hulme, 'Romanticism and Classicism', Speculations ed. Herbert Read (London 1924) p113

15. Eliot, 'To Criticize the Critic', TCC p17. For Maurras's literary essays, see Eliot's translation of 'Prologue to an Essay on Criticism', Criterion vii (1928)

16. SW p32

17. Arnold, Essays in Criticism, First Series (London 1865, repr. 1921) p7. Quoted by Eliot, SW p. xii

18. SW p31

19. Eliot, 'Christopher Marlowe', SE pp118-19

20. Eliot, 'Andrew Marvell', SE p296. The verse quotation is from 'To His Coy Mistress'.

21. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', SE p286, p287

22. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', SE pp209-10

23. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', SE pp287-88

24. Tennyson, 'The Two Voices', quoted by Eliot, SE pp286-87

25. Eliot, 'Donne in Our Time', A Garland for John Donne, ed. Theodore Spencer, (Cambridge, Mass. 1931) p15. The verse quotation is from Browning's 'Bishop Blougram's Apology',

26. Cf. Eliot, 'Swinburne', SE p327

27. Eliot, 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca', SE p126

28. UPUC p84

29. See Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', SE p21; 'Shelley and Keats', UPUC p88; and 'Byron', OPP p196

30. Eliot, 'A Sceptical Patrician', a review of The Education of Henry Adams, Athenaeum (23 May 1919) p362

31. E. M. W. Tillyard and others accused Eliot and Leavis of not considering the best of Milton, but on the other hand they themselves went to the other extreme by making more than likely claims for Milton. See Philip Hobsbaum, 'The Milton Controversy: A Documentation', The Use of English xiv (1963) pp180-86

32. Eliot, 'Milton II', OPP pp152-53

33. Frank Kermode and Edward Lobb, one adverse and the other sympathetic, yet agree that Eliot's history can be regarded only 'as a symbolic history, as a means of imposing order upon genuine, perceived differences' between various ages. See Romantic Image (London 1957) pp141--146 and T. S. Eliot and the Romantic Critical Tradition (London & Boston 1981) p43.

34. This remark is twice quoted by Eliot to justify his own criticism. See 'Thoughts After Lambeth', SE p368 and 'To Criticize the Critic', TCC p11.

35. F. R. Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry (London 1932, repr. 1950) p81

36. Cleanth Brooks, Modern Poetry and the Tradition (New York 1939) p11

37. F. O. Matthiessen, The Achievement of T. S. Eliot (New York 1947, repr. 1958) pp11-12

38. Kermode, Romantic Image (London 1957) pp44-47

39. R. Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition (London 1957) p12

40. See R. Foster, The New Romantics: A Reappraisal of the New Criticism

(Bloomington 1962); N. Frye, A Study of English Romanticism (New York 1968); and H. Bloom, The Ringers in the Tower (Chicago & London 1971). Though the view these critics hold goes back as far as Herbert Read (Reason and Romanticism, London 1926) and Edmund Wilson (Axel's Castle, London 1931), it was not until the 1950s that general opinion began to change.

41. Frye (New York 1968) p15

42. See G. Bornstein, Transformations of Romanticism (Chicago 1976), Chapter 3.

43. Gregory Jay, T. S. Eliot and the Poetics of Literary History (Baton Rouge & London 1983) p84

II. A Tennysonian Changed

I

Eliot's interest in poetry began in about 1902 with the discovery of Romantic poetry. He has recalled how he was initiated into poetry by Edward Fitzgerald's Omar Khayyam at the age of fourteen. 'It was like a sudden conversion', he said, an 'overwhelming introduction to a new world of feeling'.[1] From then on, till about his twentieth year of age (1908), he took intensive courses in Byron, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, Rossetti and Swinburne.

> It is, no doubt, a period of keen enjoyment... At this period, the poem, or the poetry of a single poet, invades the youthful consciousness and assumes complete possession for a time... The frequent result is an outburst of scribbling which we may call imitation... It is not deliberate choice of a poet to mimic, but writing under a kind of daemonic possession by one poet.[2]

Thus, the young Eliot started his career with a mind preoccupied by certain Romantic poets. His imitative scribbling survives in the Harvard Eliot Collection, a part of which is published as Poems Written in Early Youth. 'A Lyric' (1905), written at Smith Academy and Eliot's first poem ever shown to another's eye, is a straightforward and spontaneous overflow of a simple feeling. Modelled on Ben Jonson, the poem expresses a conventional theme, and can be summarized by a single sentence: since time and space are limited, let us love while we can. The hero is totally self-confident, with no Prufrockian self-consciousness. He never thinks of retreat, never recognizes his own limitations, and never experiences the kind of inner struggle which will so blight the mind of Prufrock.

'Song: When we came home across the hill' (1907), written after Eliot entered Harvard College, achieved about the same degree of success. The poem is a lover's mourning of the loss of love, the passing of passion, and this is done through a simple contrast. The flowers in the field are blooming and flourishing, but those in his love's

wreath are fading and withering. The point is that, as flowers become waste once they have been plucked, so love passes when it has been consummated. The poem achieves an effect similar to what Shelley achieved in 'When the lamp is shattered'.[3]

The form, the diction and the images are all borrowed. So is the *carpe diem* theme. In 'Song: The Moonflower opens' (1909), Eliot makes the flower-love comparison once more and complains that his love is too cold-hearted and does not have 'tropical flowers/ With scarlet life for [him]'. In these poems, Eliot is not writing in his own right, but the poets who possessed him are writing through him. He is imitating in the usual sense of the word, having not yet developed his critical sense. It should not be strange to find him at this stage so interested in flowers: the flowers in the wreath, this morning's flowers, flowers of yesterday, the moonflower which opens to the moth -- not interested in them as symbols, but interested in them as beautiful objects. In these poems, the Romantics did not just work on his imagination; they compelled his imagination to work in their way.

Though merely *fin-de-siècle* routines, some of these early poems already embodied Eliot's mature thinking, and forecasted his later development. 'Before Morning' (1908) shows his awareness of the co-habitation of beauty and decay, under the same sun and the same sky. 'Circe's Palace' (1908) shows that he already entertained the view of women as emasculating their male victims or sapping their strength. 'On a Portrait' (1909) describes women as mysterious and evanescent, existing 'beyond the circle of our thought'. Despite all these hints of a new development, these poems do not represent the Eliot we know. Their voice is the voice of tradition and their style is that of the Romantic period. It seems to me that the early Eliot's connection with Tennyson is especially interesting, in that Tennyson seems to have foreshadowed Eliot's own development.

II

The first poem of Tennyson to attract the young Eliot was The Revenge. As he grew

up, Eliot must have become familiar with the usual Tennysonian canon. The melancholy and the mourning of loss in 'Song: When we came home across the hill' and 'Before Morning' are the usual Tennysonian gestures. A certain use of words in 'Circe's Palace' is similar to that in 'Break, break, break'. Compare 'The peacocks walk, stately and slow' with 'the stately ships go on/ To their haven under the hill'. 'Stately' seems to be a favourite word of Tennyson: 'Maud is not seventeen,/ But she is tall and stately'. The Tennysonian influence managed to stretch, however vague it may seem, as far as The Waste Land. Let us consider the following example:

About a stone-cast from the wall
A sluice with blackened waters slept,
And o'er it many, round and small,
The clustered marish-mosses crept.

This is from Tennyson's 'Mariana', but the word 'crept' used in such a way is very Eliotesque; it reminds one of the creeping rats, while the blackened water reminds one of the murky Thames. Of course, it would be ridiculous to suggest a reference to Tennyson in 'The Fire Sermon', but one can see how easily a Tennysonian country scene can be changed into Eliot's darkened metropolis.

In other words, if one's purpose is different, the same images can be put to quite different uses. 'The Hesperides', which Eliot referred to in his essay on In Memoriam, contains passages which can easily be altered into what we would call an Eliotesque verse.

The Northwind fallen, in the newstarrèd night
Zidonian Hanno, voyaging beyond
The hoary promontory of Soloë
Past Thymiaterion, in calmèd bays,
Between the southern and the western Horn,
Heard neither warbling of the nightingale,

Nor melody o' the Lybian lotusflute

Blown seaward from the shore; but from a slope...

Came voices, like the voices in a dream,

Continuous, till he reached the outer sea.

The 'newstarrèd night' and the 'voices in a dream' are typically Romantic. The atmosphere is of a strange and exotic environment. This is the effect which Tennyson's poem aims to achieve. But there are elements in this which can be used for a different purpose. The sea journey reminds one of the original 'Death by Water'. And indeed Tennyson's 'Ulysses' may have made an early impression on Eliot, which was later combined with Dante and Homer to inspire the story of the Phoenician sailor.[4] The nightingale recalls the violated Philomela in 'A Game of Chess'. The Horn recalls 'Gerontion': the 'windy straits of Belle Isle' and the 'snowy Gulf'. The 'Lybian lotusflute' recalls

The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green

Enchanted the maytime with an antique flute.

'Blown seaward from the shore' recalls Prufrock's adventures in the chambers of the mermaids. And the 'promontory of Soloë' recalls the 'Lady of the promontory' of 'The Dry Salvages'. These are random associations and may not be Eliot's sources at all, but they are sufficient to show that, to change Tennyson's Romantic passage into Eliot's modernist verse, it only requires cutting out the dreamy aspect of Tennyson. This is what Eliot probably did.

Between 1917-19, Eliot taught 'Modern English Literature', from Tennyson through the nineties, as part of his Extension Lectures under the auspices of London University.[5] This may have done a great deal to refresh his memory of Tennyson. If I am right about this, then these questions will arise. Is Eliot's interest in the Grail legend connected with Tennyson's Idylls of the King? Is Murder in the Cathedral ever influenced by Tennyson's Becket?[6] And when Eliot said the following of the poet of In Memoriam,

could he be saying also of himself in The Waste Land? 'It happens now and then that a poet by some strange accident expresses the mood of his generation, at the same time that he is expressing a mood of his own which is quite remote from that of his generation'.[7] Indeed, this applies to Tennyson as well as Eliot. Even Maud is suspected to have prepared the way for 'Preludes' and 'Prufrock'.[8]

Indeed, Tennyson can be sometimes very close to Eliot in the use of imagery. Such a line as 'Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies' could have been written by Eliot if it is stripped of the unnecessary 'sweet' and 'blissful'. In Memoriam VII, which had given Eliot a 'shudder',[9] contains images of 'dark house', 'long unlovely streets' and 'drizzling rain', which recall Eliot's 'Preludes' and 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night'. The following passage from 'The Lotos-Eaters' must have been very agreeable to Eliot's taste:

> To muse and brood and live again in memory,
> With those old faces of our infancy
> Heaped over with a mound of grass,
> Two handfuls of white dust, shut in an urn of brass!

Whether Eliot had this in mind when he wrote 'The Burial of the Dead' cannot be known, but Tennyson's images seem to have re-appeared in him: 'Son of Man,/ You cannot say, or guess, for you know only/ A heap of broken images... I will show you fear in a handful of dust'. The Four Quartets, Eliot's spiritual autobiography during the war years, are in certain respects comparable to In Memoriam, 'a long poem made by putting together lyrics, which have only the unity and continuity of a diary, the concentrated diary of a man confessing himself. It is a diary', Eliot might have said of himself, 'of which we have to read every word'.[10]

Despite all these similarities, the Eliot we know is by no means like Tennyson. In fact, from 1919 on, he repeatedly rejected Tennyson's poetry. In 1919, he dismissed Tennyson as 'a very fair example of a poet almost wholly encrusted with parasitic

opinion, almost wholly merged into his environment'.[11] In 1921, he presented Tennyson, despite his perfect technical mastery, as a poet of 'crude' feeling. In 1926, he criticized Tennyson and Whitman over their 'faculty ... of transmuting the real into an ideal'.[12] To Tennyson, we may apply what Eliot said of Whitman, the 'American Tennyson': his 'world was thin; it was not corrupt enough'.[13] To Eliot, Tennyson lacked the honesty and courage of Blake, who affronted his age by revealing the 'horror'. Tennyson's work beautifies and idealizes, but ignores the huge gap between the real and the ideal.

Thus in the mature Eliot, Tennyson enters not as an influence, but as a negative example. Occasionally, Tennyson inspired a line or an image of Eliot: 'O swallow, swallow' near the end of The Waste Land is a quotation from Tennyson's Princess. But before bringing the image into his own poem, Eliot has squeezed out the element of 'idealization'. The swallow is no longer a messenger between lovers; it is not associated with romantic love at all. Instead it is connected with the rape of Philomela and with the sordid side of human relationships. 'Burbank with a Baedeker' uses a line from Tennyson's 'The Sisters': 'They were together, and she fell'. Eliot retained the Victorian sense of 'fell', but changed 'she' into 'he'. We are not to overlook this little alteration, because a whole chapter of cultural history is contained in it. A contrast is evoked, as it is so often in Eliot. The allusion becomes a means of criticism and the meaning becomes a vertical chain of associations.[14]

For this kind of poetry, Tennyson is by no means helpful. Contrary to the belief of A. Walton Litz, Tennyson could not teach Eliot to become what he wanted to be. Tennyson's meaning is singular and moves on a single level. His frequent use of words like 'dream' and 'charmed' only embellishes rather than enriches. His poetry has a fairy-tale quality and a fairy-tale view of this world, which is at odds with Eliot's character. Eliot certainly would not allow himself to slip into such lapses.

It may appear that Eliot had also learnt dramatic monologue from Tennyson and

Browning: the best of his early poems are dramatic monologues. But, as a genre, the form can be traced to the Elizabethan dramatists or perhaps still further to the Greek dramatists.[15] It is characteristic of Eliot to go to earlier models rather than his immediate predecessors, and the essential strategy of his poems is different from that of Tennyson and Browning. The achievement of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' is not in its presentation of 'a moment of significant being',[16] as the monologues of Tennyson and Browning are, but in its psychological conflict. When we ask what in this poem impresses us most, we may think of its vivid characterization, its irony, its bold language, and its complex effect.

Let us go then, you and I,

When the evening is spread out against the sky.

This opening may have brought to mind many poets of the Romantic period, the most prominent of whom is Wordsworth with his 'beauteous evening, calm and free'. Tennyson's 'newstarrèd night' is very much in line with Wordsworth. It creates an atmosphere of evening, rather than a very clear image of it. Eliot's evening is neither 'calm and free', nor 'newstarrèd', it is

Like a patient etherised upon a table.

Here we see Eliot's emphasis. By doing the evening (what a poetic subject for the Romantic!) such a violence, Eliot made a decisive difference, asserting something new simply by that one line. He has evoked all the romantic associations of the evening, as one critic has put it, in order 'to end them all'.[17]

III

To see how the Romantics disappeared from Eliot, we must return to 1908, the year of Eliot's great transformation. It may be said that from that year on he was trying to purge the Romantic tendency in himself. As his later activities show, his life-long effort is to beat the Romantics down. It all began with his discovery of the French symbolists. In 1908, Eliot read Arthur Symons's The Symbolist Movement in Literature and

encountered a poet called Jules Laforgue. This is a ferociously anti-Romantic poet. Especially fierce is his attack on Romantic sentimentalism. His usual weapon is irony and his usual trick is to entertain a sentiment while also dismissing it.

Laforgue led Eliot to see new possibilities in poetry and, like a sudden transformation, changed him from 'a bundle of secondhand sentiments into a person'.[18] Eliot learnt the Laforguian irony and applied it in his own criticism of Romanticism. The earliest results are 'Nocturne' (1909) and 'Humouresque' (1909): the former is a stylized love story of a Romeo and a Juliet told in such a way that the usual sentiment is exposed to ridicule; the latter is a humorous piece in imitation of Laforgue's 'Dimanches'.[19] The one unique success of the Laforguian influence is 'Portrait of a Lady': a dramatic monologue spoken by a young man who is trying to register the effect of a lady's intimacy. Whether the lady had a real-life model in Adeleine Moffat, the 'enchantress of the Beacon Hill drawingroom' Eliot visited, is not important,[20] the important thing is that she represents her type: a person who is romantic in every sense of the word: sentimental, nostalgic, living in imagination, losing touch with the actual world, using a language trite and decadent, entertaining feelings banal and strange.

One notable feature of the poem is the sustained comparison of the lady's speech to false music: a metaphor, which is more ingenious than has been recognized and which could be written only by someone who had made a serious study of the English metaphysical poets. To compare the lady's words to music is a way of dismissing her speech as elusive and illusory, likely to induce a state in which we lose our sense of reality. In fact, the comparison constitutes the most important point in the poem's criticism of Romanticism. And the wit sharpens the ridicule.

Having said this, one thinks of 'Conversation Galante', where the young man defines music as something 'which we seize/ To body forth our own vacuity'. Here, in 'Portrait of a Lady', he starts by associating the lady's fancy (Chopin's soul resurrected in a flower) to the violins and cornets rhapsodizing nostalgic 'velleities and carefully

caught regrets'. Then, as the lady rambles on, he compares her romantic idea about friendship to 'the windings of violins' accompanied by the 'ariettes of cracked cornets': cracked perhaps because the tune does not sound altogether right. It is rather the music 'de sinistres polkas', in Laforgue's words, 'Et des romances pour concierge,/ Des exercises délicats'.[21] It is quite probable that this was the source of Eliot's comparison of music and sentiment. But, while the comparison may come from Laforgue, the structural arrangement of the comparison is quite another matter. In this poem, the Laforguian association is coherently sustained by a technique which had been learnt from the metaphysical poets. Such a fusion of French symbolist poetry and English metaphysical poetry is the work of a genius.

When the lady resumes her sentimental velleities and talks about life as a lilac, it sounds to the young man like an 'insistent out-of-tune/ Of a broken violin on an August afternoon'. Here the metaphor reaches a new height. That the compared musical instruments change from violin and cornets, to a violin and cracked cornets, and finally to a broken violin, indicates that the lady's speech sounds increasingly wrong. As the poem draws to a close, her romanticism emerges as something decadent and ridiculous. This is a typical way in which Romanticism survived in Eliot's post-1908 poems. It survived only to be jeered at or rejected.

The subject of 'Prufrock' is love, which is perhaps the most outworn of all poetic subjects. By re-opening this subject, Eliot risked the almost inevitable prospect of imitation. The only new ground left to him seems to be in the treatment. In a traditional love poem, the lover's plight is usually his mistress's indifference. The traditional lover is thus always shown to be bombarding her with a persuasive rhetoric, a powerful speech, and his success depends on whether he can persuade her. Although he may experience the pain of love, and may complain endlessly, he is always confident that at the end he will have his heart's desire.

Tennyson's Prince, whose song Eliot celebrated in The Waste Land, is such a lover.

If Eliot's 'Prufrock' had been another version of such a love story, it would not have had any real worth. But Eliot introduces irony, as Laforgue taught him to do, and makes his protagonist fall in love, but also fear the love he entertains. Like a hero of Henry James's later tales, he is timid and afraid, but with a typical Puritan fear of having dared too little.[22] He feels his desire, but he also ridicules himself for having that kind of desire. His task is not to persuade his mistress (he never dared to reveal his mind), but to persuade himself. Prufrock's plight is his own self-consciousness. The irony is that, while the title names the poem as a love song, all the poem does is to overthrow such a title. It turns out to be a song about the inability to love. Prufrock may want to express his feeling, but the very expression changes the meaning. The love song looks like a joke. The sentiment is denied by its very expression. It is squeezed out, as Symons said of Laforgue, 'before one begins to play at ball with it'.[23] How did Eliot do this? Let us turn to the poem itself.

IV

The poem begins with Prufrock inviting us to go with him to visit his ladies, but, until the end of the poem, we never reach them. Thus the action takes place all on the way. It is a long winding street, as well as a long and winding argument. And in Hamlet-fashion, the argument is with himself, over the pros and cons of the action under consideration. For Prufrock, it is whether to express his mind, which is turning with desires. They are ordinary human desires, shown in his submission to the attraction of women's bare arms. As if led by the nose and quite in spite of himself, Prufrock is summoned to answer the overwhelming question.

Yet he prefers to linger; he prefers to take his mind off the debate for a while. The hustle and bustle of cheap hotels and saw-dust restaurants distracts him; the yellow fog also arouses his fancy.

> The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes...
>
> Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening.

This passage of eight lines which describes the fog as a 'cat' constitutes a metaphor quite in the fashion of Bishop King or John Donne. The essentials of such a metaphor, according to Eliot, are 'to entertain almost any idea, to play with it, to follow it out of curiosity, to explore all its possibilities of affecting [one's] sensibility'.[24] The cat-fog is certainly a play of sensibility, just as Donne's compasses-lovers and globe-tears are. Eliot's is certainly another example of the kind of poetry which Samuel Johnson had described as 'pursuing [the] thoughts to their last ramifications'.[25] Its long lines and slow cadence seem to show the relaxed mind of Prufrock who can now relish his own wit.

But such an 'escape' cannot truly liberate him or unburden his mind. The overwhelming question returns just the same. 'There will be time, there will be time', he tries to extol his own patience. He might just as well feel, truly at heart, that time is pressing on him, as Marvell's lover hears 'Time's winged chariot hurrying near':

> There will be time, there will be time
> To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
> There will be time to murder and create.

The phrase, as is well known, is an allusion to Ecclesiastes which says that there is a season for everything in the world. It is also an allusion to Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress', where the hero says exactly the opposite: 'Had we but world enough, and time,/ This coyness, Lady, were no crime'. But the language and the metrics remind one of Elizabethan drama. Its rhetoric could have been that of a Ford, or a Webster. It is 'an adornment or inflation of speech', Eliot says, '*not done for a particular effect* but for a general impressiveness'.[26] Prufrock's high-sounding speech indicates his escape yet again into self-appreciation: his verbal cleverness amuses him, but cannot relieve his heart.

Thus the initial one third of the poem has already shown Eliot's natural sympathies and inclinations concerning literary history. He has welded together in his first important

poem, consciously or not, the French symbolists, the English metaphysical poets and the Elizabethan dramatists. Exactly how these influences worked really important effects on him will be clear as we go on. Here, despite Prufrock's repeated effort to take his mind away, the women still return to his mind.

In the room the women come and go

Talking of Michelangelo.

Prufrock has known these women already, known what kind of life they live. It consists of endless coffee-drinking. 'I have measured out my life with coffee spoons'. Though cruel, the wit tells the truth of the matter. Prufrock's view of life is that of an outcast, a view which can come only from one who is tormented by 'the inevitable inadequacy of actual living to the passionate capacity'.[27] This view of life may very probably have come to Eliot from Laforgue who had lost interest in almost everything and who has long passages describing the meaninglessness of existence. Baudelaire's incessant complaints against life could also have reinforced such an impression. In his early poems written under the immediate impact of French symbolist poets, Eliot was already fascinated by this theme, but here in 'Prufrock', the sense of depression, of meaninglessness, is much heavier and much more oppressive.

To put it simply, Prufrock is bored. He is tired of the pretences of polite society, of its propriety and etiquette. Obviously he suffers from the Baudelairian or Laforguian 'spleen'. Although he is dressed with absolute correctness -- 'my collar mounting firmly to the chin,/ My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin' -- it cannot save him from being judged, 'formulated, sprawling on a pin'. Although the wit eases the tragedy by making it into a joke, the problem is unsolved and the situation remains. Prufrock still feels himself 'pinned and wriggling on the wall'. He cannot even do anything about women's gossip: 'How his hair is growing thin!'; 'But how his arms and legs are thin'!

Such a life, which consists of hypocrisy and gossip, is certainly inadequate for

someone whose 'passionate capacity' has exceeded what actual life can offer. Prufrock yearns for something more satisfying. He falls in love in order to find a way out. For another person, this would be an easy and satisfactory solution to a serious emotional problem. But for Prufrock this is not easy. He discovers that he cannot 'force the moment to its crisis'. His retreat cannot be explained in any simple way. He cannot be checked by mere small matters.

The fact is that his restraints are exercised from within, in other words, by himself. The prospect of loving another human being frightens him. The arms, which are apparently braceleted, white and bare -- arms which make him so digress -- are under lamp light 'downed with light brown hair'. It is the animality of human love which horrifies him. To fall in love is by no means the way out of his predicament. Thus he is shown to have fallen in love while constantly denying it as well. His passion is not of a kind which can find satisfaction in this world; it is a passion which no love of another human being can ever fulfil. Prufrock knows, when settling a pillow by her head,

> That is not it at all.
>
> That is not what I meant, at all.

The desire to love and the fear of its consummation: this is what tears Prufrock apart. As we have seen, the problem arises from his over-consciousness. He is aware of too much. It would be better and less painful if he could return to a lower level of evolution and a lower level of consciousness.

> I should have been a pair of ragged claws
>
> Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

This image of a crab is a duplicate of Laforgue's shellfish, which complains of having too strong an antenna and perceiving too much. Prufrock is certainly a very special kind of crab, which like Laforgue's shellfish is tormented by an 'extra-terrestrial hunger' ('fringales supra-terrestres'). Such a hunger certainly cannot find satisfaction in this world, least of all in sex. For the true object of its desire is 'the blind and silent

beatitude' ('la béatitude aveugle et silencieuse').[28] That means, it is the disparity between the actual and the ideal which causes pain to Prufrock, which obstructs his action. And it is only when we bear this in mind that we can fully understand why to express love is such a painful task for Prufrock: a task which in Laforgue's words 'm'aura sensiblement rapproché de la tombe'.[29]

In verses like this, where are Tennyson and the Romantics? Nowhere. Instead, we see Laforgue and other French symbolists; we see the Elizabethan dramatists and metaphysical poets. And with the help of these models, Eliot made a decisive break with the traditional treatment of the love poem. First of all, that noble feeling, which many traditional poets have glorified, is here considered as inadequate. And by taking a detached attitude to it and by treating it ironically, Eliot has avoided sinking into the sentimentalism which embellished so many previous love poems. Prufrock is always detached, always viewing his own feeling from outside.

... I have seen my head (grown slightly bald)

brought in upon a platter.

In this typical Prufrockian fantasy, he sees himself metamorphosed into John the Baptist. The important thing is that he now is both the actor and the eye that sees himself acting that role.

And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker.

Such a re-doubling of consciousness is Laforguean. And by using it here, Prufrock is able to adopt two roles at the same time: the one expressing his feelings and the other rejecting them as ridiculous. The fantasy roles are considered, and then dismissed. Such a technique is also common to the Elizabethan dramatists. 'The really fine rhetoric of Shakespeare', Eliot says, 'occurs in situations where a character in the play *sees himself* in a dramatic light'.[30] And the irony of Prufrock arises exactly from here. He is looking at himself in much the same way as Othello and Hamlet see themselves at their own crucial moments.

Having said this much, one point reached I hope is that Eliot began his poetic career with every prospect of becoming a Romantic, but he was fortunate enough to encounter the French symbolists, the Elizabethan dramatists and the metaphysical poets, who swerved his development into a different direction. Another point is that, although Eliot's becoming a modernist is already foreshadowed in some Victorian poets like Tennyson, he made a decisive difference by bringing what he learnt from them to a different use. A further point of investigation is to see how Eliot revitalized the tradition which he believes to have been driven underground since Milton. This I shall do by comparing him with someone whose career bears a striking similarity to his own, namely, Algernon Charles Swinburne.

Notes to Chapter II:

1. UPUC p33

2. Ibid p34

3. It seems to me there is an unmistakable presence of Shelley in this early poem of Eliot. There is a similarity both in rhythm and in poetic argument.

4. Ronald Bush even suspects Tennyson's 'Ulysses' had inspired 'Gerontion'. 'In all likelihood', he says, ' "Gerontion" starts as a recasting of Tennyson's "Ulysses", which ... Eliot called a "perfect poem" (SE 210, 211)'. See T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style (New York & Oxford 1983) p34

5. See Ronald Schuchard, 'T. S. Eliot as an Extension Lecturer 1916-1919', Review of English Studies (New Series) xxv (May & August 1974) pp169-72

6. Eliot must have been aware of Tennyson's Becket, for he later talked about his having cut out a romantic episode from Tennyson's play (OPP p81). However, there is a fundamental difference in their religion. Tennyson, Eliot says, only had a 'somewhat sketchy' Christian belief. See Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot, ed. Frank Kermode

(London 1975) p243

7. Eliot, 'In Memoriam', Selected Prose, ed. Kermode (1975) p243. The same view is expressed by Eliot in his radio talk on Tennyson's In Memoriam, 'The Voice of his Time', Listener xxvii (12 Feb 1942) pp211-12. In 'Thoughts After Lambeth', SE p368, he said almost the same thing about The Waste Land.

8. See Arthur J. Carr, 'Tennyson as a Modern Poet', Victorian Literature: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. Austin Wright (New York 1961) p312 and W. K. Wimsatt, '"Prufrock" and Maud: Plot to Symbol', Hateful Contraries: Studies in Literature and Criticism (Lexington, Kentucky 1965) pp201-12. The best study of Eliot's debt to Tennyson is A. Walton Litz, 'That Strange Abstraction, "Nature": T. S. Eliot's Victorian Inheritance', but he has exaggerated incidental similarities and, to me, reached a wrong conclusion, ie. Eliot's poetry is part of the Romantic tradition. See Nature and the Victorian Imagination, ed. U. C. Knoepflmacher & G. B. Tennyson (Berkeley & Los Angeles 1977) pp470-88

9. Eliot, 'In Memoriam', Selected Prose, ed. Kermode (1975) p243. For more verbal similarities, see S. Musgrove, T. S. Eliot and Walt Whitman (Auckland 1963), which has an appendix entitled 'Eliot and Tennyson'.

10. Eliot, 'In Memoriam', Selected Prose, ed. Kermode (1975) p243

11. Eliot, 'The Naked Man', a review of William Blake: the Man by Charles Gardner, Athenaeum (13 Feb 1920) p209

12. Eliot, 'Whitman and Tennyson', a review of Whitman: An Interpretation in Narrative by E. Holloway, Nation and Athenaeum xl (18 Dec 1926) p426

13. Eliot, 'American Literature', a review of A History of American Literature vol. II by William Trent et al, Athenaeum (25 April 1919) p237

14. Malcolm Cowley has a classic description of Eliot's use of allusion as criticism: 'Beneath the rich symbolism of The Waste Land, ... the poet was saying that the present is inferior to the past. The past was dignified; the present is barren of emotion. The past

was a landscape nourished by living fountains; now the fountains of spiritual grace are dry'. See The Exile's Return (Harmondsworth 1951, repr. 1976) p113

15. According to Philip Hobsbaum, Tradition and Experiment in English Poetry (Basingstoke & London 1979), the monologue of Browning also arose out of Elizabethan drama, which declined until a time when brilliant individual speeches were valued in themselves (p235). It seems to me impossible, as Robert Langbaum has done, to exaggerate Browning's influence in order to connect Eliot to the Romantic tradition. See R. Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition (London 1957) pp75-108

16. George T. Wright, The Poet in the Poem (Berkeley & Los Angeles 1962) p49

17. A. D. Moody, Thomas Stearns Eliot, Poet (Cambridge 1979) p32

18. Eliot, 'Reflections on Contemporary Poetry', Egoist vi (July 1919) p39

19. Eliot acknowledged this debt with a subtitle 'After J. Laforgue'. For Eliot's intensive borrowing from the French symbolists, see E. J. H. Greene, T. S. Eliot et la France (Paris 1951)

20. Conrad Aiken, Ushant (Boston 1952) p173

21. Jules Laforgue, 'Dimanches XII', Poésies Complètes (Paris 1970) p208

22. Cf. Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle (1931, repr. Glasgow 1974) p87 and Grover Smith, T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning (Chicago 1956, repr. 1968) p15. Other studies of Eliot's debt to Henry James may be found in F. O. Matthiessen, The Achievement of T. S. Eliot (New York 1947, repr. 1958) and Lyndall Gordon, Eliot's Early Years (Oxford 1977).

23. A. Symons, The Symbolist Movement in Literature (London 1899) p112.

24. Eliot, 'Sir John Davies', OPP p136

25. Samuel Johnson, 'Life of Cowley', Lives of the English Poets (London 1961) p36

26. Eliot, '"Rhetoric" and Poetic Drama', SE p42

27. Eliot, 'Beyle and Balzac', Athenaeum (30 May 1919) p393

28. Jules Laforgue, 'Solemé', Moralités Légendaires (Geneva 1980) p205

29. Jules Laforgue, 'Dimanches XVIII', Poésies Complètes (Paris 1970) p218

30. Eliot, 'Rhetoric and Poetic Drama', SE p39

III. The Lesson of Swinburne

Eliot recalled in the late 1920s, 'The form in which I began to write, in 1908 or 1909, was directly drawn from the study of Laforgue together with the later Elizabethan drama; and I do not know anyone who started from exactly that point'.[1] It is true that nobody started from that same point. That is the peculiar circumstance that made him what he was. But there are poets who were equally interested in the same authors, but who never became what Eliot eventually became. Swinburne, for example, provides an interesting comparison with Eliot. When we read Swinburne, we should ask ourselves why Swinburne studied the French symbolists and the Elizabethan dramatists and turned out to become a Romantic, while Eliot studied the same authors and became an anti-Romantic. To investigate this question will, I hope, throw some light on how Eliot established his difference with the then dominant Romantic tradition.

I

Swinburne was born in 1837, more than fifty years earlier than Eliot, and died in 1909, just when Eliot was beginning to write his first mature poems. He did not see the modernist revolution, but he and his fellow Victorians created the soil in which modernism was to grow. They popularized the French symbolists and the Elizabethan dramatists, so that these became what Hugh Kenner calls 'a pair of "period" interests'.[2] Swinburne went to Eton and Oxford, two strongholds of the 'Establishment'. Like Eliot, his first interests were Romantic poets: Blake and Shelley in England and Victor Hugo across the Channel. These influences were primal and ineradicable. Actually Swinburne never overcame them.

Eliot read Swinburne at an early age and, up till 1914, he could still remember some romantic lines from Swinburne's 'Laus Veneris'.[3] In Eliot's early poetry, there are shadows of Swinburne. There is the portrait of a Swinburnian male-torturer ('Circe's Palace') and 'a pensive lamia in some wood-retreat,/ An immaterial fancy of our own'

('On a Portrait'): a vision which seems to be presided over by the author of 'A Forsaken Garden'. Yet like all other Romantic poets who had influenced Eliot in his early years, Swinburne came to be seen with a critical eye after 1908. In fact, Eliot was perhaps most unkind, when he relegated Swinburne's Greek imitation to a 'vulgar debasement'.[4] In 1920, he attacked Swinburne for his lack of substance and his obsession with sound to the neglect of sense. Swinburne's 'pure sound' annoyed Eliot. Such verses as the following got on his nerves:

> There lived a singer in France of old
>
> By the tideless dolorous midland sea.
>
> In a land of sand and ruin and gold
>
> There shone one woman, and none but she.

'When you take to pieces any verse of Swinburne', Eliot says, 'you find always that the object was not there -- only the word'.[5] In 1922, Eliot made this same point. This time Swinburne is compared unfavourably with Dryden. 'Swinburne was also a master of words, but Swinburne's words are all suggestions and no denotation'.[6] What fretted Eliot is of course Swinburne's vagueness and elusiveness. His verse fails to fit into Eliot's ideal poetry of clear image and complex feeling. This point will become clear as we get to the latter half of this chapter.

If Swinburne the poet repelled Eliot, Swinburne the critic influenced him profoundly. His valuation of Swinburne the critic is higher than we might grant. Eliot almost depended on him as an authority on the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, the planets that revolve around the sun of Shakespeare. Swinburne was introduced to these dramatists at Eton and they inspired his early and, in Eliot's opinion, 'simply inferior' plays.[7] But Swinburne had an impeccable taste, concerning the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, and 'an unerring gift of selection'. He is, for Eliot, 'a more reliable guide to them than Hazlitt, Coleridge, or Lamb; and his perception of relative values is almost always correct'.[8]

The facts show that Swinburne and Eliot have many convergences of judgment. Both admit that these dramatists often lack unity; that they are sometimes inconsistent; and that their choice of subject matter often lacks a moral principle. But both regard them as great poets on a small scale. Each of them, as Eliot wrote of Middleton, is 'a great poet, a great master of versification', 'in flashes and when the dramatic need comes'.[9] For both Eliot and Swinburne, they are valuable exactly in this respect and both benefited from such extracted splendour. It is surprising to find that Swinburne and Eliot had so many favoured passages in common. It is also surprising to find that both poets wrote an essay on Cyril Tourneur, quoted the same passage for its poetic strength, and preferred likewise 'bewildering minute' to 'bewitching minute'.

> Does the silk-worm expend her yellow labours
> For thee? For thee does she undo herself?
> Are lordships sold to maintain ladyships
> For the poor benefit of a bewitching minute?

It would seem that Eliot's view of this dramatist was derived from Swinburne and that his categories of criticism were borrowed. Hugh Kenner said that the minor Elizabethan dramatists were first selected by Lamb into specimens and then became a passion of Swinburne before they were discovered by Eliot.[10] It would seem that Eliot owed a great deal to this tradition. F. R. Leavis also said that the very marked tendency of Eliot's criticism of the Elizabethan-Jacobean dramatists 'has been to endorse the traditional valuations'.[11]

But it seems to me that these critics have been misled by the appearances. One needs to look into the matter much more deeply. The best way to do this is to compare what Swinburne and Eliot said about the same author and the same work. In the above passage, and in the whole part from which this passage is taken, Swinburne says, 'there is a trenchant straightforwardness of appeal in the simple and spontaneous magnificence of the language, a depth of insuppressible sincerity in the fervent and restless vibration

of the thought, by which the hand and the brain and the heart of the workman are equally recognizable'.[12]

Indeed the last part of the sentence might have been written by Eliot, who had worked hard to achieve the unification of intellect and feeling (brain and heart), but it is unlikely that he was impressed by 'the simple spontaneous magnificence of the language' and 'the insuppressible sincerity', if there are such things in Tourneur at all. What Eliot saw instead were the strength of rhetoric, the complexity of effects, and the perpetual production of new meanings by the combination of common words. These lines of Tourneur, Eliot says, 'exhibit that perpetual slight alteration of language, words perpetually juxtaposed in new and sudden combinations, meanings perpetually *eingeschachtelt* into new meanings, which evidences a very high development of the senses, a development of the English language which we have perhaps never equalled'.[13]

Such a simple example will suffice to show that Eliot and Swinburne learnt quite different things from these dramatists and for quite different purposes. Eliot may have been introduced to the dramatists by the essays of Swinburne, but his views of them are actually distinct from Swinburne's. It is not inappropriate to say that, when Swinburne wrote:

> The ivy falls with the Bacchanal's hair
> Over her eyebrows hiding her eyes;
> The wild vine slipping down leaves bare
> Her bright breast shortening into sighs (Atalanta in Calydon)

he achieved that 'simple and spontaneous magnificence of the language'. And when Eliot wrote about 'the man with heavy eyes' who

> Leaves the room and reappears
> Outside the window, leaning in,
> Branches of wistaria

Circumscribe a golden grin

he too achieved that 'new and sudden combination' of words. The lesson which the Elizabethan dramatists taught Eliot may be said to consist, among other things, in the combination of common words to achieve uncommon effects. Eliot's quatrain poems of 1917-1919 combine influences from many quarters: the Elizabethans, the symbolists, especially Théophile Gautier, the Imagists, Henry James, and James Joyce. There is no 'simple spontaneous magnificence of the language', there is instead the deliberate arrangement of words into a complexity of effects:

This withered root of knots of hair
Slitted below and gashed with eyes,
This oval O cropped out with teeth.

Such a passage is perhaps beyond the ability of Swinburne. There is nothing of his 'pure and simple perfection of loveliness', nothing of the 'charm and sincerity of sweet and passionate fancy'.[14] There is ugliness, expressed in an ironical, witty and fluent language.

Thus what Swinburne and Eliot wrote about the Elizabethan dramatists tells us more about themselves than about the authors they studied. They appreciated in them only what each believed to be good and useful for himself. For Eliot, the Elizabethan dramatists (together with the metaphysical poets) imply the possibility of a different kind of poetry. They are not simple, nor spontaneous. They are complex and ironic. They represent a lost tradition which, Eliot believed, was capable of further development in modern times and which it was his duty to bring back to life through his own work.

In other words, these dramatists can be a real help to the poet of Eliot's age, who 'must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.'[15] Eliot's own quatrains are the result of a complex sensibility. Joyce's Ulysses is also the result of such a complex sensibility; so are Pound's Cantos.

For Swinburne, on the other hand, the Elizabethan dramatists did not indicate anything new. They only confirmed his belief in the kind of poetry he was already practising. Swinburne went to these dramatists, as we have seen above, only to search for sanction for the kind of poetry which was already in existence in his age, the kind of poetry which started with Collins and Gray, and culminated in Wordsworth and Shelley. This accounts for his blindness to the revolutionary elements in the Elizabethan-Jacobean dramatists.

II

If the Elizabethan-Jacobean dramatists failed to make Swinburne a different poet, how about his other model, the French symbolists? It was at Oxford in 1857 that Swinburne met William Morris who introduced him to Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood opened up new areas: French symbolism, Baudelaire and the theory of 'art-for-art's sake', and Baudelaire became the patron saint of their aesthetic movement. Swinburne's membership in the Brotherhood and his temporary conversion to symbolism resulted in his frantic insistence on the exemption of art from moral and humanistic concerns.

In his criticism of Baudelaire, we see yet again the division between Swinburne the critic and Swinburne the poet. His review of Les Fleurs du Mal exhibits the usual insight he is capable of at his best: 'Not the luxuries of pleasure in their simple first form, but the sharp and cruel enjoyments of pain, the acrid relish of suffering felt or inflicted, the sides on which nature looks unnatural, go to make up the stuff and substance of his poetry ... Thus, even of the loathsomest bodily putrescence and decay he can make some noble use'.[16] Swinburne recognized the peculiarity of Baudelaire's subject matter, but no dramatic change occurred in his sensibility or his poetry.

Poems and Ballads (First Series) show that Baudelaire failed to work wonders in Swinburne's poetry. Although he embraced some of Baudelaire's theories, his own poetry remained decidedly un-Baudelairean. All the time we feel the shadow of Hugo,

Blake, Coleridge, and Shelley. What Swinburne did was to try to reconcile these masters of his with Baudelaire and Gautier. The symbolists could be Swinburne's real interest for a period of time, but they never replaced the Romantics. Swinburne's first volume, which is well-known for its influences from the French, reads like a mixture of Shelley and Baudelaire at the most. But how much of Baudelaire can we find in

If love were what the rose is,
    And I were like the leaf,
Our lives would grow together
In sad or singing weather... ('A Match')

Very little, if anything at all. Yet there is much Shelley in it. Shelley's ghost looms behind every line of this short passage.[17] The figure of rose and leaf is typically Shelleyan and neither is the treatment of the matter out of the Shelleyan mode. It does not impress us as anything new.

Who shall give sorrow enough
    Or who the abundance of tears?
Mine eyes are heavy with love. ('A Lamentation')

Never did Eliot sink into such sentimentalism. Baudelaire cannot be held responsible for it either. If this verse illustrates the theory of 'art for art's sake', it is also written in a trite and worn-out language. And so is the following:

I had wrung life dry for your lips to drink,
    Broken it up for your daily bread:
Body for body and blood for blood,
As the flow of the full sea risen to flood
That yearns and trembles before it sink,
    I had given, and lain down for you, glad and dead.
                ('The Triumph of Time')

The image of a powerless male 'victim of the furious rage of a beautiful woman' is

the result of Swinburne's special masochism,[18] but the despair, the melancholy, which Eliot seldom allowed in his own poetry, seems to be losing control. Swinburne is given up to the emotion. He is carried away by it. He dwells on his suffering for so long that he makes it larger than it is. Even in 'Laus Veneris', which Eliot recommends to anyone who reads Swinburne, this is not altogether right.

> Alas thy beauty! for thy mouth's sweet sake
> My soul is bitter to me, my limbs quake
> As water, as the flesh of men that weep,
> As their heart's vein whose heart goes nigh to break.
>
> Ah God, that sleep with flower-sweet finger-tips
> Would crush the fruit of death upon my lips;
> Ah God, that death would tread the grapes of sleep
> And wring their juice upon me as it drips.

In the end, so many words were wasted in the expression, that we feel that many of his words have no meanings behind them. It is the words, according to Eliot, which give us the thrill, not the feeling. 'We see the word "weary" flourishing in this way independent of the particular and actual weariness of flesh or spirit'.[19]

The tradition which this epitomizes is a tradition which gives more emphasis to atmosphere than to clear vision. Swinburne's 'ivy' and 'vine' evokes the mythical world of Bacchus; his 'abundance of tears' overwhelms us with morbid sentimentalism; and I personally find it hard to visualize a 'fruit of death' being crushed upon the lips. Swinburne's criticism is sharp enough, but his poetry seems to be unaffected by French symbolists, who for him mean little more than 'art for art's sake'. It is perhaps in this sense that we should understand Eliot's remark that Baudelaire 'had what is in a way the misfortune to be first and extravagantly advertised by Swinburne'.[20]

Eliot, on the other hand, was reading Émaux et Camées, on Pound's instigation but

with a view to be stimulated and stirred to write. 'Have I anything to say in which this form will be useful?' he asked himself.[21] Like Laforgue and Baudelaire in the earlier years, Gautier had an instant impact on Eliot's poetry. Satire had existed in English, but Eliot was able to verse it in the peculiarly effective quatrain of Gautier. He was able to combine the Gautierian satire with Laforgue's complaints against life and Baudelaire's sense of good and evil.

> The hippo's feeble steps may err
> In compassing material ends,
> While the True Church need never stir
> To gather in its dividends.

This is modelled on Gautier's 'L'Hippopotame', yet we can also hear the flippant tone of Laforgue. Similarly, parts of 'Whispers of Immortality' are inspired by Gautier's 'Carmen', but we can also see the dandyism of Baudelaire.[22] Although these quatrains draw satiric portraits of modern life -- Burbank seeing his Hercules leaving him, the cooking egg aspiring for Madame Blavatsky's instruction, the Church more concerned with its stomach than a hippo, Grishkin distilling a ranker smell than the Brazilian jaguar, and Sweeney straddling in the lengthened shadow of history -- although these portraits point us to life's sordid side, they are not merely a way of criticism. The complaints against life contain intimations of the Absolute: the 'nimbus of the Baptized God' or, on a secular level, the memory of a golden age: 'the eagles and the trumpets' of the Roman empire and 'la forme précise de Byzance'.

The detached treatment is most certainly a result of Eliot's study of the French symbolists. It shows that the author has full control over his own feeling, and is cool enough to understand himself and his situation. He may feel pain, but he always stands at an arm's length to analyse his own feeling. If the pain is unbearable, he can also make fun of it, so that in the end the pain is mastered by being understood. This is not just a small strategy in the arrangement of emotion; it comes from the belief that the poem is

not an outburst of feeling, nor a spontaneous recollection of powerful emotions in tranquillity, but an order of words which are arranged in a special way to achieve a special effect.[23] Thus the French symbolists had an effect on Eliot, which they did not have on Swinburne.

III

All this seems to be best demonstrated by 'Gerontion', which unifies Eliot's inheritance from the Elizabethan dramatists and from the French symbolists. The symbolists have a strong presence in the poem, not in terms of allusions or quotations, but in the general way the subject matter is treated.[24] Although the poem deals with an imminent tragedy, there is neither the cry of pain, nor the sigh of despair. What we have is 'the dry thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season'. There is regret, no doubt, but there is also an analytical intelligence trying to understand it. The narrator never collapses under his own emotion. The detached point of view, the non-sentimental treatment, is almost surely a result of the study of Laforgue, Baudelaire and Gautier.

The influence of the Elizabethan dramatists is pervasive, and this will become clear as we go on. The poem narrates a personal problem, but it also implies a universal predicament. The old man in the decrepit house, whose name gives the poem its title, parallels the condition of mankind in Eliot's time: old, dilapidated, and longing for salvation. Gerontion becomes the 'comprehensive and representative human consciousness', just as the house becomes a symbol of the decaying civilization: the withered family stock, the European family, the Mind of Europe, the body and finally the brain.[25]

The old man's personal history offers him little prospect of Heaven. He has spent his life doing virtually nothing important and has earned little credit for after life.

> I was neither at the hot gates
> Nor fought in the warm rain
> Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass,

Bitten by flies, fought.

The 'hot gates' refers to the battle of Thermopylae in ancient Greece; the 'salt marsh' refers to a battle in modern tropical warfare. If Gerontion's life covers such a span of time, he can only be a symbol of Man himself, who discovers too late that he is not qualified for salvation.

Gerontion still retains, from ancient Greece, the hope of salvation by heroism. To become a hero is to be saved from the oblivion of death; it ensures that his name be passed on to posterity and be kept alive. Gerontion's regrets show that he is in some way still clinging to his kind of belief.

However, Christianity offers another kind of salvation. The Incarnation marks a time in history when men no longer needed to be heroes to be saved.

The word within a word, unable to speak a word,
Swaddled with darkness. In the juvescence of the year
Came Christ the tiger.

The adaptation of Lancelot Andrewes's sermon has a general significance relating to Eliot's thought on literary history. For Eliot, the early seventeenth century not only saw the highest literary development in England, but it was also a time of great spiritual integrity and religious awareness, of which Andrewes's sermons are the evidence. Then, after that, a decline began in literature as well as in religion. In the subsequent ages, we lost the mentality to understand the profoundest truth. Andrewes's 'Word made flesh', for example, is not understood by the modern De Bailhache, Fresca, and Mrs. Cammel.

To entertain an ideal age brings attention to the inadequacy of one's own time. This is the most important means of criticism in Eliot's poetry. The reference to the seventeenth century in 'Gerontion' serves to show how far away we have fallen from that ideal, especially in morality and religion.

In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering judas,
To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk

Among whispers...

This is the typical ritual modern men perform, whose meaning they have forgotten. The people of different nationalities -- Mr. Silvero, Hakagawa, Madame de Tornquist, Fräulein von Kulp -- indicate the universality of the problem. These people are going through the ceremony of Communion, with no religious awareness and out of no passionate belief. In the end, it becomes a mere devouring and makes no difference to Mr. Silvero who seems to believe in Christ, and Hakagawa who bows among Titians.

Thus, the problem with modern civilization is what one critic aptly calls 'the pathology of disbelief'.[26] Life without belief seems natural enough for most people, while others find it necessary to challenge faith: 'We would see a sign'. All are unaware that the looseness of religion, the looseness of morality, has resulted in a history of 'impudent crimes' and 'unnatural vices', both 'fathered by our heroism'. This modern depravity is only the endless end of a long line of sins and rebellions. Gerontion alone realizes this.

After such knowledge, what forgiveness?

His meditation, which is by no means a 'concitation /Of backward devils', reveals a horror: 'The tiger springs in the new year'. And by that time it is not we who are going to devour the blood of Christ in the wine or the body of Christ in the bread, but 'us he devours'.

The epigraph points us to a part of Measure for Measure (III. i.) which is highly significant for this poem on two levels. Firstly, it indicates Eliot's deliberate attempt to model his own poem on the music of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poetry and prose. In fact the whole poem consistently makes use of the Elizabethan blank verse rhythm. The very first two lines --

Here I am, an old man in a dry month,

Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.

-- are regular Elizabethan blank verse, although adapted from a modern prose work: A.

C. Benson's biography of Edward Fitzgerald. Eliot's debt to the late Elizabethan age, in this poem, is not just in the metric, but also in the use of rhetoric, in the dramatic techniques and in the form of dramatic monologue.

Secondly, Shakespeare's play functions again as a contrast to the modern experience. The duke, preparing Claudio for execution, tells him to 'be absolute for death' and meet 'darkness as a bride'. This is exactly what Gerontion is unable to do. The 'terror in inquisition' sparks off his heated self-defence.

In the next part, the Last Judgment is enacted, as it were, in Gerontion's mind. He tries to dispute the Judge's verdict, tries to explain away the 'unnatural vices' and his own loss of passion. In grand language, Gerontion argues that history has deceived us and confused us with its 'many cunning passages', 'contrived corridors and issues'.

> She gives when our attention is distracted
> And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
> That the giving famishes the craving.

The inversion of the middle line places the two 'gives' together, which (combined with 'she') reminds us of other meanings of 'give'. By seeing history as a temptress, the poem achieves an interesting ambiguity, showing Gerontion's problem to be both historical and sexual.

In the second part of the retort, the sexual overtone continues. 'Adulterated' and 'closer contact' point to the same direction. But the tone becomes more personal as the 'us' changes to 'I' and the 'you' becomes the Judge himself.

> I would meet you upon this honestly.
> I that was near your heart was removed therefrom.

The separation from 'you' is indeed a fundamental problem facing the modern man. Gerontion, in Yvor Winters's words, is 'an individual from whom grace has been withdrawn, and who is dying of spiritual starvation'.[27] Yet, in his craving for 'forgiveness', he discards the virtue of repentance and humility. His proud-necked

self-defence only explains, on the contrary, why he is to be 'devoured'.

Elizabeth Schneider finds it hard to reconcile this passage with the rest of the poem in tone and feeling.[28] Perhaps she has neglected the fact that the passage is adapted from Thomas Middleton's Changeling. This source is not just an insignificant accident, it indicates the author's intention to model his poem on this play, which in moral essence is 'surpassed by one Elizabethan alone, and that is Shakespeare'.[29]

The language in which Gerontion argues his case shows the general influence of Elizabethan rhetoric. He speaks like some hero of Middleton's play: proud, unrepentant and refusing to accept the Divine Judgment. In his high falutin language, there is all that self-inflation, which is the opposite of the virtue of humility. Pride, unrepentance and self-righteousness: these are what makes Gerontion the representative of rebellious Man. The end cannot be averted.

> ... De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel, whirled
> Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear
> In fractured atoms.

This is the unchangeable prospect awaiting this world of disbelief. These lines allude to George Chapman's Bussy d'Ambois, in which sinners are punished in outer space.

> Fly where the evening from the Iberian vales
> Takes on her swarthy shoulders Hecate
> Crowned with a grove of oaks: fly where men feel
> The burning axletree, and those that suffer
> Beneath the chariot of the snowy Bear...

Eliot said in 1932 that the image has a personal saturation value for himself, as it had for Chapman.[30] But again it is not just the imagery that Eliot owes to Chapman. Compare the cadence and the movement of the verse, and we see that Eliot is also indebted to Chapman's blank verse. Like his Elizabethan model, Eliot's *vers libre* has the flexibility to accommodate the most homely: 'The woman keeps the kitchen, makes

tea', and the most exalted: 'Virtues are forced upon us by our impudent crimes'.

It is here that we see clearly Eliot's difference with Swinburne. Eliot revives his models through his poetry, presenting them to us in a new and fresh perspective, while Swinburne, though receptive to them as a critic, is opaque to them as a poet. Looking back on Swinburne in later life, Eliot must have had a sense of triumph in not having become a Swinburne; he must have congratulated himself in having come down a different route.

Notes to Chapter III:

1. Quoted by Hugh Kenner, The Invisible Poet (London 1959, repr. 1985) p12

2. Ibid. p13

3. L. 55, 'Where tides of grass break into foam of flowers'. See Eliot, Letter to Conrad Aiken (19 July 1914), The Letters of T. S. Eliot, ed. Valerie Eliot (London 1988) pp40-41

4. Eliot, 'Euripides and Professor Murray', SE p61

5. Eliot, 'Swinburne as Poet', SE p326

6. Eliot, 'John Dryden', SE pp314-15

7. Eliot used 'simply inferior' to refer to the 'closet dramas' of the Victorian period, ie. 'the plays of Tennyson, Browning, and Swinburne'. See 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca', SE p75

8. Eliot, 'Swinburne as Critic', SW p17

9. Eliot, 'Thomas Middleton', SE p169

10. Kenner (1959) p13

11. F. R. Leavis, The Common Pursuit (London 1952, repr. 1970) p283. To be fair to Kenner and Leavis, Eliot never challenged Swinburne's judgment of the Elizabethan

dramatists as overtly or as vehemently as he challenged his poetry. Instead he almost always cites Swinburne as an authority (see SE p229, p231). A further evidence of this is Eliot's remark: 'The accepted attitude toward Elizabethan drama was established on the publication of Charles Lamb's Specimens. By publishing these selections, Lamb set in motion the enthusiasm for poetic drama which still persists' (SE pp109-10). Still, Eliot's criticism has a different emphasis from that of Swinburne.

12. A. C. Swinburne, Complete Works (Prose Works) vol.I, ed. Edmund Gosse & Thomas J. Wise (London 1926) p476

13. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', SE p209

14. Swinburne, Complete Works (Prose Works) vol. I (London 1926) p384

15. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', SE p289

16. Swinburne, 'Baudelaire', a review of the Fleurs du Mal, Completes Works (Prose Works) vol. III, pp420-21

17. See Shelley, 'Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,/ Are heaped for the belovèd's bed'. Eliot has pointed this poem out as a ghost behind many of Swinburne's poems. See 'Swinburne as Poet', SE p325

18. Cf. Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony (London 1933) pp217-37. For Swinburne's masochism, see also his novel Lesbia Brandon whose character Herbert, according to its editor Randolph Hughes, reflects the temperament of Swinburne, and his 'masochism is very largely Swinburne's'. See Lesbia Brandon, ed. Randolph Hughes (London 1952) p278, p393.

19. Eliot, 'Swinburne as Poet', SE p327

20. Eliot, 'Baudelaire', SE p381

21. Writers at Work (Second Series), the Paris Review interviews (London 1963) p84. Though, according to Pound, Gautier was part of the campaign against the sloppiness of contemporary *vers libre* , Eliot seems to regard it more as a poetic struggle of his own. See also Pound, Polite Essays (London 1937) p14

22. The best guide to Gautier's influence on Eliot is René Taupin's 'Influence du Symbolisme Française sur la Poésie Américaine de 1910 à 1920'. His views are repeated by many later and more accessible critics like Edmund Wilson (Axel's Castle, London 1931), E. J. H. Greene (T. S. Eliot et la France, Paris 1951) and more recently Erik Svarny (The Men of 1914: T. S. Eliot and Early Modernism, Milton Keynes 1988).

23. For Eliot's attitude to Wordsworth's theory of poetry, see 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', SE p21 and 'Wordsworth and Coleridge', UPUC pp67-86

24. 'Gerontion' reminds Wallace Fowlie of Baudelaire's 'Le Voyage'. The two poems are certainly comparable 'in terms of a cultural context', but it seems to me there is no specific borrowing from Baudelaire, as Fowlie seems to believe there is. See 'Baudelaire and Eliot', T. S. Eliot: The Man and His Work, ed. Allen Tate (London 1967) pp313-14

25. Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry (London 1932, repr. 1950) p83; and Kenner, The Invisible Poet (London 1959, repr. 1985) p108

26. Wolf Mankowitz, 'Notes on "Gerontion" ', T. S. Eliot: A Study of His Writings by Several Hands, ed. B. Rajan (London 1947) p133

27. Yvor Winters, In Defence of Reason (Denver 1947) pp496-97. Acute though this remark is, Winters's criticism suffers from a hostility to Eliot. He distinguishes The Waste Land and Les Fleurs du Mal, for example, as a 'difference between triviality and greatness'(ibid. p499).

28. Elizabeth Schneider, T. S. Eliot: The Pattern in the Carpet (Berkeley & Los Angeles 1975) p54. It is interesting that Schneider connects Eliot's whirlwind beyond the Shuddering Bear with the gyre in Yeats's 'Second Coming'. If Yeats is in some way comparable here, he is certainly not Eliot's source.

29. Eliot, 'Thomas Middleton', SE p165.

30. Cf. UPUC p147

IV. The City and the Mythical Method

1

'The pervading note of spiritual tragedy in the brooding verse of Baudelaire dignifies and justifies at all points his treatment of his darkest and strangest subjects'.[1] This is from Swinburne, but it could also have been from Eliot, who shares almost the same opinion. 'It is not merely in the use of imagery of common life, not merely in the use of imagery of the sordid life of a great metropolis, but in the elevation of such imagery to the *first intensity* -- presenting it as it is, and yet making it represent something much more than itself -- that Baudelaire has created a mode of release and expression for other men'.[2]

The difference is, while Swinburne is merely trying to justify Baudelaire's use of sordid images, Eliot is trying to find an example for his own poetry. 'From Baudelaire I learned first, a precedent for the poetical possibilities, never developed by any poet writing in my own language, of the more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis, of the possibility of fusion between the sordidly realistic and the phantasmagoric, the possibility of the juxtaposition of the matter-of-fact and the fantastic'.[3]

For Eliot, a new tradition was implied by Baudelaire as well as by the metaphysical poets and the later Elizabethan dramatists. It is not an exaggeration to say that much of The Waste Land is impossible without Baudelaire. The poet, who wrote about the 'Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves,/ Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant', suggests the image of an 'unreal city' for Eliot.

> Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
> A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
> I had not thought death had undone so many.
> Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
> And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
> Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,

To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours

With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.

The hellish city-scape is at once Dante's and Baudelaire's. If Eliot is most near Laforgue in his use of irony and most near Gautier in his use of satire, then he is most near Baudelaire in his exploitation of urban imagery. In tapping the sordid side of the city, Eliot brought some new life into English poetry, as Baudelaire had done to French poetry.

The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,

Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends

Or other testimony of summer nights...

In all these instances, Eliot gives his poetry a freshness which we cannot get from previous English poetry: a city of corruption and depravity which is far removed from the countryside whose fields of flowers had been celebrated by poets for centuries. In so doing, Eliot shows a sense of modernity, a sense of his own age which is as important as the 'historical sense'. This anyhow is Pound's impression of the early Eliot. According to him, one of Eliot's most important contributions is that 'he has placed his people in contemporary settings'.

> His men in shirt-sleeves, and his society ladies, are not a local manifestation; they are the stuff of our modern world, and true of more countries than one.[4]

Yet, in English prose, the city already had a strong presence in some nineteenth-century authors, most prominently Poe and Dickens. The latter especially had extraordinary gifts imagining London. We remember his Pickwick club, the lawyer's office, the blacking factory, the orphanage, and the Marshalsea. However, despite all the sympathy he has for the underprivileged and despite all the corruption he exposes, his city does not arouse fear, revulsion, and horror as Baudelaire's Paris or Eliot's London does. Dickens is not writing as an outcast. He is an observer as well as a participant. He

believes in social improvement and the final triumph of justice.

Baudelaire, on the other hand, has none of this optimism. His Paris, like Engels's London of the 1840s, is a post-industrialized city of mechanized crowds. Mass-production diminished the creativity of the individual and reduced him to no better than a machine.[5] Baudelaire's city-dwellers represented for him pettiness and triviality. Everywhere he saw stupidity, error, sin and small-mindedness. His typical Parisians are bored and spiritually dead, but they clutch their drink and women as at the last straw. Baudelaire's city is something of a hell and, in creating this hell, he becomes sort of a 'fragmentary Dante'.

For Eliot who was himself obsessed with a vision of London as waste land, Baudelaire was a useful guide. He suggested 'a way of feeling, a way of understanding disorder'.[6] In 'Les Septs Vieillards', which inspired the 'Unreal City', Baudelaire wanders in the foggy Parisian streets, an especially Eliotesque situation, and saw all Parisians in a vision of the seven withered old men. The sight horrified him. In 'Au Lecteur', from which Eliot quoted in The Waste Land, Baudelaire addressed to his readers a highly original sermon about what one critic calls 'our greatest sin': triviality.[7] The language in which this is revealed anticipates Eliot's prophecy of a similar ennui in his city of London.

This quotation, 'Hypocrite lecteur, --mon semblable, --mon frère', places Eliot in a similar position to the author of Les Fleurs du Mal: he envisages only a small audience and he is at odds with his society for being 'far in advance of the point of view of his own time'.[8] Eliot's London is nearer to Baudelaire's Paris than anything else. It contrasts sharply, for example, with Wordsworth's London, which 'doth like a garment wear/ The beauty of the morning'. Eliot's crowds over the London Bridge, his Sweeney and Mrs. Porter, his typist and house-agent's clerk, his Fresca and Mr. Eugenides, and his working-class women in the pub are all likely characters for Baudelaire's Paris: they are indeed Eliot's own 'fleurs du mal'.

The Waste Land is concerned with sterility and depravity. This is to some extent communicated in its craving for revival. In Baudelaire, too, there is a moving description of a swan which, having escaped from its cage, dashed out into the street dragging its white plumage through the dust and cried: 'Water, when will you rain down?' In this poem, 'Le Cygne', the bird's struggle to extricate itself from the dust, its longing to return to water, parallels the Fisher King's longing for rain. Both communicate a feeling of disaffection, of the hostility of their environment.

What especially impressed Eliot is Baudelaire's sense of good and evil. Baudelaire's view of sensual pleasure is one which, with some variance, Eliot preached in 'The Fire Sermon'. In 'Un Voyage à Cythère', which Eliot considered in 'Baudelaire in Our Time', the poet describes a man who with high hopes sails out to the island of love (Cythère) but finds on arrival a barren and rocky desert. Baudelaire has perceived, according to Eliot, that 'what distinguishes the relations of man and woman from the copulation of beasts is the knowledge of Good and Evil'.[9] In the end, the man saw himself as a dead body being consumed by birds of prey. The end of human love, for Baudelaire as for Eliot, is death. It is the pleasure that kills. Eliot's waste-landers, especially Fresca and the typist, are, to use the image of Baudelaire, only sailing towards death.

'All first-rate poetry is occupied with morality: this is the lesson of Baudelaire', Eliot wrote in 1922.[10] Baudelaire's 'sense of Evil' is always associated with a 'dim recognition of the direction of the beatitude'. We can say this of Eliot, too. The waste he portrays, the brown land and the murky river, also 'implies the possibility of a positive state'. However, Baudelaire could not provide all answers for Eliot's search for a new poetry, being 'insufficiently removed' from Romanticism.[11] Although he is one of 'the greatest two psychologists' in French, 'the most curious explorers of the soul', he only had 'an imperfect, vague romantic conception of Good'.[12] His morbidity, his Satanism, and his blasphemy have to be corrected, for Eliot, by Dante and the saints. His

'romantic nostalgia' and 'romantic sorrow' has to be replaced, for example, by the astute irony of a James Joyce. Indeed, Eliot learnt from Baudelaire what this author could offer for his own poetic revolution. And Baudelaire's influence on Eliot has to be seen in the perspective of the latter's renovation of English poetic imagery.

II

The Waste Land arose from individual poems composed over a period of several years. The final pulling-together was done during a recuperative trip to the Continent in the winter of 1921-1922. Then, two thirds were cut from the original manuscript by Pound's 'caesurian operation'. The final form exemplifies in many ways the experiment of the so-called Modernist movement. The poem's early readers were puzzled because they were not yet prepared for the excessive 'culture' the poem represents. Louis Untermeyer was irritated by the 'pompous parade of erudition' and the 'absence of an integrated design'.[13] Harold Monro challenged 'the permissibility of introducing, as Mr. Eliot does, into the body of a poem, wholly or partly, or in a distorted form, quotations from other poems'.[14] Even a sympathetic reader like Edmund Wilson was very conscious of the half a dozen foreign languages and the thirty-three or more sources.

The unconventionality shows Eliot, like Baudelaire, to be ahead of his time. Or to put it another way, his critics were behind their own age. What they failed to understand is that Eliot's innovations are largely an answer to the changed view of time and reality in his age, changes effected by developments in contemporary anthropology, philosophy and psychology. Anthropology showed that all manifestations of life, in the past and the present, are governed basically by principles which can be extracted from ancient myths. One corollary of this is that our modern life, however much it differs from past life, is paralleled by it and follows more or less the same pattern.[15]

In exploring principles of this kind, anthropologists emphasized the unity of mankind, regarding the less civilized tribes of Africa and the Pacific islands as the empirical evidence of the 'childhood' of civilization. A study of 'savages' explains the

origin of many phenomena and behavioural patterns of the civilized world. This is the basic premise of anthropologists as different as James Frazer, Jessie Weston, Bronislaw Malinowski, Wolfgang Köhler, and Margaret Mead. It created the mode for the comparative study of different civilizations and different races. Provincialism, whether historical or geographical, is to be deprecated. Eliot's Harvard philosophy department was famous for its interest in ancient Chinese and Indian philosophies, and Eliot himself had spent some years, not unprofitably, in 'the mazes of orientalism'.[16]

Psychology showed that our consciousness consists of perception as well as memory. The past does not die away; it lives in our memory, mixes with our perception, and affects our judgment. Bergson's philosophy did a great deal to construe such a view. If our mind works in such a way, then the reality we perceive must be a mixture of the past and the present. This is not just true to the mind of the individual. But the past of a race, the past of mankind, remains a living force in the present and persists as Durkheim's 'social consciousness' or Jung's 'collective unconscious'.[17] If literature is to represent reality, it must show how the past and the present coexist in our consciousness.

Such changed views of time and reality caused problems for literary representation. If our consciousness has its roots in all times, or if a large part of our consciousness is memory, then the narrative should not be constrained to the present alone. It should proceed at the same time on several levels and should encompass the past and the present and if possible the future. It should proceed in what Yvor Winters called 'qualitative progression'.[18] So what characterizes the modern age is a sudden widening of vision, both historically and geographically. Donald Davie has defined this as an 'imaginary-museum' situation. The poet is conscious of so much, both of his own and of other traditions that, when he writes, his mind seems to be moving in an imaginary museum, being simultaneously aware of various cultures and piecing them together to form new wholes.[19]

Eliot was always interested in different points of view, in the way the past survives into the present. He cultivated an awareness 'not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence'.[20] The primitive mind interested him, for it seemed to possess keys to knowledge which have since been lost to us. The habit of seeing visions, for example, which was common in Dante's age, is now no longer tenable.[21] In fact, it is relegated to the abnormal. The challenge for anthropology is to imaginatively reconstruct the past mind, to restore customs and habits which can be of value to the present, ie. to see the past 'in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show'.[22] Hence the collocation of the present and the past in Eliot's poetry. What his early critics failed to understand is that the allusions and quotations served exactly this purpose.

The metropolitan consciousness necessitates a new idiom and a new mode of expression. In 1922, after having criticized the 'three provincialities' of English, Irish and American poetry, Eliot wrote: 'The lesson of language ... is one to be learned on both sides of the Atlantic... Whatever words a writer employs, he benefits by knowing as much as possible of the history of these words, of the *uses to which they have already been applied* . Such knowledge facilitates his task of giving to the word a new life and to the language a new idiom. The essential of tradition is in this; in getting as much as possible of the whole weight of the history of the language behind his word'.[23] Now we understand why Eliot had put so much culture into his poem.

For Eliot, this new idiom was created by James Joyce. To the above statement, he added: 'Mr. Joyce ... has not only the tradition but the consciousness of it'. In his essay on 'Ulysses, Myth and Order', Eliot writes again, 'In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him... It is ... a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.'[24]

Eliot's criticism of Joyce offers a way to understand the method of The Waste Land.

It is necessary, in order to understand Eliot's poem, to go much deeper into Joyce's innovations, paying special attention to those episodes of Ulysses which Eliot really liked. In 'The Oxen of the Sun', for example, Joyce's account of Theodore Purefoy's birth constantly refers back to a much more important event in the past: the Nativity of Christ. The place is a maternity ward in Dublin, where Mrs. Purefoy is in labour. A group of medical students are gathered in the ante-chamber to wait for the child's birth. But the situation is described in terms which recall 'the vigilant watch of shepherds and angels about a crib in Bethlehem of Juda long ago' (345/14:1382-1383).

The parallel is ironical, since it gives an enormous importance to a mere ordinary incident: an irony which Eliot may have appreciated. It is very much like the way Eliot's Sweeney coming to Mrs. Porter is paralleled to Actaeon coming to Diana. The irony in Joyce, according to Harry Levin, is also double-edged. While it reduces the characters to mock-heroic absurdity, it also magnifies them, treating their little habits as profound rituals and attaching a universal significance to the most minute particulars. In other words, the finding of classical precedents for modern instances is not a pastime; it asserts a 'sense of the past, of the recurrence and continuity of human experience'.[25]

The theme of Incarnation is further exploited when Joyce describes the actual moment of the boy's birth: 'But as before the lightning the serried stormclouds, heavy with preponderant excess of moisture, in swollen masses turgidly distended, compass earth and sky in one vast slumber, impending above parched field and drowsy oxen and blighted growth of shrub and verdure till in an instant a flash rives their centres and with the reverberation of the thunder the cloudburst pours its torrent, so and not otherwise was the transformation, violent and instantaneous, upon the utterance of the word' (345/14:1383-1390).

The 'utterance of the word' reminds us of Eliot's own poetry on the subject; and the inflation of the situation to such a grandiose proportion, the elevation of an ordinary birth to such epic significance, looks like a joke. Yet, on the other hand, it infuses a meaning

into nature which would otherwise be totally automatic, instinctual and meaningless. We can almost say of this what Matthiessen said of Eliot. The parallel 'can greatly increase the implications of [Joyce's text] by this tacit revelation of the sameness (as well as the contrasts) between the life of the present and that of other ages'.[26]

What is more, the various stages from the child's conception to its birth are made to correspond to the stages in the development of English prose from the earliest time to the present. Such an ingenious arrangement seems to have impressed Eliot, who wrote in 1921, 'Joyce has form -- immensely careful. And as for literary -- one of the last things he sent me contains a marvellous parody of nearly every style in English prose from 1600 to the Daily Mail'.[27] Eliot's form, too, (especially in the quatrains and in The Waste Land) rose out of the same deliberate arrangement and the same careful matching of the past to the present. If Eliot did not need Joyce to teach him such things, Joyce's work certainly delighted him and confirmed his own belief in the method. He wrote in 1923, Ulysses 'has given me all the surprise, delight, and terror that I can require'.[28]

For Eliot, Joyce's significance lies in his invention of a new narrative method: the 'mythical method'. It is in the use of myth as a source of order and significance that Joyce sees parallels everywhere in contemporary life of what he already knew in myth and religion. He is having a continuous dialogue with the past. In the 'Scylla and Charybdis' episode, Stephen retells the life of Shakespeare into a parable of the Creation. Shakespeare's composition of Hamlet, his creation of an imaginary world of art, is somehow paralleled to God's creation of the world. In exact parallel, God created the world and entered it and suffered in the person of Christ. Shakespeare wrote Hamlet, and entered the play and suffered in the person of Hamlet.

Joyce often gives the impression that he is more concerned with the past than with the story he tells. The story only gives him an occasion to say what he has to say as a man of art and culture. The events, in fact, become only a series of parables. Shakespeare is further identified with Hamlet because he wrote Hamlet shortly after his

father died: a situation which recalls the Prince of Denmark who enters the play just after his own father was poisoned. Shakespeare's situation is also similar to that of old Hamlet. He too had an unfaithful wife. Old Hamlet has a son called Hamlet while Shakespeare had a son called Hamnet. All the time, what Joyce really wants to tell us is not so much the life of Shakespeare as the 'Consubstantiality' of Father and Son: God is both Christ and the Father who begot Christ. (171/9:828-885)

For sure, not everyone will appreciate this, but Eliot did. He wrote of 'Scylla and Charybdis', this part of Ulysses 'struck me as almost the finest I have read: I have lived on it ever since I read it'.[29] What deserves notice here is Joyce's meticulous effort to uncover the pattern which underlies similar experiences. It is this that Eliot learned for his own use. The numerous correspondences between the past and the present in both authors give the impression that contemporary life, although apparently chaotic, is in fact strictly ordered within a predetermined pattern. It is this pattern, which is often obvious in myths, that gives the contemporary life a meaning by connecting it to a higher or mythical reality.

Joyce's constant manipulation of parallels between antiquity and contemporaneity brings to sight the archetypal patterns of contemporary life. 'It is a function of all art', Eliot was to write later on, 'to give us some perception of an order in life, by imposing an order upon it'.[30] For him, Joyce's importance lies exactly here. And in so doing, Joyce has initiated a new form of narrative. 'The novel ended with Flaubert and with James', Eliot said, and so did their method. 'Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method'. And he did not forget to point out that 'psychology, ethnology, and The Golden Bough have concurred' to make it possible.[31]

III

Thus, the method of The Waste Land is the result of a changed sensibility, and a changed view of time and reality. If it is fragmentary, if it is packed with allusions, it is also a new and modern attempt to grasp reality. It is, in Eliot's personal terminology, an

attempt to transcend provincialism. Its realistic details assume meaning only when they are paralleled to those of a legend. 'Not only the title', Eliot wrote in the Notes, 'but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend: From Ritual to Romance'.

The legend is about the Fisher King, about the loss of the holy Grail, about the curse on his land, and about the search for the Grail. In The Waste Land, the modern world is seen through this medieval legend; the modern decadence is compared to the ancient curse.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish?

The waste, of course, is a metaphor. The stony rubbish, the sunken river, and the withered vegetation are an index to the spiritual state of the age. The sordid and the ugly are not depicted for their own sake. The description of realistic details is not meant as a simple rejection. The feeling of disgust, the feeling of disillusion, as Eliot said of Dante, is only 'the necessary and negative aspect of the impulse toward the pursuit of beauty'.[32] The rejection of this world is always the opposite side of the wish for a better world. In all the suffering of The Waste Land -- what Eliot said of Baudelaire can usually be applied back to himself -- there is a reaching out towards something ideal, something that cannot be had in human relationship.[33] In other words, The Waste Land is at once a critique of the contemporary culture and a search for the ideal, and for a reality of which the Grail is just a symbol: the Grail which once held the blood of Christ.

For such a vision, Tiresias the prophet of ancient myth and literature performs the role of protagonist, uniting all the rest. 'What Tiresias sees is the substance of the poem', Eliot says in the Notes. However, Tiresias cannot see. He is blind. Did Eliot forget this fact? Certainly not. The contradiction is deliberate. In ancient myth and literature, Tiresias is never the protagonist. He is the person who knows the fate of others, but is under vow never to reveal it. Though he is blind, he sees more than the

people around him. Hence, in Eliot's poem:

I Tiresias, though blind ... can see.

Eliot seizes this difference between blindness and insight and plays upon it. For the Sweeneyan natural men who only know 'birth, copulation and death', for the visionless and passionless crowds which 'flowed over London Bridge', life is all right so long as they have a secure wage and a home to go back to after dark. What has gone wrong with the civilization is simply beyond their understanding, beyond their interest.

Yet, Madame Sosostris seems to be different. A 'famous clairvoyante' and the wisest woman in Europe, she seems to understand the mysteries, she seems able to predict the future, but the fact is that she only knows fortune-telling. Signs are apparent in her cards, but she fails to understand them, no matter whether it is 'the death by water' or 'crowds of people, walking round in a ring'. She is a degenerated seer, a false prophet, and in the end only just another of the blind crowd, which has no aspirations beyond the immediate material needs.

Thus, The Waste Land mourns the disappearance of spiritual belief, mourns the lack of moral awareness. If the man and the woman in 'A Game of Chess' have any higher pursuit, they would not feel so helpless or so desperate.

'What is that noise?'

The wind under the door.

'What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?'

Nothing again nothing.

The lack of meaning, the lack of purpose, characterizes the life of this couple as well as of those in the East End pub, and of the crowd that swarmed across the London Bridge. Into this vision of cultural collapse has gone all of Eliot's personal breakdown, personal failure, which is transmuted here, as in Shakespeare and Dante, into 'something universal and impersonal'.[34] All of his personal feelings are enlarged into a prophecy of 'life in death'. 'I think we are in rats' alley/ Where the dead men lost their bones.' The

waste-landers are 'alive' only in the sense that the ghosts in Dante's hell are 'alive': 'I had not thought death had undone so many'.[35]

Added to this spiritual death is the atrocity of the First World War, the revolution in Eastern Europe, the shipwrecks at sea, and the murders in city suburbs. All these bring to mind, in the Joycean fashion, similar instances in the ancient world when death was believed to be a door to new life. 'Those are pearls that were his eyes'. This is how Shakespeare described 'the change by sea' which, through death, transforms the ordinary into the rich and the beautiful. 'I am indebted in general' to The Golden Bough, Eliot says in the Notes. 'I have used especially the two volumes Adonis, Attis, Osiris'.

These two volumes contain the stories of vegetation gods in ancient myths, who are sacrificed every autumn. They are either hanged, or buried, or consigned to water. And when they resurrect the next year they bring vitality back to the world. The 'death' of the modern world is nothing of this kind or only a parody of it. The soldiers are sacrificed in vain. The drowned merchant sailor is not the god that was put to water. Stetson burying a corpse in his garden is not performing a vegetation ceremony but covering up a murder. Here in all its memory and desire, the poet delivers a criticism of his time by holding everything in contrast with a better or ideal past.

The woman in 'A Game of Chess', for example, is described as a latter-day Cleopatra, but in the end she emerges as someone who lacks exactly what made Cleopatra known to us. Since she cannot even love, she is only a parody of her prototype. With her bad nerves, she also recalls Ophelia to whom the poem refers, but lacks all of her innocence. Maybe she is the violated Philomela whose picture decorated her boudoir: yet quite paradoxically she is a victim, not of violence, but of 'life' itself. Philomela's 'inviolable singing' is now reduced to her hysterical screams and bored sighs.

Thus, in Eliot, the past comes back to assert its presence just as in Joyce and the anthropologists. The parallel clarifies the present situation as well as diminishes it. As an

ideal, the past asserts its presence, ironically, only by its absence. What Tiresias sees now, as an ancient visitor to the modern city of London, is spiritual inertia, moral decay, and degenerated waste. But once Spenser described the city as a healthy and prosperous centre of culture. At the evening hour that strives homeward, Tiresias witnesses a scene of unholy union: the typist entertaining her young man carbuncular.

> The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
> The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
> Endeavours to engage her in caresses
> Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
> Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
> Exploring hands encounter no defence;
> His vanity requires no response,
> And makes a welcome of indifference.

The form, a flawless quatrain in iambic pentameters, which had been a usual form for love poetry, is here depicting a relationship which is loveless. In fact, the act is committed in such a feelingless manner that it only amounts to what Eliot calls a 'pleasant rape'. Compared to this life-denying sex, the violation of Mrs. Porter and her daughter by the ape-neck Sweeney is just a small incident. The Thames daughters who surrendered in a moment of weakness eventually came to realize their own weakness, but this pair, the typist and her young man, had absolutely no knowledge of good and evil. They are going through a routine, or obeying an animal instinct. Their meeting in bed or on her divan is only another example of what Eliot calls 'the natural, "life-giving", cheery automatism of the modern world'.[36]

On the technical level, 'The Fire Sermon' evokes several eighteenth-century followers of Milton. The typical evening setting recalls Collins's Ode (as well as Sappho's Fragments). The meditation on life and death at 'the violet hour' recalls Gray's 'Elegy', and the woman who stoops to folly alludes to Goldsmith's The Vicar of

Wakefield. But these are not called back to be Eliot's models. As A. D. Moody rightly puts it, Eliot applied to them the 'cultural critique [he] worked out in The Sacred Wood and Homage to John Dryden'. The sentimental feeling the scene seems to require is consistently suppressed by a technique learnt from Dryden: ie. 'to magnify the ridiculous and the trivial, and to create the object which his satire contemplates'.[37] The Romantic precursors will be further held down, as we shall see, by examples from Shakespeare, Marvell and the Jacobeans.

C. K. Stead has found parallels between The Waste Land and 'Kubla Khan', but it seems to me that they are comparable only in a limited sense: that is, as two examples of 'the purest poetry in the language'.[38] If we look at the mood of the poems, Coleridge's dream of a paradisal garden stands only at the other extreme of Eliot's vision of a degenerated society. The latter's sense of decline is genuine, it is the objectivation of a personal vision. There is none of what David Craig calls 'defeatism' in Eliot's critique of the post-war world.[39] It is exactly because his vision is likely to be discredited that it comes as a shock. To Eliot himself, that moment of realization is not unlike the experience of Joseph Conrad's Kurtz at the moment of his death.

> Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during the supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision, -- he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath --
>
> 'The horror! the horror!'

This is the state of Kurtz's mind when the veil is rent, the truth is revealed, and the meaning of existence suddenly becomes clear. The traumatic experience is 'somewhat elucidative' for The Waste Land in which a similar sudden illumination draws from its author a cry of 'fear', as it did from the prophet Ezekiel. For Eliot, 'the recognition of the reality of Sin is a New Life'. It is an immediate form of 'salvation from the *ennui* of modern life'.[40] But, at this moment, the society at large is not aware of it. Tiresias is

alone with his vision. He realizes what no one else realizes; sees what no one else understands.

What is that sound high in the air
Murmur of maternal lamentation
Who are those hooded hordes swarming
Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth
Ringed by the flat horizon only
What is the city over the mountains
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London.

The decay of Eastern Europe and the break-up of western civilization concur to make the world 'unreal'. As a persona Tiresias is not any different from Prufrock and Gerontion: he is a possibility of what the author might be. As well as a possibility the author contemplates, he is also rejected as imperfect or even ridiculous. Tiresias's prophetic vision is what Eliot aspires to, but his point of view is awry, just falls short of being totally correct for Eliot. His report of the decay, which is so devoid of feeling as if he has resignedly given up to it, is not the attitude Eliot wants. The sense of horror has to be supplemented from other personae: Augustine, Buddha, Ezekiel, Hieronymo and so on. This irony of Tiresias is almost certainly a continuation of the Laforguian or perhaps Baudelairean influence.

The hope of revival exists in the poem only as a wish: 'Who is the third who walks always beside you?' The presence of 'the unknown other' is communicated exactly through his absence. The knight approaching the Chapel Perilous only found that the Grail was not there. It is Eliot's special cosmopolitan disposition which enables him to seek wisdom in the thunder's voice. In the 'Da Da Da', he hears the heavenly commands

of 'Give, Sympathize and Control'. The crumbling old civilization failed exactly on these points, and they are exactly where a new civilization may start.

But this suggestion is made only to be dismissed. The poem reclines on to its pessimism again. In this modern world of unbelief and materialism, that prophecy is self-consciously unacceptable. The person who knows the truth and the mystery is only looked upon as a Hieronymo who has gone 'mad'. Or as the Prince of Aquitaine in a ruined tower shouting to a world which does not want to listen. No matter what he appears to the world, the speaker is at heart an Arnaut Daniel who suffers and wills the suffering for the purpose of purgation. Here the poet, by casting himself into these personae, is also doing something which Shakespeare's Othello did at the end of the play: looking at himself in a dramatic light. His attention is no longer on the problem he faces, but on himself.[41]

Thus The Waste Land completes a programme which started with 'Portrait of a Lady' and 'Prufrock': a programme to bring the tradition of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries back to life to replace the dominant tradition of the nineteenth century. But Eliot is not wholly sucked up into that tradition, either. He has his footing firmly in his own age. He revives the essence of that tradition and explores its full possibilities for further development. He brings the tradition back to life in a medium which answers to the sensibility of his own age and which suits the changed view of time and reality.

Notes to Chapter IV:

1. Swinburne, Complete Works (Prose Works) vol. III, ed. Edmund Gosse & Thomas J. Wise (London 1926) p421

2. Eliot, 'Baudelaire', SE p388

3. Eliot, 'What Dante Means to Me', TCC pp126-27

4. Ezra Pound, 'Confound it, The Fellow Can Write' (1917), Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, ed. T. S. Eliot (London 1928, repr. 1954) p420

5. For Baudelaire's view of the city and that of Engels, see Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', Illuminations, trans. Harry Zohn (London & Glasgow 1973) pp168-72. Indeed, Engels's criticism of the Capitalist mass-production in the machine age rests, to some extent, on the effect it had on the spirit of the workers. See The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844 (Harmondsworth 1987)

6. Wallace Fowlie, 'Baudelaire and Eliot: Interpreters of their Age', T. S. Eliot The Man and His Work, ed. Allen Tate (London 1967) p301. James Thomson's The City of Dreadful Night may also be at the back of Eliot's city interest, especially when we recognize that Thomson also saw London through Dante's Inferno. But Eliot read Thomson at an early age and as a school assignment. So it is probable that Thomson was later displaced by Baudelaire.

7. Stephen Coote, The Waste Land, the Penguin Masterstudies Series, (Harmondsworth 1985) p112

8. Eliot, 'Baudelaire', SE p381

9. Ibid. pp390-91

10. Eliot, 'The Lesson of Baudelaire', Tyro 1 (1922) p4

11. Eliot, 'Baudelaire', SE p390, p385, p388

12. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', SE p290; 'Baudelaire', SE p391

13. See Michael Grant, (ed.) T. S. Eliot: The Critical Heritage vol. I (London 1982) p151

14. Ibid. p165

15. Sir James Frazer, for example, draws on evidence from various cultures and traditions to reveal a 'widespread institution' among them all. Jessie Weston summarizes all anthropology, when she says: 'Myth in its nature is a common principle underlying

all manifestations of life'. See The Golden Bough, the Abridged Edition (London 1922, repr. 1929) p.vi and From Ritual to Romance (New York 1920, repr. 1957) p36.

16. ASG p43

17. Eliot describes Émile Durkheim, 'with his social consciousness', as 'fascinating' (SE p62). It seems to me there is a great deal in common between Durkheim's '*conscience collective* ', Jung's 'collective unconscious' and Bergson's '*durée vital* '. See The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (London 1915, repr. 1957) pp13-18; The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London 1977) vol. XVIII pp477-86; and Matter and Memory (London 1911) pp322-24. All of these in their own ways demonstrate how ancient customs and beliefs transmit through the ages in the form of behavioral codes and common assumptions.

18. Y. Winters, In Defence of Reason (Denver 1947) p57

19. Donald Davie, The Poet in the Imaginary Museum (Manchester 1977) pp45-56

20. SW p49

21. Eliot says, 'We have nothing but dreams, and we have forgotten that seeing visions -- a practice now relegated to the aberrant and uneducated -- was once a more significant, interesting, and disciplined kind of dreaming'. (SE p243)

22. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', SE p16

23. Eliot, 'The Three Provincialities', Tyro 2 (1922) p13

24. Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order and Myth', Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot, ed. Frank Kermode (London 1975) p177

25. Harry Levin, James Joyce: A Critical Introduction (New York 1941, repr. 1960) p74. The 'mock-heroic absurdity' and so on is paraphrased from a passage on p73.

26. F. O. Matthiessen, The Achievement of T. S. Eliot (New York 1947, repr. 1958) pp 35-6

27. Eliot, Letter to Robert MacAlmond (2 May 1921), The Letters of T. S. Eliot, ed. Valerie Eliot (London 1988) p450

28. Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth', Selected Prose, ed. Kermode (1975) p175

29. Eliot, Letter to John Quinn (9 July 1919), The Letters, ed. V. Eliot (1988), p314

30. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', OPP p86

31. Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth', Selected Prose, ed. Kermode (1975) pp177-78

32. Eliot, 'Dante' (1920), SW p169

33. See Eliot, 'Baudelaire', SE p390

34. Eliot, 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca', SE p137. The personal dimension of Eliot's poetry has now been generally recognized after such convincing books as Lyndall Gordon's Eliot's Early Years (Oxford 1977) and A. D. Moody's Thomas Stearns Eliot: Poet (Cambridge 1979)

35. Eliot says that the ghosts in Dante's hell are not deadened, they are mostly alive, reliving their life and suffering their desires again perpetually in death. See 'Dante' (1920), SW p166

36. Eliot, 'Baudelaire', SE p391

37. Moody (1979) p90, p91

38. C. K. Stead, The New Poetic: From Yeats to Eliot (London 1963) p149, p151

39. David Craig, 'The Defeatism of The Waste Land', The Real Foundations: Literature and Social Change (London 1973) pp195-212; see also T. S. Eliot: The Waste Land, A Casebook, ed. C. B. Cox & A. P. Hinchliffe (London & Basingstoke 1968, repr. 1978). It seems to me that Craig has mistaken Eliot's critique of the contemporary culture as a critique of the industrialization and urbanization. Surely, Eliot is more concerned with the decline in religion and morality. This is the core of Eliot's complaints.

40. Eliot, 'Baudelaire', SE p389

41. Eliot, 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca', SE p130

V. The Eyes of Beatrice: A New Direction

After The Waste Land, Eliot was confronted with several problems which were implied or expressed there, but were never fully resolved. 'The peace that passeth understanding' was supposed to be the formal ending, but the anguished cry never reached the peace and stability the soul aspired to. During the following years, Eliot's personal life became turbulent, as his marriage gradually came apart. The need for an external authority re-emerged as the heart tried to stabilize itself. This need culminated in his conversion in 1927, but all the time Dante pointed to the direction.

Eliot's interest in Dante started in about 1910 and it persisted throughout his life. To exactly what extent Dante possessed Eliot's mind is difficult to fathom, but his poetry up to The Waste Land referred to Dante from time to time.[1] Dante had always been a great craftsman for Eliot. Sometimes he suggested a solution to a particular problem, sometimes he lent a word or a phrase or a metaphor which Eliot found particularly correct. On the whole Dante set an example for Eliot of the economy of language and the concreteness of imagination.[2]

But from 'The Hollow Men' on, Dante came more and more to represent the metaphysical perspective of life. He was now not just the great stylist, but also the 'spiritual leader' and 'the great exemplar' of the type of 'metaphysical poetry' Eliot was now trying to write.[3] Indeed, this aspect of Dante's influence grew to be very prominent in 'The Hollow Men'. Eliot's cosmos of death's dream kingdom, death's twilight kingdom and death's other kingdom must have come from Dante's hierarchy of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. Eliot's attempt to give the word a new meaning and the language a new idiom in the later period seems to mean, according to one critic, making these terms comprehensible again to the modern mind.[4] The hollow men's world -- 'this valley of dying stars' and 'the tumid river' -- evokes the Dantesque Hell.

Shape without form, shade without colour,

Paralysed force, gesture without motion.

It is well-known, now, that these lines are adapted from The Heart of Darkness: 'a vision of greyness without form'. Indeed they might be, but Dante is behind Conrad, too. And Conrad's Congo is described deliberately to evoke the Hell of the Inferno.[5] Here we have an example of Eliot echoing an author who is himself an echoing of Dante. That is to say, Eliot was not just attracted to Dante, but also to authors who were influenced by Dante. We have seen how he was attracted to Baudelaire, the 'fragmentary Dante'. And we shall see in the next chapter that he was attracted to Keats and Shelley for exactly the same reason. It is sufficient to say, at this moment, that Eliot's 'hollow men', just like Conrad's traders, are the living images of Dante's ghosts who huddle together on the bank of River Acheron in Inferno III, waiting to be ferried across to Hell.

'The Hollow Men' is a coda to The Waste Land, not just because it contains passages which were saved from the Waste-Land manuscript, but because it concludes some of its important themes. 'This is the dead land'. Or, more accurately, it is the land of the spiritually dead. It may be the 'waste land' of the earlier poem; it may also be the dead land of Conrad's Congo. The river may be the Acheron, it may also be the Thames or the Congo. Indeed Eliot's heart of darkness is also a hellish 'hollow valley' of dying stars, a 'broken jaw of our lost kingdoms'.

'The eyes' and the 'multifoliate rose' are direct references to Dante's Purgatorio XXX. In 'Song to the Opherion', they were the 'golden foot I may not kiss or clutch'. This was revised into 'eyes that last I saw' in 'Doris's Dream Song' and then to 'eyes I dare not meet in dreams' in 'Three Poems'.[6] No matter whether it is the golden foot or the eyes, they belong to a beloved woman -- probably Doris, or the Opherion or the girl in 'La Figlia che Piange'. All these women here become one woman who is made into a symbol, rather like the way Dante made Beatrice into a symbol.

The second stanza is a dramatization of the feeling of being looked at. The whole

poem, to an extent, is about the hollow men's sense of hauntedness. The 'eyes I dare not meet in dreams' are actually looking at them and following them everywhere. The eyes are not just eyes of love, but they are also eyes of judgment. They look down from a higher reality. In the Divine Comedy, it is the eyes of Beatrice that Dante dared not meet at the summit of Purgatory. At that 'final meeting in the twilight kingdom', Beatrice's gaze reminds Dante of his sins and unfaithfulness.[7]

Similarly, the eyes in 'The Hollow Men' are also eyes that watch, judge and cause shame. They may be the eyes that looked at Prufrock when he escaped downstairs; they may be the eyes of that face which 'sweats with tears' in 'The wind sprang up at four o'clock'; and they may also be the eyes of the Eumenides that followed Harry in The Family Reunion. But in all these instances, they are terrifying. 'Let me be no nearer', 'not that final meeting'.

Stephen Spender found 'The Hollow Men' trembling on the verge of many things, not the least the 'Shelleyan romanticism'. Here, he said, 'we are not far from the stars in Shelley's "Ode to a Skylark", a poem which is all the more likely to have haunted Eliot because he criticized its vagueness'.[8] This is interesting, because critics have found 'The Hollow Men' one of the purest symbolist poems, without logical links and without even a background story to give it structural support.[9] Yet, we have to admit that there were non-revolutionary elements in Eliot, even in his early poetry.

The readers of the *Boston Evening Transcript*
Sway in the wind like a field of ripe corn.

The 'field of ripe corn' is not a fresh image, although there is some novelty in the comparison: crowds of people seen from a panoramic view. The way Eliot phrased it indeed sounds an echo of Shelley.

Henceforth the fields of heaven-reflecting sea

... will heave ...

Beneath the uplifting winds, like plains of corn

Swayed by the summer air. (Prometheus Unbound III ii)

The wind and the sway of corn are both in Eliot. The only difference is that Shelley's tenor is the surf of the sea. Yet I am not quite sure if Eliot is copying Shelley. Most probably it is a coincidence, 'a field of ripe corn' being a 'poetic' image, liked by poets of all ages.

As I walked out one evening,

Walking down Bristol Street,

The crowds upon the pavement

Were fields of harvest wheat. ('As I Walked Out')

This is from W. H. Auden. Again we cannot be sure if Auden is copying either Eliot or Shelley. The coincidence seems to be due to the fact that such an image is likely to occur to anyone imagining such a situation.

The nightingale is another memorable image in Eliot's poetry, but it is also found in a tradition of poets, from Nashe through Keats to Swinburne. I am afraid that Eliot has done nothing better, for example, than Coleridge in 'The Nightingale, A Conversation Poem'. The classical association of Philomela is also found in Coleridge. Even the memorable 'twit twit ... jug jug' seems just a version of Nashe's 'jug jug' and Coleridge's 'murmurs musical and swift jug jug'. Apart from the modern association of 'nightingale' with prostitute and of 'jug jug' with prostitution, what Eliot has offered us is just another routine description of the bird.

Eliot's susceptibility to traditional images should not be strange, since he has insisted on the poet's root in tradition. Some of his poems express emotions which are common to many past poets, in a manner which is likely to recall especially the Romantic poets. Nostalgia which is repeatedly found in Eliot is a notoriously Romantic subject. We think of Wordsworth's 'Intimations of Immortality', Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight'

and especially Byron's 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage'. The Romantic nostalgia leads either to the idealization of childhood or the memory of a Golden Age.

> And Harold stands upon this place of skulls,
> The grave of France, the deadly Waterloo!
> How in an hour the power which gave annuls
> Its gifts, transferring fame as fleeting too!
> In 'pride of place' here last the eagle flew,
> Then tore with bloody talon the rent plain,
> Pierced by the shaft of banded nations through;
> Ambition's life and labours all were vain;
> He wears the shattered links of the world's broken chain.
>
> (Canto III xviii)

Childe Harold, in his peregrination through Europe, often slips into such meditations on past glory and present decay. Thinking of Napoleon on the battlefield of Waterloo, he most strongly anticipates Burbank in Venice, 'meditating on time's ruin, and the seven laws'.

> ...Who clipped the lion's wings
> And flea'd his rump and pared his claws?

It seems hard, this instance apart, to talk of Byron's influence on Eliot, for the two poets are on the whole not comparable, different both in style and concern. Though Byron's narrative poetry earned Eliot's high esteem, it seems only to have inspired one of Eliot's juvenilia, 'A Fable for Feasters'. Yet, Eliot's poetry is not lacking in Byronic situations.

> Where are the eagles and the trumpets?

We need not think of the 'eagle' over the battlefield of Waterloo, but Eliot's sensitivity to decline seems to be an echo, if not a conscious one, of Don Juan's desperate call of 'where are they?' on the isles of Greece. And for both poets, the answer

may be 'buried beneath some snow-deep Alps'.

The isles of Greece, the isles of Greece!
Where burning Sappho loved and sung,
Where grew the arts of war and peace,
Where Delos rose, and Phoebus sprung!
Eternal summer gilds them yet,
But all, except their sun, is set. (Canto III lxxxvi)

The strong sense of loss is found in both Byron and Eliot. The only aspect in which Eliot may have risen above the Byronic framework is his non-sentimental treatment of this normally pathetic subject. Indeed he remains quite composed, treating the decline, though not without regret, as a matter of fact. This seems to have kept him at a remove from Byron's 'My own the burning tear-drop laves,/ To think such breasts must suckle slaves'.

The wind in the tree is another image adored by almost all the Romantics. A typical example is found in Shelley's

A wind arose among the pines; it shook
The clinging music from their boughs. (Prometheus Unbound II i)

Eliot is not totally free from such images either. His wind that 'shakes a thousand whispers from the yew' seems a remote echo of the Romantic wind of inspiration, music and joy. The only difference he can claim is all in the word 'whisper', which seems to me uniquely Eliotesque. It suggests mystery and hidden meaning, which are exactly what Eliot wants for his context. Otherwise, the image is totally traditional and can claim nothing new.

Yet, the important difference is that what had been a common, recurrent image in Romantic poets, becomes only an occasional one in Eliot. If we look at the main trend, we see Eliot not falling back into Romantic tradition, but moving further away from it.

His relation with Romanticism in the later period seems to be something like this: his antagonism gradually melted down; he no longer made fierce attacks; but he was still unable to appreciate Romantic poets because of their uncongeniality. Whether this was his fault or that of the Romantic poets, one cannot be sure, but the block in Eliot's taste was clearly still there, unsurpassed. 'The Hollow Men' is anything but Romantic. It seems to me unique in English literary history: there are no other poems like it.

We are the hollow men

We are the stuffed men.

The form of monologue, it is true, is not Eliot's invention. The confessional self-portraiture has precedents not just in Eliot's own early poems, but in many past English poets, especially in his immediate predecessors.

We are the music-makers,

And we are the dreamers of dreams.

This is how Arthur O'Shaughnessy begins his 'Ode', a poem which Eliot tells us can be found in any anthology of late nineteenth-century verse.[10] I am not sure if Eliot had this in mind, when he composed 'The Hollow Men', any more than James E. Flecker's 'War Song of the Saracens'.

We are they who come faster than fate: we are they

who ride early or late.

The similarity is obvious in the first-person confessional style. Yet the views of 'The Hollow Men' are anticipated by neither of these.

We are the hollow men

We are the stuffed men

Leaning together

Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!

It is a portrait of those passionless folks who populate the modern waste land. What deserves notice here is that Eliot has approached this subject through three different

angles: a method which is also found in O'Shaughnessy and Flecker. First, he describes how 'we' should look to those who have crossed to 'death's other Kingdom'.

> Those who have crossed
> With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
> Remember us -- if at all -- not as lost
> Violent souls, but only
> As the hollow men
> The stuffed men.

Compared to those who live in Paradise, we must appear spiritually dead. In their eyes, we are only flesh and blood, without the spiritual dimension.

Eliot's second step to isolate the hollow men is implicit in the above passage, too. It is to compare them unfavourably with the 'lost violent souls'. These are people who have spirit and conviction and have made an effort to pursue them. They are 'lost' and 'violent' because they either have wrong convictions or resort to the wrong means in achieving them. One of these is Guy Fawkes who, under the pretext of religious beliefs, conspired to blow up the Parliament at the State Opening Day in 1605. The other is Kurtz, the hero of The Heart of Darkness, who went to the Congo under the banner of civilization, but found himself using savage means upon the black natives, in what Conrad describes as 'the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience'.[11]

In contrast to these misguided but highly motivated souls, the hollow men are 'hollow' indeed, because they are not even motivated. Eliot's famous essay on 'Baudelaire' provides a gloss on this:

> So far as we are human, what we do must be either evil or good; so far as we do evil or good, we are human; and it is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing: at least, we exist. It is true to say that the glory of man is his capacity for salvation; it is also true to say that his glory is his

capacity for damnation. The worst that can be said of most of our malefactors, from statesmen to thieves, is that they are not men enough to be damned.[12]

The third perspective through which Eliot wants us to look at the hollow men is Dante's Inferno. The hollow men are the moral neutrals of the Limbo. Dante's ghosts, Guy Fawkes's effigy, and the farmer's scarecrows, whose 'heads are filled with straw' and who behave 'as the wind behaves', are the apt images through which we should understand Eliot's 'hollow men'.

These observations, accurate and highly critical, apply to the people who live in modern cities and whose vision never extends beyond the here and now. 'The Hollow Men' is a continuation of The Waste Land's rejection and disgust. The advance it achieves on that earlier work seems to be that it shows how very important the 'spirit' is to Eliot now. The change, however, is part of a general shift in Eliot's poetry and criticism to faith and Christianity.

After his confirmation by the Anglican Church in 1927, Eliot seemed to be preoccupied, more than anything else, by the question of humanism and religion. He had two tasks on hand: to defend faith and Christianity and to attack atheism. His enemy now consisted not so much of the Romantics, but unbelievers ranging from Descartes to the Humanists of his own day. His essay on John Bramhall is more of an attack on Hobbes, 'one of those extraordinary little upstarts whom the chaotic motions of the Renaissance tossed into an eminence which they hardly deserved and have never lost'.[13] His essay on Bradley seems a veiled attack on Arnold's theory of poetry as a substitute for religion.

In his essays on humanism, Eliot turned his attack on his former teacher Irving Babbitt and the philosopher Bertrand Russell, and severely criticized the former's theory

of 'inner check' and the latter's new 'gospel of happiness'.[14] He is now an enemy of anyone who does not accept Christianity, including H. G. Wells, G. B. Shaw, Professor Whitehead, the Huxley brothers, Dr. Freud, Dr. Jung, Dr. Adler, Norman Foerster and J. Middleton Murry. 'Without religion', he wrote, 'the whole human race would die, as according to W. H. R. Rivers, some Melanesian tribes have died, solely of boredom'.[15]

Such enthusiasm for religion changed the course of his criticism. Eliot had always insisted that we should regard poetry as poetry, not as anything else, and that literary criticism should always concentrate on the literary values and be always based on literary and not other considerations. But now this principle was being over-ridden by other interests. His standards of judgment, apart from those purely literary ones, now include those of a politician, a moralist and a theologian.[16] The theory of 'tradition and the individual talent' is now complemented by those of orthodoxy and heresy, monarchism and anarchism.

This is most clearly shown in Eliot's enthusiasm for Lancelot Andrewes. To me, Andrewes' sermons are rather plain, as they should be, since they were designed to communicate orally to an audience. And they are generally flat, except for occasional intensity. Yet Eliot was convinced of their extraordinary qualities:

> In an age of adventure and experiment in language, Andrewes is one of the most resourceful of authors.[17]

And after comparing Andrewes' sermons with those of John Donne, he concludes that the latter is 'a prose which is much more widely known, but to which I believe that we must assign a lower place'.[18]

The relative superiority of the two men's literary merits remains in question. It should be quite certain that Andrewes is by no means one of the best prose writers of the English language, or even of his age. It is all the better that Eliot could benefit from such

a writer. But one would have serious doubts, after reading Andrewes' sermons, if a remark like the above is quite disinterested criticism. It seems that religion and faith have become a considerable criterion in Eliot's literary judgment.

> Of the two men, it may be said that Andrewes is the more mediaeval, because he is the more pure, and because his bond was with the Church, with tradition. His intellect was satisfied by theology and his sensibility by prayer and liturgy. Donne is the more modern ... much less the mystic; he is primarily interested in man. He is much less traditional.[19]

'Mediaeval' and 'mystic' have both become terms of approbation. Donne is judged to be less good, simply because he is less medieval and less mystical. On a small scale, Eliot's religio-moralist concern resulted in such lapses of judgment. And it can be imagined, on a subject of greater scope, what this concern will lead to. It is in relation to this that Eliot's most famous faults of judgment occurred in After Strange Gods.

Indeed, For Lancelot Andrewes (1927) was a turning point. And this was strongly felt to be so by quite a number of critics of that time. Eliot himself recalled that an anonymous reviewer for the Times Literary Supplement hailed For Lancelot Andrewes as a sign of his 'unmistakably making off in the wrong direction'.[20] Whether the direction is wrong or not need not concern us here, but the change is unmistakable. Of the many essays which Eliot wrote between 1926 and 1931, half are on the writings of bishops and saints. In reading these authors, he had cultivated a massive interest in spiritual improvement and in the progress of the soul, which these authors write about.

Indications are that Eliot had by now reached a new phase in his intellectual development: a phase when he was presided over by Dante. If his early poetry draws us a picture of hell, he is now growing out of this waste land and moving towards a reality which is positive in the best sense. If his poetry up to now is largely a criticism, then the later poetry is going to be largely a song of praise. In the Dantesque metaphor, he is leaving Hell behind him and beginning his Purgatory climb towards Earthly Paradise.

In this sense, the early poetry and the later poetry are connected much in the way that drought and faith are in the Christian mystic's experience. 'The Christian thinker', Eliot writes, 'I mean the man who is trying consciously and conscientiously to explain to himself the sequence which culminates in faith ... -- proceeds by rejection and elimination'.[21] Indeed his own poetry started with 'rejection and elimination'. These two words summarize what he had done in 'Prufrock', 'Gerontion' and The Waste Land. The deep sense of horror and disgust expressed in these works is indeed the first step in his progress toward the love of God.

That is to say, looking back from 1927, Eliot's early poetry assumes added significance and becomes part of a 'larger whole of experience'. The despair and disgust, expressed in the early poetry, have become 'a necessary prelude to, and element in, the joy of faith'.[22] 'His despair, his disillusion, are, however, no illustration of personal weakness' -- what Eliot said of Pascal generally illustrates himself as well -- 'They are perfectly objective, because they are essential moments in the progress of the intellectual soul; and ... they are the analogue of the drought, the dark night, which is an essential stage in the progress of the Christian mystic'.[23]

In the later poetry then, Eliot has passed the drought and embarked on the 'way to the promised land beyond the waste'.[24] Here he is doing what Dante had done in Purgatorio and Paradiso. In this sense, we must guard against a prejudice which some critics hold against Dante's Purgatorio and Paradiso: 'the prejudice that poetry not only must be found *through* suffering but can find its material only *in* suffering'.[25] The point is that, for Eliot now, 'beatitude' will be the subject of his poetry. If Dante became the most important influence on Eliot from now on, then we would expect in Eliot a Dantesque progress towards the beatitude and, most importantly, a Dantesque view of the universe.

But Dante is by no means the author of the ideological system in his own poetry. According to Eliot, he 'had behind him the system of St. Thomas, to which his poem corresponds point to point'.[26] Dante's cosmological geography originated in the Thomist division of essence and existence. Although this again can be traced back to Aristotle, it is through St. Thomas, the first man to systematize Catholic theology, that Aristotle was passed on to Dante. The Thomist system of thought seems to have sifted through Dante into Eliot's own mind.

> In the poetry of Dante, and even of Guido Cavalcanti, there is always the assumption of an ideal unity in experience, the faith in an ultimate rationalisation and harmonisation of experience, the subsumption of the lower under the higher, an ordering of the world more or less Aristotelian.[27]

This was written by Eliot in 1931, when he compared the age of Donne unfavourably to the age of Dante. There is in this remark not just an admiration for the poetry of Dante, but also an admiration for the condition of his age: a condition which Eliot summarized as an ideological unity and a belief in a common external reality.

Such a comparison also suggests that the age of Donne no longer has the importance it once had in Eliot's private tradition. Edward Lobb has very well demonstrated that, in his 1926 Clark Lectures, Eliot had pushed his most valued historical period from the seventeenth century back to the age of Dante.[28] The unified mind, the mind which can think and feel simultaneously, is now exemplified not by Donne but by Dante and the medieval Europe. The seventeenth century remains an influence, but with only a secondary importance.

Indeed the tradition of Eliot's later poetry seems to consist of Dante and medieval visionary poets. He shares their bleak vision of this world and their aspiration for the

world of the spirit. The first step towards the spiritual world seems to be rejection. Thus, Part V of 'The Hollow Men' opens with a sarcastic description of the worldly life. Based on a nursery rhyme, the passage pictures the life of Man as children's play: a merry-go-round around a prickly pear, the prickly pear being a phallic symbol and the merry-go-round an obsession with human love.[29] The spirit in which this is described borders on black humour. And the point reached is that this life is almost hopeless and worthless, characterized by activities centred on bodily and material satisfaction. It is completely incompatible with the world of the spirit.

Thus a dark Shadow is seen to separate the universe into two halves: idea and reality, motion and act, conception and creation, emotion and response, desire and spasm, potency and existence, and essence and descent. In other words, the Shadow forms a barrier between us and the kingdom of God. The Shadow, of course, is death; and salvation requires passing through this Shadow.

As the poem develops, the gulf of separation becomes so painfully felt that the feeling intensifies into a death-wish.

Life is very long.

In a beautiful image borrowed from Rudyard Kipling's 'Danny Deever', which Eliot describes as 'technically remarkable',[30] the world is seen coming to its end.

This is the way the world ends

Not with a bang but a whimper.

A whimper is Kipling's image of Danny Deever passing away. A bang is the image of the explosion of Guy's gunpowder. Eliot chose to see the world end in a whimper because, in his later poetry, this world dies through personal renunciation and rejection, through total devotion to a transcendental world. Like in the saint's passion, this is done in solitude, not in revolution. In the later poetry, nature is rejected in favour of a super-nature.

Finally, we have to ask ourselves: is Eliot abandoning the seventeenth-century metaphysical tradition of Donne and Webster in favour of Dante and thirteenth-century Europe? The answer is 'no'. Only Eliot now needed Dante more than Donne and Webster. This is because of his religion and of his spiritual need. In terms of literary qualities, Donne and Dante belong to the same tradition. 'The poets of the seventeenth century, the successors of the dramatists of the sixteenth, possessed a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience. They are simple, artificial, difficult, or fantastic, as their predecessors were; no less nor more than Dante, Guido Cavalcanti, Guinicelli, or Cino'.[31] In Eliot's mind, the thirteenth century and the seventeenth century are inseparable and are linked together in a continuous line of development.

When Samuel Johnson named the 'school of Donne' as 'metaphysical' poets, he was chiefly criticizing their wit, their love of conceit. Eliot's 'metaphysical' tradition, though admitting these qualifications, obviously has another meaning. He used the word to mean what it means in philosophy: namely, what is beyond our vision, what transcends our perception. Eliot's later poetry is devoted to the exploration of a visionary world. It is 'metaphysical' in the sense that Dante's poetry is metaphysical. And therefore he followed Dante more closely than anyone else.

Notes to Chapter V:

1. The most memorable references to Dante in Eliot's early poems are the epigraph to 'Prufrock', the title of the American edition of Poems (1920), and the various allusions: Piccarda de Donati in 'A Cooking Egg'; Inferno IV, La Pia, Ugolino and Arnaut Daniel in The Waste Land. In his later poetry, Eliot referred to Dante many times. For an introduction to Dante's influence, see Mario Praz, 'T. S. Eliot and Dante',

Southern Review ii (1937) and Graham Hough, 'Dante and Eliot', Critical Quarterly xvi (1974)

2. Cf. Eliot, 'Dante' (1929), SE p252. 'For the science or art of writing verse, one has learnt from the Inferno that the greatest poetry can be written with the greatest economy of words, and with the greatest austerity in the use of metaphor, simile, verbal beauty, and elegance'.

3. Eliot's essay 'Dante' (1920) was originally entitled 'Dante as a "Spiritual Leader"' Athenaeum (2 April 1920) p441. The 'great exemplar' is from Clark Lecture I pp15-16.

4. Dominic Manganiello, T. S. Eliot & Dante (Basingstoke & London 1989) p3

5. Conrad, in The Heart of Darkness (Harmondsworth 1983), often used Dantesque metaphors to describe the Congo. On one occasion, Marlow turns off the path into the shade of a grove, only to discover that 'I had stepped into the gloomy circle of some Inferno' (p44). The white traders are 'mean and greedy shadows' and the land is 'a wilderness' of 'impalpable greyness'. For Conrad's debt to Dante and Virgil, see Robert O. Evans, 'Conrad's Underworld', Modern Fiction Studies ii (1965) pp56-60 and Lillian Feder, 'Marlow's Descent into Hell', Nineteenth-Century Fiction ix (1955) pp280-92

6. 'The Hollow Men' went through an experimentation of three or four years and through many revisions. Most of the five sections were published individually in poems entitled differently. For the publication history, see A. D. Moody, Thomas Stearns Eliot, Poet (Cambridge 1979) pp118-21 and C. K. Stead, The New Poetic: From Yeats to Eliot (London 1963) pp167-70

7. See Purgatorio XXX. Eliot referred to this episode in 'Dante' (1929) as 'of the greatest *personal* intensity in the whole poem'. SE p263

8. Stephen Spender, Eliot (Glasgow 1975) p122

9. Grover Smith argues that The Waste Land, for all its lack of logical links, had the advantage of the Grail legend as an underpattern. In 'The Hollow Men', even this has

been omitted. See T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning (Chicago 1956, repr. 1968) pp102-03

10. See Eliot, 'What is Minor Poetry', OPP p44

11. Joseph Conrad, 'Geography and Some Explorers', Last Essays (London 1926) p25

12. Eliot, 'Baudelaire', SE p391

13. Eliot, 'John Bramhall', FLA pp35-36

14. These attacks were repeated in 'Thoughts After Lambeth' in a more obvious form. See SE pp353-77

15. Eliot, 'Thoughts after Lambeth', SE p360. In 1948, Eliot made a very similar statement: 'Any religion, while it lasts, and on its own level, gives an apparent meaning to life, provides the frame-work for a culture, and protects the mass of humanity from boredom and dispair' (NDC p34). It is interesting to compare these remarks with his earlier statement: 'Religion, however poor our lives would be without it, is only one form of satisfaction among others, rather than the culminating satisfaction of all satisfactions'. See International Journal of Ethics xxvii (July 1917) pp542-43

16. This is obvious in much of Eliot's criticism of this period. The essays on humanism, Bramhall, Bradley, Andrewes, and the two sets of lectures delivered in America, The Use of Poetry and After Strange Gods -- all testify to this. Finally, Eliot set it down in 'Religion and Literature' (1935) in a plain statement: 'The "greatness" of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards'. See Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot, ed. Frank Kermode (London 1975) p97

17. Eliot, 'Lancelot Andrewes', FLA p27

18. Ibid. p19

19. Ibid. p31

20. Eliot, 'Thoughts after Lambeth', SE 358

21. Eliot, 'The Pensées of Pascal', EAM p146

22. Ibid. p152

23. Ibid. p152

24. Eliot, 'Thoughts After Lambeth', SE p358

25. Eliot, 'Dante' (1929), SE p262

26. Eliot, 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca', SE p135

27. Eliot, 'Donne in Our Time', A Garland for John Donne, ed. Theodore Spencer (Cambridge, Mass.1931) p8

28. See Edward Lobb, T. S. Eliot and the Romantic Critical Tradition (London 1981) pp15-17. There is much idealization, as Praz and Hough pointed out, in Eliot's judgment of Dante's age: idealization either arising from misunderstanding or imperfect understanding. For Eliot, some passages in Dante assume 'a significance infinitely more potent than its verbal import' (Praz p527). His understanding of medieval Europe is largely monolithic: ignoring all its problems only to emphasize its integrity of thought (Hough p298). Nevertheless, it is sufficient to show what importance Dante and his age had for Eliot now.

29. See Smith (1956) p107

30. Eliot, 'Rudyard Kipling', OPP p232

31. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', SE pp287-88

VI. From Dejection to Revival

For critics who want to see Eliot as part of the Romantic tradition, the later Eliot presents some happy evidence. Now he became more tolerant in his criticism and on more than one occasion admitted his injustice to Milton and the Romantics. He wrote long essays on every one of the English High Romantics, and on Goethe, Tennyson and Kipling. His cult of In Memoriam and Kipling's verse seems to indicate a positive interest rather than an intention to criticise them adversely.[1] In 1932, he wrote with conviction that Byron's Don Juan contains some 'sound critical admonition' and that most observations in Keats's letters are 'of the finest quality of criticism, and the deepest penetration'.[2] In 1950, he quoted from Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' and The Triumph of Life as among 'the greatest and most Dantesque lines in English': 'a supreme tribute to Dante'.[3] In 1956, he presented Coleridge as the founder of modern criticism and said: 'The criticism of to-day, indeed, may be said to be in direct descent from Coleridge'.[4]

It is interesting to examine Eliot's later poetry in view of these remarks. His imagery now includes the traditional stars, rose, garden, fountain and so on. The various techniques and devices of his early poetry are no longer in use. Now he seldom uses personae, except in some Ariel poems. The voice of the poem and the voice of the poet begin to merge and become a single voice. Irony almost disappears and sincerity is in order. With these changes, his chief weapons against Romanticism seem to have gone. Now we must ask ourselves what relation the later Eliot bore to the Romantics and whether he now received any influence from the poets he had formerly attacked.

George Bornstein and A. Walton Litz seem to have come to the positive answer.[5] To do them justice, we may discover in Eliot's later poetry quite a few links with the Romantic period. The situation, the subject matter and the language are all likely to remind us of certain poems of the Romantic category. 'Journey of the Magi' recalls

Yeats's poem on 'The Magi'; 'A Song for Simeon' recalls Tennyson's 'St. Simeon Stylites'; and 'Animula', which describes the experience of growing up, recalls Wordsworth's 'Intimations of Immortality'. Yet, some further investigation will show that the matter is not as simple as this. The similarity is mostly accidental and due to very special reasons.

I

The essence of Eliot's later poetry is the transcendental aspiration, suggested by one of the discarded titles of 'Ash-Wednesday', Section II: 'with hope the day'. These are the words of Arnaut Daniel who was expecting the day of deliverance from Purgatorio to join God in Heaven. Used here in 'Ash-Wednesday', they express at the same time a transcendental wish and a fundamentally negative attitude to this life. By placing hope wholly with Heaven, the narrator has equated this life with suffering and purgation. In Section I of 'Ash-Wednesday', the predominant note is frustration and despair. There is between the lines a feeling of weariness, unease and mislocation: a feeling which the Magi and Simeon had experienced after they saw the new born Child.

> We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
> But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation.
>
> ---
>
> I am tired with my own life and the lives of those after me.

The narrator's situation in 'Ash-Wednesday' is also comparable to that of Guido Cavalcanti whose 'Ballatta, written in exile at Saranza', inspired the poem's opening lines. It is important to note that Eliot often used the word 'exile' in a special sense, as in 'after this our exile'. 'Animula', for instance, describes the soul's incarnation as an exile from heaven: a little soul which issues from the hand of God but fails to return to its place of origin. 'Exile' simply means the soul's descent into this world or this life.

Here the exile has a different sense. The speaker is not exiled from heaven, but from worldly life. Like Cavalcanti who was expelled from Florence and expected never to

return, the narrator of 'Ash-Wednesday' is also heart-broken, dispirited and disillusioned with human life: 'Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?' Why should he struggle for the glory which is 'infirm' or the power which is inevitably 'transitory'?

Such disillusion can end in pessimism, but it can also generate a positive desire, and spur the individual to seek a more significant life. The narrator, who chooses to retire from the degraded modern urban life and be devoted to a spiritual world, has obviously made the latter choice. That is to say, contrary to 'Animula', 'Ash-Wednesday' describes the way back to God: to the original Garden of Eden. To put it simply, it expresses the wish to escape from this world of suffering in order to attain to a world of happiness: a wish which is also expressed by Pericles when he saw, through the sea mist, his lost daughter and a life beyond this world:

> This form, this face, this life
> Living to live in a world of time beyond me; let me
> Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken.

The same vision of this life as suffering is found in much Romantic poetry as well. Keats, for example, had contrasted the nightingale's 'happy lot' to what he saw as the life of this human world:

> The weariness, the fever, and the fret
> Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
> Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,
> Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
> Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
> And leaden-eyed despairs;
> Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
> Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

Though some of these details are Keats's personal sufferings and cannot be

connected with his general view of this life, the pattern of his thought is not different from that of Eliot: it is a wish to exchange this world of suffering for a world of blessedness. In Keats's particular case, it is a wish to drink a draught of magic vintage and 'leave the world unseen, /And with thee [the nightingale] fade away into the forest dim'.

This again is expressed by Shelley in his 'Ode to the West Wind', where he invokes the 'fierce spirit' to lift him up, because life's 'heavy weight of hours' has 'chained and bowed' him down. The ode does not directly express an attitude to life, but there is much to be chewed over in a line like

I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

In poems like this, there is a basic pattern to be extracted: the poet is usually in low spirits; he feels the pain of life; then he calls upon nature (in the form of the west wind or a nightingale) to save him from the suffering. Perhaps the most famous of this kind of poem is Coleridge's 'Dejection, An Ode', which Eliot described as a 'piece of his formal verse which in its passionate self-revelation rises almost to the height of great poetry'.[6] Coleridge's starting point is a suffering which threatens to smother his 'shaping spirit of Imagination':

A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassion'd grief
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief
In word, or sigh, or tear--

Under such a stifling grief, Coleridge's vision of the world is changed. He listens to the wind and hears 'a scream of agony'. He looks at the wild heath and sees himself as 'a little child', who having lost its way 'now moans low in bitter grief and fear /And now screams loud, and hopes to make her mother hear'.

The 'mother' of the metaphor is of course Sara Hutchinson, with whom Coleridge was hopelessly in love. She alone can be his liberator. She alone is capable of saving

him from pain and grief: saving him by rejoicing and thus sending out from her soul

> A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
>
> Enveloping the Earth.

'Dejection' is a much loved subject during the Romantic period. Shelley also has 'Some Stanzas Written in Dejection, Near Naples', which were inspired by the same 'loneliness' and 'despair'. Wordsworth repeatedly wrote about the Poet's 'despondency and madness' and he certainly had experienced dejection after his return to England from France. Keats had an 'Ode to Melancholy', and wrote about the fears that he might cease to be. At the end of this list, we may place 'Ash-Wednesday', which may be regarded as Eliot's Dejection Ode.

In 'Ash-Wednesday', the narrator's vision of this world as suffering and frustration arises from a special dilemma: his soul is devoted to a higher world but his body is still tied to the world it detests. A reluctant exile, he cannot enjoy the green mountains and blue seas, as the Romantic poets did. When he looks at this world, he only sees a vast desert of dry sands in which there is neither water nor vegetation. When he looks at himself, he only sees a skeleton with its flesh and blood consumed by worldly vices incarnated in three white leopards. Section II is set in the Scriptural desert of the Book of Ezekiel, where the prophet in a vision feels

> The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about. (37:1-2)

The dry sands and dry bones are actually the city and its population. Ezekiel's sojourn in the desert reflects the narrator's wandering in the infernal city of the twentieth century, 'an over-crowded desert jostled by ghosts'.

The poetic landscape in Eliot is, of course, a reflection of his inner intellectual state. The drought and the desert, according to Nancy Hargreave, are both symbols of an inner spiritual desolation.[7] When Eliot says that 'the desert is not remote', he is talking about a

spiritual aridity both in himself and in his time. If we lay the image of desert aside, Eliot is describing almost the same thing as Coleridge described in his 'Dejection, An Ode'. It is a type of *acedia* or interior desolation, which has its origin in the medieval spiritual man's aridity: a standard condition before illumination or revival.[8]

If Coleridge's dejection is finally unfrozen by Sara, Eliot's found no solution in this world. 'In much romantic poetry', he writes, 'the sadness is due to the exploitation of the fact that no human relations are adequate to human desires, but also to the disbelief in any further object for human desires than that which, being human, fails to satisfy them'.[9] This is perhaps why Coleridge's grief is so heavy and so likely to recur. Eliot's revival depends on a supernatural veiled sister who lives in a garden not of this material world.

Eliot told Paul Elmer More that 'Ash-Wednesday' is a 'sketchy application of the philosophy of the Vita Nuova to modern life'.[10] One implication of this is that 'Ash-Wednesday' is a group of love poems, (its invocation of 'Lady' and its original title 'Salutation' immediately place it in this tradition), and that the relation of the narrator to the lady is comparable to that of Dante to Beatrice. That is to say, Eliot's lady is also a human lover in the first place, not unlike Coleridge's Sara. But, as the poem develops, she undergoes a process of transhumanization as Dante's Beatrice did. The narrator's feeling is sublimated to the love of God, as Dante's moved 'from Beatrice living to Beatrice dead, rising to the Cult of the Virgin'.[11]

For the narrator of 'Ash-Wednesday', only a transformed 'Beatrice' is able to preside over his spiritual regeneration, for 'the love of man and woman (or for that matter of man and man) is only explained and made reasonable by the higher love, or else is simply the coupling of animals'.[12] That is to say, a normal human relationship would be disgusting to Eliot unless it is raised to a higher level. His asceticism was so strict as to lead him to deny the basic human feelings.

If in Romantic poetry, the cause of regeneration is often a natural agent: a

nightingale, the west wind or a woman, for Eliot it has to come from above. In the Book of Ezekiel, Chapter XXXVII, God commands Ezekiel to prophesy over the dry bones in the desert. The voice is that of the prophet, but the words are those of the Lord:

> Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and ye shall live: and I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord. (37: 5-6)

As soon as he said this, Ezekiel saw the multitude come alive, becoming flesh and blood again. And in a moment, they 'stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army'.

This miracle is, of course, a metaphor for the narrator's revival from spiritual death to spiritual life. Having been reduced to dry bones in this world, he has his flesh and blood restored to him through devotion to the Lady:

> It is this which recovers
> My guts the strings of my eyes and the indigestible portions
> Which the leopards reject.

Such is his spiritual rebirth that God will before long put breath into him and enable him to sing a prayer to the Lady in the garden 'where all loves end'. The sexual image is used here to express, as David Ward puts it, 'not so much the conflict of the soul, but the resolution of that conflict by an object of worship'.[13]

In much Romantic poetry, on the other hand, the recovery is often brought about, not by the breath of God, but by the breeze of nature. We think of Coleridge's 'wild storm' which blows into his Eolian harp and makes him able to sing again. We also think of Shelley's plea to the West Wind: 'Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is'.

> Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
> Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!

In these Romantic poets, religious patterns are used to interpret secular experiences. The religious element is naturalized, and only remains as what M. H. Abrams calls 'a

formal parallel, or a verbal or rhetorical echo'.[14] What Eliot would like to attribute to God, they attribute to nature.

II

It is for this reason that Eliot's religious poetry sometimes reads very much like Romantic poetry. Sections III and IV of 'Ash-Wednesday', for instance, strongly recall some parts of Keats's Fall of Hyperion, A Vision. If we reduce each poem to its most elementary level, each is about the dream of the speaker who sees a god through a lady. Yet we cannot take them in such a simplistic way, or we destroy the poems completely. Let me start to explain with Keats.

Keats's poem begins with his wandering in a forest where grew 'trees of every clime'. There he saw the remains of an angelic feast and drank from a 'cool vessel of transparent juice'. He fell into a slumber and in his dream he saw an enormous sanctuary in which huge steps lead up to an altar and an image, 'huge of feature as a cloud'. Nearby, ministering to the shrine, is a 'veiled shadow', who gave him two choices: either 'ascend these steps' or 'die on that marble where thou art'.

At this moment, a sudden 'palsied chill' struck his limbs and death was coming upon him. He struggled and was saved by his decision to ascend. As soon as he touched the lowest step, life returned to him and 'seem'd to pour in at the toes'. Awed by the 'Holy Power', he started inquiring about it and asked to see the face behind the veil: a request which was eventually granted.

> Then saw I a wan face,
> Not pined by human sorrows, but bright-blanch'd
> By an immortal sickness which kills not;
> It works a constant change, which happy death
> Can put no end to; deathwards progressing
> To no death was that visage; it had past
> The lily and the snow; and beyond these

I must not think now, though I saw that face.

Of course, Keats's poem is not a Christian poem. The image on the altar is of the fallen Saturn and the lady he has just seen is Moneta, the last surviving Titan. Yet the poem has the shadow of a religious poem. The speaker's trip back to an unfallen age, in a way, parallels Eliot's spiritual journey back to the unfallen Garden.

Apart from its mourning for past glory, the poem is also about the relation of the poet to his Muse. According to Frank Kermode, the Saturnian age represents for Keats the 'archaic way of thought -- imaginative rather than discursive' and Moneta, the sole survivor of that age and the mother of the Muses, is its image and its high priestess.[15] In this sense, she represents all that Keats searches for as a poet. She is the symbol, the image, or simply the Beauty of poetry. Thus, in a strange way, she is the secular counterpart of the Virgin of 'Ash-Wednesday'.

Like Eliot's Lady, she is also immortal, divine, and full of terrible knowledge. She is also veiled, mysterious and requiring from her lover a priestly devotion. And similarly, again, she compensates for his renunciation and suffering with her Beauty and inspiration.[16] As Keats' poet-quester crawls up the steps to her, he somehow anticipates the narrator of 'Ash-Wednesday', who is to renounce the whole world and climb the purgatorial stairs leading to the 'veiled sister' in the garden.

In one of his essays, Eliot refers to 'Ash-Wednesday' as his 'high dream'.[17] The yew, one of the important symbols in the sequence, had genuinely appeared in his dreams.[18] Eliot's dream took place not because he had drunk some magic potion, but because of exhaustion and penitence. 'We did little good to each other'; 'May the judgement not be too heavy upon us'. After confession and contrition, the narrator is exhausted and falls asleep with the prayer still on his lips:

Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death

Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.

So what follows is a dream of 'death': the whole civilization, 'our inheritance', is

seen as a vast desert (Section II); a climbing of the Dantesque Purgatorial Mount (Section III); and a vision of the Biblical Earthly Paradise (Section IV). With these correspondences in mind, we may regard these sections as Eliot's mini Divine Comedy.

However, it is Sections III and IV which concern us now and are comparable to The Fall of Hyperion. As in Keats's poem, here is also a 'time of tension between dying and birth'. To ascend the stairs means 'life', and to remain at the bottom means 'dying' or 'death', because at the top of the stairs is a garden in which the narrator can achieve new life, while at the bottom is a vast desert in which people are being consumed by the three symbolical wild beasts.

As the poem develops, this tension is materialized as a struggle between temptation and renunciation, between instinct and reason, and between the enchanted 'maytime' and the transcendental garden where 'the fountain sprang up and the bird sang down'. One critic says that the voice of 'Ash-Wednesday' is that of a will, not of a whole personality.[19] Indeed, while the will is behind the motive to climb up, the instinct urges a return to the world where

> Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown,
> Lilac and brown hair.

And the forces of nature are sometimes so strong that they threaten to displace the will to ascend. This is perhaps why the poem attacks back in so violent a way to deny nature, deny life and deny pleasure.[20]

This is perhaps also why the integrity of the poem is kept at such a high price. Seen from the poem's point of view, to return or descend means to slip down 'the toothed gullet of an agèd shark'. It simply means self-destruction. To ascend, on the other hand, means deliverance and rebirth into a new life. Here Eliot has a lot in common, not just with Dante, but also with Keats. While Keats's poet-quester in The Fall of Hyperion is struggling between poetic life and death, Eliot's Christian man is struggling between spiritual life and death.

Among the High Romantics, Keats is especially close to the later Eliot, in that he is also a kind of visionary: weary of this life and looking to some Beauty high up in the clouds. Keats is perhaps the only poet in the Romantic period whom Eliot could genuinely appreciate, the only Romantic poet whose poetry he found to be 'the kind of Shakespeare'.[21] But the similarity arises, not because Eliot became Romantic in his latter years, but because Keats had moved closer to Dante,[22] who is the major influence on Eliot at this time.

The difference between Keats's early and later poetry can be seen in the gap which yawns between Hyperion and The Fall of Hyperion. The first Hyperion was a genuine effort at a Miltonic epic: it is copious, grand and obsessed with the sublime. As far as details are concerned, the fallen Titans' debate over their revenge on Jove in Book II is almost certainly an imitation of the so-called Parliament of Hell in Paradise Lost. The grandiose style and the long-winded sentence structure, which in a way suit their epic subject matter, must also have come from Milton.

In The Fall of Hyperion, on the other hand, the Miltonic influence had waned. This is an attempt to use the model of Dante to recast the original Hyperion. In the second version, the epic narrative gave way to the form of a dream. The following lines will serve to show what Dante had worked on Keats's imagination. They describe the poet-quester's first sight of Moneta when her veil was removed.

> But for her eyes I should have fled away;
> They held me back with a benignant light,
> Soft mitigated by divinest lids
> Half-closed, and visionless entire they seem'd
> Of all external things; they saw me not,
> But in blank splendour, beam'd like the mild moon,
> Who comforts those she sees not, who knows not
> What eyes are upward cast.

The Beatrice figure looking down at a Dantesque poet-quester and the eyes that beamed with 'benignant light' remind us of Dante's first sight of Beatrice at the summit of Purgatory. A divine revelation is what both poets are aiming at. The language and the imagery, furthermore, remind us of those parts of Eliot's poetry where Dante's presence is most prominent. Here is Eliot's first sight of his 'silent sister':

Who walked between the violet and the violet
Who walked between
The various ranks of varied green...
White light folded, sheathed around her, folded

If Eliot's first sight of the lady and the garden in Section IV is full of surprised wonder, then Keats was also fascinated by the mystery surrounding the altar, the image, and the veiled shadow. If Eliot cried out, 'Lord, I am not worthy', Keats also suffered from a feeling of 'unworthiness' when he was saved from death and chosen to see the unique vision. Having 'usurped' that height, both poets suffered from a feeling of undeserved favour.

All this, again, comes from Dante, who is behind both 'Ash-Wednesday' and The Fall of Hyperion. Keats might have, and Eliot certainly had, drawn on Cantos XXX and XXXI of the Purgatorio, where Dante having reached the gate of Earthly Paradise was fascinated by the Divine Pageant: 'a flash of such surpassing brilliancy', 'a strain so ravishing to mortal sense', and 'such whiteness never seen in mortal land'. There, Beatrice appeared to him in a triumphal chariot.

In a veil of white, with olive chaplet bound,
A maid appeared beneath a mantle green,
With hue of living flame enrobed around. (XXX 31-33)

The veil of both Moneta and the lady of 'Ash-Wednesday' may have originated here. Before the veil is lifted from the Divine Beauty, the worshipper has to go through a total purgation of mind. Keats's poet-quester and Eliot's spiritual pilgrim had both gone

through a symbolic death. Dante is to achieve this through repentance. Beatrice cast her eyes upon Dante from behind the veil and accused him of sins and unfaithfulness. An oppressive shame settled upon his brow and tears flowed down his cheeks 'in ample shower'. This may be the source of the 'unworthiness' in both Keats's poet-quester and Eliot's spiritual pilgrim. And finally Beatrice unveiled herself and this is what Dante saw.

> A thousand longings more intense than fire
> Mine eyes attracted to those eyes of light
> Fixt on the Griffon with profound desire:
> And in them, like unto the sun portrayed
> Within a glass, the two-fold thing was beaming--
> His either nature there by turns displayed. (XXXI 117-123)

The 'eyes of light' and the Griffon's brilliant reflection in them, recall Moneta's eyes which beam with benignant light and the eyes which comfort those she sees not. Here we may also remember Eliot's 'eyes' which changed into 'the perpetual star' and 'multifoliate rose'. They are all variations of Beatrice's eyes which now are shining with the 'splendour of eternal living light'.

Eliot refers to the Divine Pageant in Section IV of 'Ash-Wednesday'. Although he calls his chariot a 'gilded hearse' drawn by 'jewelled unicorns', although, like a chariot of time, it flies fast 'bearing away the fiddles and flutes' and restoring a lady who wears 'white light folded, sheathed about her, folded', these innovations cannot obliterate the fact that the pageant, the chariot and the garden all come from the last Cantos of the Purgatorio.

The Divine Pageant is also behind The Triumph of Life of Shelley, another Romantic poet on whom Dante made an unmistakable impact. This poem's most obvious connection with Dante is its dream form. While the poet was bathing in the morning sunshine, 'a strange trance over my fancy grew'.

And then a vision on my brain was rolled.

The vision Shelley sees is a procession of historical figures from Plato to Napoleon, carried along in an endless flow of people: an aimless movement and a huge dance of death. Yet Shelley calls it 'life'. Among this flow of people, a chariot sweeps past and leaves behind 'one of its deluded crew', later identified as Rousseau, to become the Virgil to Shelley's Dante, explaining the meaning of the whole show to him.

The poem's inspiration in the Divine Comedy explains why Eliot was so impressed by this poem while so repelled by Shelley's other poems. It 'made an indelible impression upon me over forty-five years ago', he wrote in 1950.[23] Having said this, we also remember his remark in 1921: 'In one or two passages of Shelley's Triumph of Life, in the second Hyperion, there are traces of a struggle toward unification of sensibility'.[24] These two poems obviously occupied a special place in Eliot's mind.

The triumph will almost surely remind us of Eliot's 'Triumphal March', which is modelled on Coriolanus's victorious return to Rome. Shelley also seemed to have such a triumph in mind.

The million with fierce song and maniac dance
Raging around--such seemed the jubilee
As when to greet some conqueror's advance
Imperial Rome poured forth her living sea
From senate-house, and forum, and theatre...

But Eliot's triumph is not just a procession of human vanity, it is also a quest for peace 'at the still point of the turning world'. Though Shelley's theme seems to be 'all things are transfigured except Love', his poem is largely restricted to criticism, presenting life as futility and folly. Its vision never reaches out to the full glory Dante described in the Paradiso. In the end, the conclusion seems to be that death and corruption will catch all irrespective of their good and evil. Even the mysterious 'Shape', which moves upon the stream as

A light of heaven, whose half-extinguished beam
Through the sick day in which we wake to weep
Glimmers, forever sought, forever lost

-- which looks like a Holy Ghost -- turns out to be only a Goddess of Oblivion who places our memory under her feet like embers and 'tramples its sparks into the dust of earth'.

By now it must be clear that Eliot, Keats and Shelley are comparable because they have a common model behind them. And it must be also clear that the effect they achieved is distinct one from the other, because they used Dante differently. Keats, for example, emphasized suffering and devotion, but his god is almost entirely Beauty: aesthetic Beauty rather than the Christian God. Shelley's views are, from an orthodox point of view, totally heretical. His mind was saturated in Platonism, not in Christian thought. That is to say, Keats and Shelley typically learnt Dante's form but naturalized his theology. They tended to secularize all that in Dante is Christian or Catholic.[25]

III

Eliot, on the other hand, inherited both the form and the theology from Dante. Without theology, Sections V and VI of 'Ash-Wednesday' will simply become meaningless. If the 'higher dream' is a direct experience of God, then these last two sections are a conscious search for God through tradition. After 'a thousand whispers' from the yew awakened the narrator from his 'higher dream', back he returned to 'this our exile'. Actually Section V is closely connected with Section I: it continues the former section's meditation on those 'matters that with myself I too much discuss, too much explain'.

If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
If the unheard, unspoken
Word is unspoken, unheard;
Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,

The Word without a word, the Word within

The world and for the world.

The prologue of St. John's Gospel and the 1622 Christmas sermon of Lancelot Andrewes's combine to make the image of 'the Word made flesh', Eliot confessed, 'never desert the memory'.[26] The whole passage, which revolves around 'word' and 'world', portrays a long and patient search for the Word which is at the centre of the unstilled world. After the 'higher dream', God alone walks in the garden of the narrator's mind, or 'the garden in the desert'.

Ash-Wednesday is the first day of Lent, a period of forty days of fasting and penance, commemorating Christ's temptations in the wilderness and his triumph over Satan. So the sequence also contains a confession, a prayer for mercy and an appeal for interference. ('Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood'; 'Teach us to care and not to care'.) Because of the nature of the theme, Eliot has turned to the Church's tradition, making liberal use of the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer and the Roman Catholic liturgy.

O my people, what have I done unto thee?

--is part of the Reproach on Good Friday, supposedly Christ's last words to those who put him on the Cross. Such borrowing abounds in 'Ash-Wednesday'.

And like Christ's forty days in the wilderness, this is also a time of tension for the narrator: a brief transit, 'where the dreams cross /The dreamcrossed twilight between birth and dying'. He is also undergoing a trial, facing a difficult choice at a cross-road where one exit leads to 'Our peace in His will' and the other leads to 'lilac' and 'sea voices' of the sensual world. His salvation will depend on his successful resistance to the temptations of the 'profit and loss', and the 'granite shore' where

The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying

Unbroken wings.

It is such a trying time that he especially needs the assistance, the encouragement,

and the guidance of the blessed sister. A large portion of the last two sections are prayers:

Will the veiled sister pray for
Those who walk in darkness?...

Suffer me not to be separated
And let my cry come unto Thee.

Finally, the poem's progress from this world to the world of God, from the love of man to the love of God, is analogous to the Mystic's Progress from the Dark Night, through renunciation to the Heart of Light. In its imagery, language, and philosophy, the poem evokes the Divine Comedy as well as the writings of Lancelot Andrewes, Blaise Pascal and other spiritual men Eliot wrote about during this period, opposing this world and this life to the after-life and higher reality. Like Dante and the others, Eliot has shown a strong sense of good and evil and is strongly aware of the issue of sin and redemption. And it is this which finally distinguishes him from Keats, Shelley and other Romantics.

Notes to Chapter VI:

1. Kipling left several legacies in Eliot's poetry and prose works: (i) 'The Man Who Would Be King' was obviously at the back of 'The Man Who Was King', (ii) a line of 'Danny Deever' appeared in 'The Hollow Men', and (ii) the garden in They became the inspiration of 'Burnt Norton'. Eliot commented on the last two works of Kipling in his essay, 'Rudyard Kipling', OPP p233, p245

2. UPUC p31, p100

3. Eliot, 'What Dante Means to Me', TCC pp130-32

4. Eliot, 'The Frontiers of Criticism', OPP p104

5. See George Bornstein, The Transformations of Romanticism (Chicago 1976), Chapter 3 and A. Walton Litz, 'That Strange Abstraction "Nature"', Nature and the Victorian Imagination, ed. U. C. Knoepflmacher & G. B. Tennyson (Berkeley & Los Angeles 1977). Both critics insisted on Eliot's reconciliation with Romanticism in later life, but neither could offer much concrete evidence in terms of influence.

6. UPUC p67

7. See Nancy Hargreave, Landscape as Symbol in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot (Jackson, Mississippi 1978)

8. I am indebted, on this particular point, to M. H. Abrams whose interpretation of Romantic poetry has great value for the present chapter. He traced the basic patterns of Romantic lyrics to the religious writings of the Middle Ages, which, incidentally, are also the model for Eliot's later poetry. See 'The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor', English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. Abrams (New York 1960) p47

9. Eliot, 'Baudelaire', SE p390

10. Eliot, Letter to P. E. More (2 June 1930), quoted by B. A. Harris, 'The Rare Contact, A Correspondence between T. S. Eliot and P. E. More', Theology lxxv (March 1972) p141

11. Eliot, 'Dante' (1929), SE p275

12. Ibid. p274

13. David Ward, T. S. Eliot: Between Two Worlds (London 1973) p152

14. Abrams (1960) p48. This thesis was later developed in Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (London 1971), where Abrams says, 'Many of the most distinctive and recurrent elements in both the thought and literature of the [Romantic] age had their origin in theological concepts, images, and plot patterns which were translated, in Wordsworth's terms, to men "as natural beings in the strength

of nature" '. And he goes on to say that the 'characteristic concepts and patterns of Romantic philosophy and literature are a displaced and reconstituted theology, or else a secularized form of devotional experience' (p65).

15. Frank Kermode, Romantic Image (London 1957) p8. It is interesting that Kermode who gave an excellent reading of the second Hyperion did not recognize its connection with 'Ash-Wednesday'.

16. This is Kermode's basic interpretation of the career of the symbolist poet. The joy of seeing the vision and its cost in suffering are the same for the poet as for the priest or the mystic. In fact, Kermode draws clear parallels between the career of a poet and that of a priest. 'To prostrate before this [lady] is the privilege of the artist's joy and the reward of his suffering' (ibid. p10). But Kermode's attempt to connect Romantic poetry and modern poetry on this point seems to be stretching the argument a little too far.

17. Eliot, 'Dante' (1929), SE p262

18. Reported by B. C. Southam, Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot (London 1968) p133

19. E. E. Duncan Jones, 'Ash-Wednesday', T. S. Eliot: A Study of His Writings by Several Hands, ed. B. Rajan (London 1947) p37

20. Some critics see this struggle as one between reason and imagination. The triumph of reason in the poem is regarded as a failure of imagination. What these critics fail to see is the integrity of the sequence as a whole, unified by a single purpose. One damaging effect of this failure is that they only see fragments of poetry in 'Ash-Wednesday': they like the 'lilac and brown hair' and the 'lost sea voices', but regard the rest as either 'a mechanical catalogue of clean Catholic contradictions' or 'an almost whining prayer' -- which is of course untrue. See Harold Bloom, The Ringers in the Tower (London 1971) p200 and Gregory Jay, T. S. Eliot and the Poetics of Literary History (Baton Rouge & London 1983) p201

21. UPUC p100

22. Since John Middleton Murry, The Mystery of Keats (London 1949), Keats's debt to Dante has been a commonplace, but the details of Keats's borrowings have not been sufficiently recognized.

23. Eliot, 'What Dante Means to Me', TCC p130

24. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', SE p288

25. Graham Hough (in 'Dante and Eliot', Critical Quarterly xvi [1974]) has gone to great lengths to explain the way Dante lent different examples to Shelley, Keats and Eliot. A few extracts will be helpful for the point I have made: 'Chaucer went to [Dante] for fragments of curious learning and imagery; Hunt [Landor, and Keats] for a sentimental love-story; Shelley for an example of emblematic and visionary narrative; Rossetti for a sort of sublimated half-spiritualised sensuality' (pp297-98). Every one of these writers went to Dante for elements which were peculiarly significant for him. 'To the Romantics it was, naturally, the Paolo and Francesca story, misread -- even purposely misread. To Rossetti, saturated in the Vita Nuova, it was the theme of the lover on earth and the beloved in heaven -- seen in his own entirely erotic, unmetaphysical way. To Eliot it is the situation of the living man meeting a friend or master or honoured predecessor beyond the grave' (p302). And Hough added: 'Eliot's version of Dante is without doubt far more central and profound than such sentimentalisations' as in the Romantic poets (p298).

26. Eliot, 'Lancelot Andrewes', FLA pp27-28

VII. The Moment of Vision

I

In 1932, Eliot recalled that, when Pound issued the statement 'poetry ought to be as well written as prose', he and Pound were attacked as 'literary bolsheviks' and 'drunken helots'. But actually, as he now saw it, 'we were affirming forgotten standards, rather than setting up new idols': namely, reaffirming Wordsworth's aim 'to imitate, and as far as possible, to adopt, the very language of men'.[1] Wordsworth had always been a great poet for Eliot, a 'seer' and a 'prophet' of poetic revolution. But unfortunately he was not Eliot's cup of tea: he had 'no ghastly shadows at his back, no Eumenides to pursue him; ... and he went droning on the still sad music of infirmity to the verge of the grave'.[2] Eliot's writings on Wordsworth are mostly platitude and carry none of the enthusiasm which he showed in this period, for example, for the prose of Lancelot Andrewes. The compliment he paid Wordsworth is just routine respect, as one will show for any important poet. 'Spenser and Wordsworth are both so important in the history of English literature because of all the other poetry which you understand better because of knowing them, that everybody ought to know something about them'.[3]

Eliot may have never been influenced by Wordsworth to any significant extent. Yet this by no means indicates that it is inappropriate to consider his poetry in the light of Wordsworth. The Four Quartets, for example, evokes Wordsworth in several ways. First of all, they were written in a descriptive-meditative mode which is the style of most of Wordsworth's poems. And then, like The Prelude, they are a sort of spiritual autobiography. And thirdly they are a sequence made by tying individual poems together. These similarities are almost obvious now after several critics have pointed them out.[4] Yet a more significant, and a not so obvious, relation between the two poets is still to be explored and is still little written about as far as published criticism has shown.

As is well known, the natural world has a special significance for Wordsworth. A

large number of his poems are inspired by the places he visited or revisited: mountains, lakes, rivers etc. One of the most famous is 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey'. This was written in July 1798 after Wordsworth, accompanied by his sister Dorothy, revisited the banks of the River Wye during a tour. Though it is one of Wordsworth's many landscape poems, it shows his lyrical and descriptive power at its highest.

Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.

The Tintern area in South Glamorgan is a place which especially appealed to Wordsworth. Growing up in the English Lake District, he cultivated a sense of beauty on the 'beauteous domain': high mountains, clear lakes, and grassy hillsides studded with flocks of sheep. The environs of Tintern Abbey are a similar pastoral scene.

The day is come when I again repose
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!

A romantic, rustic picture arises from these lines. The details of the scene, the reader might assume, are outside the sensibility of Eliot who always enjoys the reputation of

city poet. But not quite so. Let us look at the following lines from 'East Coker'.

Now the light falls
Across the open field, leaving the deep lane
Shuttered with branches, dark in the afternoon,
Where you lean against a bank while a van passes,
And the deep lane insists on the direction
Into the village, in the electric heat
Hypnotised. In the warm haze the sultry light
Is absorbed, not refracted, by the grey stone.
The dahlias sleep in the empty silence.
Wait for the early owl.

These lines, apart from the words like 'electric heat' and 'hypnotised', show Eliot to be quite close to being a Romantic nature poet.[5] East Coker, in fact, is a place which Wordsworth might well choose to visit: a quiet, green, and beautiful old-style English village, which is secluded and far from the maddening big cities. In this sense, it is a place which may attract anyone who loves nature: a place not too different from the banks of the Wye near Tintern Abbey.

If we compare Eliot's description of East Coker with Wordsworth's of the Tintern area, we discover that both poets emphasised the silence. Neither described human beings or human movement, except indirectly. The situation in both poems is a lonely poet viewing a beautiful scene in front of him. And in both poems, too, we have a realistic picture of the place, written in beautiful language and highly fluent rhythm. So the impression one gets from both passages is almost the same. The wooded hillside above the Wye is not at odds with the open field and the tree-shuttered road leading to the village of East Coker.

If these correspondences between Eliot and Wordsworth seem superficial and accidental, then the point of convergence is rather in what can be called their 'nature

mysticism'. In 'Tintern Abbey', Wordsworth has drawn a marvellous picture of the place: pastoral, quiet and romantic, but his point is not so much in the natural beauty as in the effect which the natural beauty had upon him: the mystical insight he had gained therefrom. Those 'beauteous forms' had given him 'sensations sweet,/ Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;/ And passing even into my purer mind,/ With tranquil restoration'. They had soothed him 'in hours of weariness' and relieved him of the pain and suffering of life. They had also been responsible for 'his little, nameless, unremembered, acts/ Of kindness and of love'. And above all, they had given him

> that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on,--
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things.

This is 'no slight or trivial influence'. The experience follows the classical stages of mystical experience, as recognized by Plotinus, from the physical quiet ('suspended' and 'asleep'), through a new spiritual awareness ('a living soul'), to the 'aching joy' and 'dizzy raptures' which accompany the mystic's attainment of vision ('see into the life of things').[6] Through nature, Wordsworth is able to perceive a spirit

> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky

--which is somewhat similar to Eliot's 'sunlight on a broken column', 'a tree swinging' and 'the wind's singing' reflecting something 'more distant ... than a fading

star'. In Wordsworth's own words,

I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts.

Another such experience occurred to Wordsworth in the summer of 1790 when he was crossing the Alps. The Prelude (1805), Book VI, records how he visualized the glory of the Alps after a peasant told him he had already unknowingly crossed the mountain and how immediately 'the light of sense/ Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us/ The invisible world'. Then as he walked down the Simplon Pass himself, the landscape affected him in such a way that he saw beyond it toward a visionary reality:

The immeasurable height
Of woods decaying, never to be decay'd,
The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
And every where along the hollow rent,
Winds thwarting winds, bewilder'd and forlorn,
The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
The rocks that mutter'd close upon our ears,
Black drizzling crags that spake by the way-side
As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
The unfetter'd clouds and region of the Heavens,
Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light
Were all like workings of one mind, the features
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
Characters of the great Apocalypse,
The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first and last, and midst, and without end. (1805 vi: 556-72)

This is one of Wordsworth's grandest affirmations. Again, like the 'Tintern Abbey' experience, the natural beauty first creates a physical repose, and then awakens the dormant spirit and finally leads to a vision of the awesome mystery of nature.

Wordsworth's 'spots of time' invite comparison with Eliot's sudden illuminations. In fact, Wordsworth's mystic insight is similar to Eliot's inexplicable joy experienced during an 'unattended moment'. 'Tintern Abbey' and The Prelude Book VI ultimately recall the Four Quartets which are also landscape poems and are about mystic vision and ecstasy experienced during a visit to a particular place. Just as Wordsworth's 'serene and blessed mood' came upon him while he was looking at the rustic scene, Eliot's overwhelming illumination took place as he was wandering in the garden of Burnt Norton.

The garden always had some mysterious significance for Eliot. Earlier, in The Waste Land, he had described a hyacinth garden where something like a Wordsworthian vision occurred to him.

> -- Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,
> ... I was neither
> Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
> Looking into the heart of light, the silence.

'Looking into heart of light' recalls Wordsworth's 'see into the life of things' and the 'deep power of joy' which accompanied it. Later, Eliot talked about the composition of The Waste Land and said that a certain form of illness is extremely favourable for creative writing, because at that time you feel possessed by an unknown power, you feel yourself becoming the instrument, not the maker.[7] The hyacinth garden certainly has some analogy to the garden of Eden: it has all its beauty and purity, and the value of the experience lies in the sudden recognition of that reality.

In 'Burnt Norton', a rose-garden replaced the hyacinth garden, possibly as a result of the change from fertility myth (hyacinth being a symbol of the fertility god) to

Christianity (the rose being a symbol of the Christian God). But the core of the experience in the rose garden is the same sudden awareness.

Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,
Round the corner. Through the first gate,
Into our first world.

The actual rose garden serves as the entrance into a completely new reality. The description of the garden suggests both actuality and vision. Certain details can be found at the actual garden Eliot visited, but the terms which describe it also suggest 'an old world made explicit'. This old world is not purely childhood memory, either. The birds may be partly the birds of Eden; the children may also be the angels.

Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,
And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly.

The dry pool of actuality becomes the reflection of some full splendour, the reflection of some perfect pool. Surely what we witness here is a higher Reality, of which 'human kind cannot bear very much'. The actual, historical rose garden is transformed, in the vision, into the Paradisal garden to which Eliot always aspired. As in Wordsworth, the attainment of vision is accompanied by physical repose and intense joy.

The inner freedom from the practical desire,
The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded
By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving...

The heightened consciousness, like in Wordsworth, closely follows the classical stages of mystical experience. Only Eliot is describing it more consciously, more deliberately, and in terms which were borrowed from the writings of Plotinus, the Neo-Platonists, and the Christian and Hindu mystics, especially St. John of the Cross.[8]

That is to say, Eliot took theology more seriously and made greater effort to specify the experience in philosophical terms.

Time and space, for example, have been a persistent concern of the Four Quartets. Eliot has followed the traditional distinction between time and eternity, which can be found in philosophers from Plato and Aristotle to the Neo-Platonists, as the two modes of existence which distinguish the world of man from the world of God. He has also followed the traditional distinction between these two worlds as a difference between motion and stillness. Thus, while our world 'moves in appetency, on its metalled ways/ Of time past and time future', God, the unmoved Mover, is 'at the still centre of the turning world'. In the light of this, Eliot's 'rose-garden' experience becomes what he calls an 'intersection of the timeless with time':

> I can only say, *there* we have been: but I cannot say where.
> And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time.

These two lines actually put the rose garden out of time and space. In fact, the experience is shown to be the soul's participation in the world of eternity: 'To be conscious is not to be in time'. Following the mystics, Eliot also regards God as unimaginable and indescribable in any human language. God has no attributes, no limitations, no qualifications, and is understood only in a number of paradoxes.

> At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
> Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
> But neither arrest nor movement.

The 'dance' is the Hindu image of dancing Shiva, a familiar image of the unknowable ultimate Principle.[9] The 'still point of the turning world' is an allusion to Plotinus's model of the Universe which consists of a central essence and two concentric circles or spheres of derived existence.[10] The image also bears a strong similarity to the Hindu Wheel of Existence: the 'Wheel of Brahman' on which all the natural world turns in endless cycles of reincarnation.[11] For both Plotinus and the Hindus, God is the basis

of all material existence. And all derived beings have a natural tendency to return to their source of life. Thus Eliot wrote:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started.

Despite its formidable theology, the experience of the Four Quartets is more like that of Wordsworth than that of any mystics. 'Burnt Norton' describes, after all, not an opaque mystical knowledge, but only what ordinary people can hope for: 'an unattended moment' or 'a distraction fit'. The experience is common, and by no means exclusive to saints. It is understood by all of us and may occur to all.

Sudden in a shaft of sunlight
Even while the dust moves
There rises the hidden laughter
Of children in the foliage.

Yet, the words and images have such intensity and evocativeness as to point beyond what they actually mean. The imperceptible is perceived through the perceptible: this is found not just in visionary poets like Dante, but also in Wordsworth who, in his contemplation of nature, very often rises above ordinary consciousness.

I seemed a being who had passed alone
Beyond the visible barriers of the world,
And travelled into things to come. (The Borderers)

Thus, a visionary reality evoked through the power of language unites Eliot and Wordsworth. However, the attainment of vision is achieved by different routes and for different purposes. And as we shall see, their visions have different implications, too.

II

In 1799, Wordsworth came back to settle down in Grasmere with his sister Dorothy. The natural environment of his childhood appealed to him in a way never

experienced before in the several cities in which he had staid.

Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze
That blows from the green fields and from the clouds
And from the sky: it beats against my cheek,
And seems half-conscious of the joy it gives. (1805 i : 1-4)

The 'joy' nature offered Wordsworth consists not just in physical comfort, but also in the restoration of his imagination. The gentle breeze soon became an 'Eolian visitation' and created an imaginative 'tempest' in his mind. The light-hearted happiness with which this is described, the sense of freedom away from the crowded cities, and the allusion to Satan's first sight of Eden in Paradise Lost led one critic to say that Wordsworth saw in the Lake District a 'vision of Paradise'.[12]

Yet Wordsworth's view of human life is not always rosy and optimistic. Thinking back on the River Duddon which he knew since childhood, he emphasised the river's seeming permanence against our human transience. He saw a stream that 'still glides' and 'shall forever glide'. The river seems to have remained 'what was, and is and will abide'. In comparison:

We Men, who in our morn of youth defied
The elements, must vanish.

The contrast seems to come finally to a question of time. It does not just alert us to the inevitability of death, our death, but it also makes us envy the stream whose 'form remains' and whose 'function never dies'.

'The unimaginable touch of time' is the subject of another of Wordsworth's sonnets, 'Mutability'. Through three vivid images -- a scale of musical notes, the melted frost, and a ruined tower -- the poem contrasts present dissolution with past glory, and bewails the unalterable law of change and mutability. Such observations of the human condition are gloomy indeed, but they did not lead to any desire in their author to transcend this life. Wordsworth was content simply to make the best of it.

Enough, if something from our hands have power

To live, and act, and serve the future hour.

Eliot, on the other hand, regards this life as the soul's imprisonment or exile. Though his view of this life as being bound by time and change converges with that of Wordsworth, he sees no meaning in human life unless it has a purpose beyond itself. In 'East Coker', the description of the houses that 'rise and fall'; of the men who live and die; of the older generation replaced by the younger one; and of the factory now where there was an open field -- builds up a general view of human life as ruled by the ruthless law of time and season, the law of birth and death.

As Eliot was walking down the 'deep lane shuttered with branches', as he was looking at the 'open field', he was suddenly transported back to the seventeenth century, the time of his ancestor Andrew Elyot, to witness a summer night bonfire dance:

Round and round the fire

Leaping through the flames, or joined in circles,

Rustically solemn or in rustic laughter

Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes,

Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth

Mirth of those long since under earth

Nourishing the corn.

The vision arises from Eliot's attempt to imagine the life of his ancestors, but it also gives us a general image of human existence, of human beings 'keeping the rhythm' of nature and obeying the law of time. So what we witness is not just a country dance, but a picture of human life as a whole. Eliot's ancestral home becomes a window through which he inspects the law of earthly life. Behind the bonfire dance lurks a disturbing statement: human beings are bound on the temporal cycle and human existence is hopeless because the inevitable end of all is the same: 'death and dung', 'nourishing the corn'.

The worldly life repels Eliot, and makes him wish to leave it, rise above it, and participate in the life of a higher significance. In his own words, he is extremely conscious of 'the void that I find in the middle of all human happiness and all human relations... Only Christianity helps to reconcile me to life, which is otherwise disgusting'.[13] Eliot's observation of human life leads to a totally different end and makes him rather inhumane in contrast to Wordsworth.

In 'The Dry Salvages', Eliot continues to observe human existence in a similarly bleak view. This time he chooses to focus on the sea and the life of the North American fishermen, whose life he knew during his childhood and youth.

> The sea is the land's edge also, the granite
> Into which it reaches, the beaches where it tosses
> Its hints of earlier and other creation:
> The starfish, the horseshoe crab, the whale's backbone.

The sea, like the land, registers the death of human and animal lives throughout history. Human life, in this sense, is an eternal repetition of the same scenario of birth, death, and rebirth. Seen from the life of fishermen who sail out to sea, return and sail out again, human life is also an eternal repetition of the same labour to earn livelihood.

> Where is the end of them, the fishermen sailing
> Into the wind's tail, where the fog cowers?
>
> We have to think of them as forever bailing,
> Setting and hauling, while the North East lowers
> Over shallow banks unchanging and erosionless
> Or drawing their money, drying sails at dockage.

Such description shows the author's familiarity with and his sympathy for the fishermen, but it also hides the sharp comment that the earthly life which the fishermen typify is a life which will lead to nothing except another cycle of birth and death. And, in

Eliot's view, the only aim in this life is to escape from it or to transcend it.

The difference between Eliot and Wordsworth comes from their different systems of thought. While Wordsworth is describing human experience from an essentially humanist point of view, Eliot is doing so within the framework of a dogmatized religion. And it is for this reason that Eliot and Wordsworth held completely different attitudes to nature. While Wordsworth loved nature and delighted in its joy 'in various commonalty spread', Eliot tried to divest himself of the love of created things and regarded nature as distraction.

This can be seen in their respective treatments of London. Both poets have vivid descriptions of the great metropolis and have many common details and focuses of attention. Wordsworth, who is not at his best in describing the City, has this passage to offer:

> The endless stream of men, and moving things,
> From hour to hour the illimitable walk
> Still among streets with clouds and sky above,
> The wealth, the bustle and the eagerness,
> The glittering Chariots with their pamper'd Steeds,
> Stalls, Barrows, Porters; midway in the Street
> The Scavenger, who begs with hat in hand... (1805 vii:158-64)

There is nothing special about this. It is almost the inevitable first impression that the City gives to a newcomer. Almost all these details have been described by Eliot, too, with more freshness and to better purpose. To Wordsworth, the 'quick dance of colours, lights and forms, the 'Babel din' were both fascinating and baffling. He looked with wonder and delight at

> The River proudly bridged, the giddy top
> And the Whispering Gallery of St. Paul's, the Tombs
> Of Westminster, the Giants of Guildhall. (1805 vii:129-31)

Yet he could not understand how next-door neighbours can be strangers and not know each other's names. He enjoyed the theatre and marvelled at big fairs. Yet he was saddened by the sight of women 'to open shame abandon'd'. On the whole, Wordsworth's attitude to the City is negative. Apart from its vices and corruption, the City represents bondage and limitation. On his return to Grasmere in 1799, he described himself as a former 'captive':

> ... coming from a house
> Of bondage, from yon City's walls set free,
> A prison where he hath been long immured. (1805 i : 5-8)

Eliot's London is also fascinating as well as repellent. It is attractive both in grandeur and variety, but it is also full of filth and degeneration. What distinguishes him is that his criticism aims at a much wider issue than that of Wordsworth. Most Romantics are social critics, living and writing in an age of revolution. Social concern is obviously essential to such poems as Blake's 'London', Shelley's 'Song to the Men of England' and Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. Eliot certainly is aware of this when he describes Wordsworth's 'Resolution and Independence' as 'a great poem', 'better if you understand the purposes and social passions which animated its author'.[14] Political in motive, each of these poems voices the suffering of the poor with infinite compassion. In Shelley, especially, there is almost a call for class struggle: 'Men of England, wherefore plough /For the lords who lay ye low?' Social injustice and suffering are attributed to the exploitation by the rich.

Eliot is never so explicitly political. He never takes sides between classes. He takes sides with an ideal world to criticise what he sees as the decadence and corruption of this world. He always looks down from a prophetic height and sees the problem which confronts us all, poor and rich. The aristocratic family and the working-class couple in 'A Game of Chess' are not just contrasted, but they also share the same problem. The poor scavengers who crawl from Kentish Town to Golders Green deserve sympathy,

but poverty is not the greatest problem we face. And to pit one class against another will not solve the problem.

Eliot's social criticism concentrates, instead, on the encroachment of materialism and commercialism upon moral and spiritual values. 'Perhaps the dominant vice of our time, from the point of view of the Church, will prove to be Avarice'.[15] And the War of 1939 brought him to 'a profounder realisation of a general plight ... a doubt of the validity of a civilisation'. 'Was our society, which had always been so assured of its superiority and rectitude, so confident of its unexamined premises, assembled round anything more permanent than a congeries of banks, insurance companies and industries, and had it any beliefs more essential than a belief in compound interest and the maintenance of dividends'?[16]

In the Four Quartets, thus, criticism aims at the attainment of permanent and essential values. Eliot has chosen that part of his London experience which serves to illustrate his pursuit on the spiritual level. One of his most memorable scenes is the London Tube which he used daily in the 1930s. The way down to the train is described as the soul's descent into darkness, in the manner of St. John of the Cross. And the two levels of Gloucester Road Station are compared to the two stages in the descent.

We should notice that Eliot deliberately mixed the literal and the spiritual. And in describing the London Tube, he actually put forward a spiritual experience. The appearance and the reality, the physical and the spiritual co-exist in a single experience and a single action. It is important to distinguish between them. In the Tube, the darkness is only an eclipse of daylight, typical of such 'a place of disaffection' where men and bits of paper are 'whirled by the cold wind/ That blows before and after time'. 'Not here the darkness, in this twittering world'.

The darkness of St. John of the Cross is completely spiritual. It is a complete black-out of all senses and thought. It means a suspension of all acquired mental habits: discursive reasoning and understanding, and all desires and feelings. This descent into

spiritual darkness is described, however, in terms of a descent to the lower level of the Tube station. The physical action helps us to imagine that on the mental level. And the crowds who go down to the Tube train are described as if they are going to a mass ritual of spiritual purification.

O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark ...

And we all go with them, into the silent funeral.

What are buried are not dead bodies, of course, but what St. John calls 'the imagined forms, figures and images': which include all 'creaturely' activities and capacities: 'its understanding, its likings and its feeling'.[17] This is to create a complete mental emptiness, 'cold the sense and lost the motive of action', a state in which a Divine visitation is most likely to occur. Only when all mental and physical actions are shut down, the mind 'conscious but conscious of nothing', shall the darkness become the Light and the stillness the Dancing:

Whisper of running streams, and winter lightning.

The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,

The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy

Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony

Of death and birth.

Here comes another difference between Eliot and Wordsworth. Clearly Eliot has come to regard nature as a way up to the Absolute. Our action in this world reflects our action on a higher level. For Wordsworth, on the other hand, nature is the end and the purpose. His paradise, as M. H. Abrams puts it, is achieved here and now, and can be described 'by words /Which speak of nothing more than what we are'.[18] It is only when natural majesty exceeds the capacity of his language, that he brings in God as an explanation. He resorts to 'another world' only as metaphor. Thus, the gross realities of London could call forth:

With that distinctness which a contrast gives

Or opposition, made me recognize
As by a glimpse, the things which I had shap'd
And yet not shaped, had seen, and scarcely seen,
Had felt, and thought of in my solitude. (1805 vii : 512-16)

It is for this reason that some of his 'spots of time' seem rather forced and unnatural: as when he met a blind beggar on the street of London and saw on the sheet of paper on his chest

a type,
Or emblem, of the utmost that we know,
Both of ourselves and of the universe;
And, on the shape of the unmoving man,
His fixèd face and sightless eyes, I look'd
As if admonish'd from another world. (1805 vii : 618-23)

Wordsworth is rightly full of sympathy and social responsibility, but it all arises from his humanist interest which moves 'from the love of nature to the love of man'. The admonition from 'another world' seems oddly out of place. The 'other world' is clearly designed to give extra intensity to the experience rather than as a genuine vision.[19] We can hardly speak of a systematic spiritual world in The Prelude. If there is indeed 'another world', it is the idealized scenes from the English Lake District, the West Country, and parts of the Swiss Alps. For Wordsworth, Heaven remains a metaphor, not a reality.

III

For Eliot, on the other hand, there is indeed 'another world' beyond the boundaries of human experience. For him, heaven and hell are not just 'states'; they may also be 'places'. This can be seen in his sustained interest in Ulysses's descent into Hades, Dante's visit to the underworld and similar literature from the Bible to Shakespeare.[20] The world of the dead is always mysterious because it is out of the reach of the living. It

is believed to possess unknown secrets. The adventures of Ulysses and Dante appeal to our imagination because each pretends to be a giant leap into the darkness by someone who yet can return and report his knowledge and experience. The return from the dead is always a fascinating concept. 'I am Lazarus', cried Prufrock, 'come from the dead/ Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all'.

Eliot's exploration of 'death's other kingdom', though not comparable to Dante in scope, persists throughout his work.

> And what the dead had no speech for, when living
> They can tell you, being dead.

It is in this belief that Eliot created his own encounter with his dead master, conjuring up a familiar yet unidentifiable 'compound ghost', to 'disclose the gifts reserved for age to set a crown upon [his] lifetime's effort'. The situation in which this took place is interesting. The time and place are described in such a way that they assume much uncanniness: not unlike a ghost-story, say, of Edgar Allan Poe.[21]

> In the uncertain hour before the morning
> Near the ending of interminable night
> At the recurrent end of the unending
> After the dark dove with the flickering tongue
> Had passed below the horizon of his homing
> While the dead leaves still rattled on like tin
> Over the asphalt where no other sound was
> Between three districts whence the smoke arose
> I met one walking, loitering and hurried
> As if blown towards me like the metal leaves
> Before the urban dawn wind unresisting.

Yet this is not a simple ghost story like, for instance, 'The Fall of the House of Usher' where the ghost represents a kind of evil from which one wishes to escape.

Modelled on Dante's meeting with Brunetto Latini,[22] Eliot's ghost is that of a master, of a friend with whom one can communicate. Also as in Hamlet, the ghost comes back to reveal a secret.

The communication

Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living.

The wisdom of the dead is literally hardly the preoccupation of Wordsworth, but one must admit that his poetry is full of ghostly figures. One thinks particularly of the Leech-Gatherer, the Discharged Soldier and the Old Man Travelling. Take the Leech-Gatherer for an example. He first appears to the poet

As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
Couched on the bald top of an eminence;
Wonder to all who do the same espy,
By what means it could thither come, and whence;
So that it seems a thing endued with sense:
Like a sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf
Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself.

Described in such language, the old man appears less than human, bordering between insensate things and live human beings: neither solid nor shadowy, 'not all alive nor dead', 'like one whom I had met with in a dream'-- 'a man from some far region sent'. 'Resolution and Independence' is no less a 'dream encounter' than Eliot's 'uncertain hour before the morning'.

The situation of 'The Discharged Soldier' is even more similar to 'Little Gidding' II. Here the poet is taking a walk along the public way late at night when all had sunk into a 'deep quietness'. It is the quietude after a day's toil, the quietude before morning, not unlike the dead silence after the London bombing. The poet enjoyed the solitude, his body 'drinking in a restoration' from the calmness, when

a sudden turning of the road

Presented to my view an uncouth shape.

The shock is understandable. And the stranger, in silence and darkness, is naturally taken to be a ghost. This must be Wordsworth's first reaction too, for he instinctively retreated into the shade to make sure what he had met. The 'uncouth shape' is a reference to the 'shape' Satan met at the gate of Hell. It is Milton's name for 'Death'.[23] Yet Wordsworth's 'shape' is not a ghost in the literal sense, but a human being bordering between life and death. The darkness had certainly given him an unusual appearance.

If but a glove had dangled in his hand

It would have made him more akin to man.

The ghostly figure has a stiffness in his form; has a ghastly mouth; and his bones seem to wound him. He is all motionless in the dark, propped upon a milestone. All these details add up to the picture of a person who is 'cut off /From all his kind, and more than half detached, /From his own nature'.

Wordsworth's encounter with the discharged soldier, though not really a ghost story, has certain supernatural implications. Like Eliot's 'dead patrol' with his compound ghost, Wordsworth also 'beheld /With ill-suppressed astonishment [the soldier's] tall and ghostly figure moving at [his] side'. He had also held a conversation with his ghostly companion and also had some wisdom to learn from him.

in all he said

There was a strange half-absence and a tone

Of weakness and indifference, as of one

Remembering the importance of his theme,

But feeling it no longer.

At a certain point, both the discharged soldier and the leech-gatherer assumed a speech which seemed impossible for them. They in a sense had become a vehicle. The leech-gatherer had given the poet 'human strength and strong admonishment', while the discharged soldier seemed to have become a mouthpiece, speaking not of his own will.

... My trust is in the God of heaven,

And in the eye of him that passes me.

Yet here again arises the difference between Eliot and Wordsworth. For Eliot, real wisdom and knowledge come only through revelation and therefore his ghost is a real ghost who came from the land of the dead and who had to leave at daybreak. Wordsworth's two old men are both human beings who had never crossed the border, but only approached it through experience, suffering and old age. Their wisdom and knowledge, for Eliot, can at best have a 'limited value'. Normally they can merely bequeath 'a receipt for deceit'. In fact, Eliot's individual, in his search for a spiritual world, is surrounded by the dangerous knowledge of the elders, and baffled like Dante

In the middle, not only in the middle of the way

But all the way, in a dark wood, in a bramble,

On the edge of a grimpen, where is no secure foothold,

And menaced by monsters, fancy lights,

Risking enchantment.

In contrast to Wordsworth, Eliot has his ghost to teach him, not any human wisdom, but the after-life suffering in Purgatory, the 'rending pain of re-enactment', and finally the 'redemption' through spiritual purification -- to be 'restored by that refining fire/ Where you must move in measure, like a dancer'.

This difference, though almost submerged in similarities, is fundamental and arises because of the different models behind Wordsworth and Eliot. The main presence behind the Four Quartets is Dante. For Eliot, Dante is not just a poet and theologian, he is an explorer, travelling systematically beyond the frontiers of ordinary consciousness. The Divine Comedy is to Eliot 'a constant reminder'

of the obligation to explore, to find words for the inarticulate, to capture those feelings which people can hardly even feel, because they have no words for them; and at the same time, a reminder that the explorer beyond

the frontiers of ordinary consciousness will only be able to return and report to his fellow citizens, if he has all the time a firm grasp upon realities with which they are already acquainted.[24]

The metaphor places Dante in the role of a later Ulysses who crossed strange regions to reach his 'Ithaca' and his 'Penelope'. It is important to recognize that a Dantesque descent into the realm of death and a Ulyssean journey towards home are both appropriate metaphors for Eliot's own poetry which in its nature is a step-by-step approach towards the rose garden: an 'achieved and consolidated advance into knowledge'.[25]

Old men ought to be explorers
Here and there does not matter
We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion
Through the dark cold and the empty desolation.

Such a quest as Eliot's work exemplifies is also found, in an internalized form, in Shelley, Keats, Tennyson and especially Wordsworth. But the chief influence behind Wordsworth is Milton, 'the bard,/ Holiest of men'. If we compare Wordsworth's Milton and Eliot's Dante, we find that they are alike in at least one aspect. That is to say, Wordsworth's Milton is also an explorer.

For I must tread on shadowy ground, must sink
Deep, and ascend aloft, and breathe in worlds
To which the heaven of heavens is but a veil.
All strength, all terror, single or in bands,
That ever was put forth by personal forms --
Jehovah, with his thunder, and the choir
Of shouting angels, and the empyreal thrones --

I pass them unalarmed. The darkest pit
Of the profoundest hell, night, chaos, death,
Nor aught of blinder vacancy scooped out
By help of dreams, can breed such fear and awe
As fall upon me often when I look
Into my soul, into the soul of man
My haunt, and the main region of my song. ('Prospectus')

In defining the theme of The Recluse, Wordsworth has actually identified himself with Milton, not as a justifier of God's ways to Man, but as an explorer of the highest of heaven and the lowest of hell.[26] Thus, the similarity between Wordsworth and Eliot seems to be an accident. It is true that, in Wordsworth, the quest is never ended. There is a repeated and an almost eternal search after what is 'evermore about to be', what is forever receding beyond the horizon. Yet the destination of his quest is never altogether clear. It is not like in Eliot where all effort in the quest is directed towards the 'multifoliate rose'.

All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

The preoccupation with a perennial reality is the main concern of Eliot's later poetry. Its origin has much to do with Dante's Divine Comedy as these lines, an adaptation of the ultimate vision of the Paradiso, have shown. Much of its intensity and excitement comes not from an 'intimation of immortality', but from a deliberate pursuit of it.

Notes to Chapter VII:

1. UPUC p71. For 'drunken helots', see Arthur Waugh, 'The New Poetry', T. S. Eliot: The Critical Heritage, ed. Michael Grant (London 1982) p67

2. UPUC p69

3. Eliot, 'What is Minor Poetry?', OPP pp42-43

4. See Horace Gregory, 'Fare Forward, Voyagers', New York Times Book Review ii (16 May 1943); Christopher Clausen, 'Tintern Abbey to Little Gidding: The Past Recaptured', Sewanee Review lxxxiv (Summer 1976) pp405-24; and Philip Hobsbaum, Tradition and Experiment in English Poetry (Basingstoke & London 1979) p261

5. Cf. Hugh Kenner, The Pound Era (London 1972) p438. The affinity is with eighteenth-century poets Gray, Thomson, Cowper and Collins. The Four Quartets, as landscape poems in meditation, continue the tradition of Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard and The Seasons: a tradition in which Wordsworth in 'Tintern Abbey' also participates. See Geoffrey Durrant, William Wordsworth (Cambridge 1969) p34

6. Wordsworth's parallel with the mystics is described by Geoffrey H. Hartman as a '*via naturaliter negativa* '. According to him, Wordsworth's vision usually occurs at a time when his high hopes are disappointed by nature, as in The Prelude I and VI. It is often in disappointment, or what Hartman calls 'melancholy slackening', that his imagination achieves autonomy. Thus, by a negative way, nature guided him into vision. See Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814 (New Haven & London 1964) pp33-45

7. Eliot, 'The Pensées of Pascal', EAM p142

8. Eliot's interest in the life and writings of saints and mystics dates back to 1914 or earlier. Plato, Aristotle, and the neo-Platonists were among his reading list as a student of philosophy. At Harvard, he spent a year studying Sanskrit and Hindu philosophy. He could have continued to write in the vein of 'The Death of St. Narcissus' and 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' if he had not met Pound. And his reading of St. John of the Cross, Julian of Norwich, the author of The Cloud of Unknowing and others in later years is a revival of the earlier interest. During the composition of the Four Quartets, he

was preoccupied by a book on mysticism by Evelyn Underhill. See Lyndall Gordon, Eliot's Early Life (Oxford 1977) and Eliot's New Life (Oxford 1988)

9. See Ananda Coomaraswamy, The Dance of Shiva: Fourteen Indian Essays (New Delhi 1918, repr. 1971) pp66-79

10. See W. R. Inge: The Philosophy of Plotinus vol. I (London 1918) p254

11. See The Svetasvatara Upanishad, extracted in Walter T. Stace, The Teachings of the Mystics, (New York 1960) p40

12. See Jonathan Wordsworth, William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision (Oxford 1982) pp98-114

13. Eliot, Letter to P. E. More (Shrove Tuesday 1928), quoted by B. A. Harris, 'The Rare Contact: A Correspondence Between T. S. Eliot and P. E. More', Theology lxxv (March 1972) p141

14. UPUC p73

15. ICS p97

16. Ibid. pp63-64

17. St. John of the Cross, The Dark Night of the Soul, in Stace (1960) pp190-94

18. M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism (London 1971) p95

19. In 1804 with Pantheism gone, Wordsworth's claim of vision looks like an expedient means, a 'chearing lamp' to keep his imagination alive at a time when he felt the sources of his power were closing on him. Thus, the 'invisible world' verges on the empty. The visions of 1804, including the Simplon Pass and the Ascent of Snowdon, were a response to a need to believe in such a world, because it intensifies his experience. See Jonathan Wordsworth (1982) pp184-98

20. Eliot was also interested in the visits to Hades by Aeneas, Orpheus and Tiresias. See 'Virgil and the Christian World', OPP p129; 'Song to the Orpherion', Tyro (1922); and the Notes to The Waste Land, CPP p78. Eliot had written after Pound in 1929 that hell is a 'state', not a 'place', but in view of his various references to hell and the

damned, it may very well be, for him, a 'place' too, for it assumes the authority of reality. See Eliot, 'Dante' (1929), SE p250

21. Eliot had a high esteem for Poe's ghost stories. He was also a fan of the detective fiction of Wilkie Collins and Arthur Conan Doyle. It seems to me that there is some connection between the mysteriousness of 'Little Gidding' II and Eliot's reading of ghost stories and detective novels. See Eliot: 'From Poe to Valéry', TCC p30, where he talks about 'the great influence' Poe's tales had 'on some popular types of fiction'.

22. '*Siete voi qui, ser Brunetto* ?' appeared in the manuscript of 'Little Gidding', but was deleted in the revision. The meetings between Virgil and Statius, Virgil and Sordello also moved Eliot. See Eliot, 'Dante' (1929), SE pp254-55

23. Paradise Lost II 666-67

24. Eliot, 'What Dante Means to Me', TCC p134

25. B. Rajan, The Overwhelming Question (Toronto 1976) p7

26. Herbert Read had tried to ally Wordsworth to Dante on this very point. After defining the metaphysical tradition of Dante and Cavalcanti as condensing most possible reality into a smallest possible compass, he goes on to subsume Donne, Marvell and Wordsworth into this tradition. See Reason and Romanticism (London 1926) pp50-54 and Eliot's review of it, 'Mr. Read and Mr. Fernandez', Criterion iv (Oct. 1926). It is possible that Wordsworth was aware of Dante in some circumstances, but it is unlikely that he had modelled himself on Dante. In the 'Prospectus' to The Recluse, the model is very clearly Milton.

VIII. Spiritual Struggle

There is little connection between Eliot's plays and Romanticism, apart from a quotation from Prometheus Unbound in The Cocktail Party. The great nineteenth-century poets had all tried their hands at drama, but none of them achieved success, leaving behind them a bundle of 'closet dramas' which are unstageable and mostly barely readable. 'It is not primarily lack of plot', Eliot writes, 'or lack of action and suspense, or imperfect realisation of character, or lack of anything of what is called "theatre", that makes these plays so lifeless: it is primarily that their rhythm of speech is something that we cannot associate with any human being except a poetry reciter'.[1] Because of this failure of speech rhythm, it is unlikely that the Romantic poets, with their clumsy plot construction to add to it, could offer any help to Eliot as a dramatist.

It is for this reason that, if Eliot's dramatic tradition is what we are interested in, we should look elsewhere. Firstly, the Elizabethan and Jacobean drama had been Eliot's enthusiasm since the 1920s. And up till the mid-1930s, he was still concerned with the restoration of verse drama.[2] Secondly, the Greek plays, through Gilbert Murray's translation and Sybil Thorndike's performance, had occupied the London stage for a decade. The 'chorus', according to E. Martin Browne, provided an exciting mode of expression for poets who wished to write for the theatre. The 'ritual form and communal expression' exercised an immense attraction.[3] Thirdly, there is the realistic drama of Ibsen, Shaw and Galsworthy. These dramatists are especially acute in their exploration of social problems. Where Eliot's tradition lies will be clear as we read the plays themselves.

The epigraph of 'Sweeney Agonistes' points us to Aeschylus's Orestes, but its verse points us to the music-hall of its time,[4] and its protagonist, struggling with his spiritual dark night, points us to St. John of the Cross. The 'Fragment of a Prologue' is an

attempt to introduce the characters by card-cutting, a feature which reminds us of The Waste Land. But, unlike Madame Sosostris, Doris does not just draw the cards of the characters, but also foretells the events which are to take place: there is going to be a party, an absent friend, a quarrel, and a coffin. These will go to make up the 'Fragment of an Agon'.

At the party in the second part are all those we have met in the first part: Doris and Dusty, two street girls; Wauchope, a 'real live Britisher' and World War I soldier; Horsfall, his comrade in arms; Klipstein and Krumpacker, two Americans known to the last two since the war and now in London on business. The new comer is Sweeney, a self-appointed cannibal. The only absent friend is Pereira, the 'King of Clubs', who had phoned Doris at the beginning of the play. 'You can't trust him', Doris says. It seems that Pereira is the most important character in the play, the protagonist of Sweeney's murder story. 'I know who', Doris says to Sweeney, at the end of his story.

The crucial point of the play is that the murderer, having killed his mistress and kept her in a bath of lysol, cannot expect to have disposed of her forever. No matter how hard he tries to cover it up, 'take in the milk, pay the rent' and so on, the shadow of murder will pursue him like hell.

He didn't know if he was alive
and the girl was dead
He didn't know if the girl was alive
and he was dead
He didn't know if they were both alive
or both were dead.

Psychologically, he has got himself into a situation where death and life have no meaning, no difference. This mental disturbance is an intense experience and is poetically of great value; it results from the recognition that what has been done has been done and cannot be undone. 'You know the hangman is waiting for you'.

Eliot's interest in murder has to do with the Elizabethan drama. Shakespeare has several murder stories which he highly appreciated. The psychology of Brutus and Macbeth before and after committing murder attracted him.[5] But the murder in 'Sweeney Agonistes' has more to do with Aeschylus than with anyone else. Pereira's biting conscience is similar to that of Orestes after murdering his mother: it is the agony of being pursued by the Furies. 'You don't see them, you don't -- but I see them: they are hunting me down, I must move on'.

Eliot himself described murder in many of his works: in 'Eeldrop and Appleplex', in two rejected poems of the original Waste Land,[6] in 'Sweeney Agonistes', and in The Family Reunion. And in all of these, what is important is not the murder, but the effects it has on the murderer: the terrible psychological storm it arouses in his mind, the hellish awareness of the fact that what has been done cannot be undone, the sense of crime, and the fear of retribution. All these unite to make the murderer's existence a 'swinging between life and death'. He no longer knows life from death. 'Life is death and death is life'. In The Family Reunion, this becomes a 'reversal of sleep and waking'.

This psychology of murder is valuable because it is associated in Eliot's mind with a matter which is completely irrelevant to murder. The play actually works on two levels. On the one hand, it looks like a music-hall entertainment with its light conversation, its drum-beat Jazz rhythm, and its light-hearted song of 'my little island girl'. On the other hand it is full of snares and mires. Its language suggests mystery. 'I've gotta use words when I talk to you'. Sweeney seems to be imparting a meaning of which the rest can barely grasp a shadow.

Indeed the psychology of the murderer is associated with the intense remorse described by St. John of the Cross in The Dark Night of the Soul and by St. Augustine in his Confessions. It is a type of Pascal's disgust-despair and a type of Donne's regret in later life.[7] Actually this mental state is common to all spiritual men before their illumination. Becket recalls his old sinful days, the 'old Tom, gay Tom, Becket of

London', just before his martyrdom. Dante was intensely ashamed of his 'animal feelings' just before Beatrice's revelation. The recognition of sin, to 'wake in a hell of fright', is the essential stage in the Christian mystic's Progress.

Yet, it would be a great error to mistake the mental state of a murderer for that of a Christian mystic. This is only a metaphor and the analogy is ironic. The murder -- killing the girl one loves -- is in a sense a radical form of renunciation.

> Any man might do a girl in
> Any man has to, needs to, wants to
> Once in a lifetime, do a girl in.

The girl, a symbol of sensuous life, has to be 'killed' in one way or another in a man's search for mystical union. All this seems to be indicated by the epigraph from St. John of the Cross: 'Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created beings'.

The story of Pereira and his mistress foreshadows the relation of Sweeney and Doris. Sweeney will become another Pereira if he carries out what he has threatened to do: to carry Doris to the cannibal isle and finish her off in a human stew. The human love has to be renounced in order for the feeling to be sublimated: that is, 'not to expect more from *life* than it can give or more from *human* beings than they can give; to look to *death* for what life cannot give'.[8] In each relationship, the girl becomes a 'missionary' or even more ironically a martyr.

In Eliot's very first attempt at drama, his basic technique is already clear. The ordinary action is made to reflect an action on a higher reality. If in the poetry this higher reality was often implied in his rejection and elimination, now in the plays it informs the under-pattern and provides a deeper significance. One important aspect of Eliot's plays is the double significance of dramatic action. This is, according to Eliot, one of the advantages of poetic drama over prose drama:

> In poetic drama a certain apparent irrelevance may be the symptom of this

doubleness; or the drama has an under-pattern, less manifest than the theatrical one. We sometimes feel, in following the words and behaviour of some of the characters of Dostoevsky, that they are living at once on the plane that we know and on some other plane of reality from which we are shut out.[9]

At least this is what Eliot aimed to do in Murder in the Cathedral, his most successful play on stage which enjoyed the most performances despite its dramatic defects. The story is a familiar one, about a man who comes back to England knowing that he is going to be killed and who then is killed. Its subject reminds us of Tennyson's Becket, but its form recalls the mystery plays. Yet, unlike Tennyson, Eliot has chosen to concentrate on death and martyrdom, excluding the romantic episode of Becket's youth.[10] The result is that it presents 'only one dominant character; and what dramatic conflict there is takes place within the mind of that character'.[11]

The chief disadvantage of writing about a familiar story is that nothing can be kept from the audience. Everything is known from the beginning and happens according to expectation. There is little development and little suspense. We know the end at the beginning. The whole play becomes a kind of ritual. Becket's choice has been made at the very start. The chorus of Canterbury charwomen cannot hope to persuade the archbishop to return to France.

Return. Quickly. Quietly. Leave us to perish in quiet.
You come with applause, you come with rejoicing, but you come
bringing death into Canterbury:
A doom on the house, a doom on yourself, a doom on the world.

Becket's appearance on stage concurs with his attempt to justify his return and therefore his choice of death. His reasons show him to be on a different level of understanding:

They know and do not know, that action is suffering

And suffering is action. Neither does the agent suffer
Nor the patient act. But both are fixed
In an eternal action, an eternal patience
To which all must consent that it may be willed
And which all must suffer that they may will it,
That the pattern may subsist, for the pattern is the action
And the suffering, that the wheel may turn and still
Be forever still.

Here is the division between two levels of action and two levels of consciousness, between the mind of the saint and that of the ordinary people. The chorus represents the voice of common sense, regarding death as horrible and by instinct to be avoided. But Becket sees it as part of a higher design. By equating suffering with action, he believes that the killers themselves will suffer, while the killed may not be the one who is truly 'beaten down'. As he later explains, to die is to conquer 'by suffering'. The strength of the language is beyond doubt. And certain passages are to inspire parts of 'Burnt Norton' and 'Little Gidding'.

Throughout the play, the debate seems to be: to leave or not to leave, to escape or to remain and face the danger. On the deeper level, there is a question of motive, a tension between seeking the glory of martyrdom and dying selflessly to fulfil God's will -- a tension between what Helen Gardner calls self-consciousness and sanctity.[12] This is fully acted out in the temptation scene, which culminates in Becket's resisting the desire to become a martyr.

The temptation, which is an imitation of the Temptation of Christ, is a conventional feature of the mystery play. In fact, the versification of the whole play is modelled on Everyman. The temptation of Becket is not a historical fact, but only the dramatization of an inner debate. The tempters are the personification of the alien forces of Becket's mind; they represent his other considerations.[13] And this is perhaps why the tempters are so

colourless, as if they are only targets put up to be shot down. As characters, they are absolutely lifeless, being only the embodiment of certain concepts.

The debate emerges at the end as a glorification of Becket's unwavering decision to go to death, to let things happen according to the divine plan. 'Now is my way clear'. But the embarrassment is that his very saintliness has to be communicated by himself and in fact is partially undermined in this process.[14] His death is in a sense inevitable, because he is trapped in the struggle between the State and the Church. His choice is wholly consistent with his character. His sacrifice serves to show that the authority of God has precedence over that of the King. As fulfilment of the Divine will, his impending death causes no fear. Instead it gives him relief and happiness, himself having 'become the instrument of God'.

> I have had a tremor of bliss, a wink of heaven, a whisper,
> And I would no longer be denied; all things
> Proceed to a joyful consummation.

The play is indeed a one-man play. All characters revolve around Becket, the centre. They lack their own character. Like the tempters, the knights are also nameless and puppet-like, only the instruments of the State and the King. They murdered the archbishop, not because they personally hated him, but because they had put the State before the Church. Thus they form a contrast to the archbishop, who has 'lost his will in the will of God'. The knights' apology, which is designed to show the contemporary significance of the struggle, seems a dramatic failure. Their direct address to the audience may be an effort to modernize the play in the fashion of Saint Joan,[15] but it fails as a dramatic device; it makes the end like a political or theological seminar.

Yet these peculiarities explain some features of Eliot as a dramatist. We can at least say that, up to this time, he is not realistic. In fact he had a long antagonism to the realistic drama of Shaw and Galsworthy.[16] His persistent concern in theatre is to revive poetic drama. His ideal is to be found in the Greek and the Shakespearean ages. As to

the contemporary theatre, the only things on stage that interested him were Russian ballet, music-hall, and the stylized Japanese Noh plays.[17] All these predisposed him to the strict conventional forms rather than the realistic imitation of actuality. He had used most of the conventional dramatic devices which in 'naturalistic drama' would appear unrealistic: verse medium, masks, chorus, soliloquy and, as we shall see, ghosts. He tended to regard his plays as liturgy rather than imitation of life.

> A verse play is not a play done in verse, but a different kind of play; in a way more realistic than 'naturalistic' drama ... It may allow the characters to behave inconsistently, but only with respect to a deeper consistency. It may use any device to show their real feelings and volitions, instead of just what, in actual life, they would normally profess or be conscious of.[18]

These peculiarities are also found in The Family Reunion which, Eliot admitted, contains a lyrical duet which is too poetic and draws too much attention to its poetry. It also has Furies in the cast and a chorus assembled from unimportant characters.[19] Many critics have followed Eliot's own strictures to regard these at least partially as the failures of the play. The main charge is against its plot. It is believed to have fallen short of a Christian play because Harry, the protagonist, is shown to be unrepentant. The poet, who should have created a 'consciously guilty hero', should not 'extol Harry's nobility in carrying the family burden'.[20]

This is the inevitable conclusion if one takes certain facts of the play too literally. The murder, for example, has been taken to be a fact. And the Eumenides have been taken to be the ghosts of a scolding mother. These problems have to be solved before a good understanding can be reached.

The play tells of a man who comes home after eight years of wandering to join a family reunion. But he is suffering a great deal and for no apparent reasons, seeing things which are invisible to others and pursued by forces which he does not understand. The immediate cause of this is his wife's death, for which he holds himself

responsible. 'I pushed her' overboard an ocean liner, he told his family. But the murder is a dubious one and, according to Eliot himself, is meant to be so.[21] This is where the significance really lies. Did Harry murder his wife? The answer to this question will solve many problems about the play itself. According to Downing, Harry's chauffeur, who was with the couple on the liner, it is 'much more likely to have been an accident'.

Harry's marriage is a loveless one. His mother, an overwhelming personality and a family authority not to be challenged, wanted him to marry Mary, a distant cousin. He married a different woman, in revolt, because he wanted to take his life in his own hands. But the marriage proved to be a mistake. He found out he did not love her, but she could not bear his indifference. For the last year or so, she had been using desperate means to attract his attention. She talked of suicide 'every now and again' and often did so to frighten him. It is very probable that this time she did this and counted on Harry to rescue her at the last minute, but the help never came or came too late.

Such guesses are not totally ungrounded. For one thing, they fit into Downing's account of the incident. In real life, too, there are many instances of people who take the blame when others are killed because they have been unable to help and who suffer a guilty conscience for the rest of their lives. There is no reason why Harry, who already had desired his wife's death, should not hold himself responsible for it. That is to say, Harry's guilt is perfectly natural. The problem is that it is so oppressive and weighs so heavily on him that it is incommensurate with his supposed 'crime'. He only desired her death after all. The state he is in indicates his suffering for more than his own 'crime' or for something which he does not know. These are the mysteries which the play sets out to solve.

The parallel with Oedipus Rex is apparent. Both start with a sin which is committed in ignorance and a curse which results from the sin. Yet the play is modelled on Orestes and is about inexplicable suffering, about the Dark Night of someone who is being pursued by the Eumenides.[22] 'Suffering' is the exact word for Harry's situation in the

play. He suffers first of all because he is more conscious. This is what he has to say to his uncles and aunts:

You are all people
To whom nothing has happened, at most a continual impact
Of external events. You have gone through life in sleep,
Never woken to the nightmare. I tell you, life would be unendurable
If you were wide awake.

Harry is wide awake: he sees things to which they are blind -- 'Look there! can't you see them? You don't see them, but I see them'. He suffers secondly because no one understands him. This lack of sympathy only intensifies his suffering. He feels 'alone in an over-crowded desert, jostled by ghosts'. He alone notices

the admonitions
From the world around the corner
The wind's talk in the dry holly-tree
The inclination of the moon
The attraction of the dark passage
The paw under the door.

He alone knows that these are just 'comparisons in a more familiar medium' of a reality which 'has no language': the hints of a world which cannot be communicated.

Harry behaves according to his better knowledge and deeper understanding. But to the others, his conduct is at best strange. Violet suggests, 'Harry must see a doctor'. Ivy thinks his cunning betrays his 'malady'. And his mother did 'ring up the doctor'. The Hamlet parallel only increases our impression of their misunderstanding: how far they have missed the point! In fact, Eliot has deliberately created a contrast between Harry and the other characters in the play: a contrast between the 'sensitive and intelligent' and the 'material, literal-minded and visionless'.[23]

Harry left home eight years ago, apparently to escape the design of his mother, but

he did not know that there was a larger design which had been wrought even before his birth and which he could not escape wherever he went. Now he has came back and 'hoped for something in coming back'. He hardly knew what it was he hoped for. Yet the unseen forces compel him to pursue.

Here and here and here -- wherever I am not looking,
Always flickering at the corner of my eye,
Almost whispering just out of earshot.

The whole play is about Harry's search for the origin of his suffering, the origin of a guilt which has become almost unbearable. From a different angle, it is about his discovery, his gradual 'de-possession' from the curse.

In the whole family, only Agatha, one of the aunts, shows any sympathy. In fact, she is the only person who knows what happened. She is the only person who is able to understand Harry.

I mean painful, because everything is irrevocable,
Because the past is irremediable,
Because the future can only be built
Upon the real past.

For this reason, Agatha alone is able to offer spiritual guidance to Harry and show him the way to freedom and to the end of his suffering. In the meantime, all awaits Harry to find out.

O God, man, the things that are going to happen
Have already happened.

How can we be concerned with the past
And not with the future? or with the future
And not with the past?

He already has the feeling that time past and time future are inextricably connected.

This points to the direction of his quest, which is to be a quest back through time.

And whatever happens began in the past, and presses hard on the future.
The agony in the curtained bedroom, whether of birth or of dying,
Gathers in to itself all the voices of the past, and projects them into the future.

'The man who returns will have to meet/ The boy who left': a borrowing from Henry James's 'The Jolly Corner'. But Harry will not just meet his own ghost. He must go beyond his childhood, right back to the point where things went wrong. It is possible that, in his backward quest, he may trace it to some impersonal cause like the Fall. It is possible that his problem is only part of a universal one. This, anyway, is what he seems to mean when he reproaches his aunts and uncles for isolating things.

I was like that in a way, so long as I could think
Even of my own life as an isolated ruin,
A casual bit of waste in an orderly universe.
But it begins to seem just part of some huge disaster,
Some monstrous mistake and aberration
Of all men, of the world, which I cannot put in order.

This widening of the problem is another parallel to Hamlet and, in its special way, it suggests a connection between Harry's guilt and the Original Sin.

But such a point should not be stretched without further justification from the text. The answer to Harry's suffering has to be found in his own family and this is what he rightly judges to be the case. 'Do you remember my father?' he asks Dr. Warburton, the family doctor and friend. He is right to think that his father might be behind all this. In fact, to people around him, he is almost his father's double. Warburton told him that the father was 'very much like you'. His mother was surprised that 'you looked just like your father when you said that'. And somehow Harry seems to be remembering something which only his father could have done, when he says to Agatha:

O my dear, and you walked through the little door

And I ran to meet you in the rose-garden.

Perhaps Harry has inherited a sin from his father, just as we have inherited the Original Sin. This is what Harry will eventually find out. But at the moment, he is still half in the dark.

So far the play has kept its suspense very well and in fact so well that when the revelation comes, it comes as a shock. Agatha's story about Harry's father resolved all the mysteries which the play has planted in its earlier parts. What relief for Harry to know that he was unable to love only because he was conceived and born out of a loveless marriage! 'A curse comes to being /As a child is formed'. What a relief to know that his desire to get rid of his wife only comes from his father who had plotted against his mother! What relief to know that he had done nothing out of his own will, but he has only been 'playing a part that had been imposed upon [him]' and that it was all because of the curse!

It is possible
You are the consciousness of your unhappy family,
Its bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame.

The immediate response of people in such a situation should be, not repentance, but relief. The recognition of sin, according to Eliot, is 'an immediate form of salvation'.[24] To insist on beating Harry down is to miss this vital point. Indeed, Harry experiences a sense of liberation, like someone having broken the chains that tied him down. The recognition has changed his vision of the whole world. 'I feel happy for a moment, as if I had come home'. The Furies, too, which had been the forces of retribution, are now metamorphosed into 'the bright angels'. In this treatment, there is nothing like what Grover Smith calls 'too abrupt' a change, because it all comes naturally as a result of the recognition.[25]

If these facts are grasped, there is little need to criticise Eliot for failing to make Harry repent. His behaviour and conduct are pre-determined. So there is little for Harry

to repent and it would contradict the curse if he is made to, for that would be to postulate at the same time that Harry was under a curse and that he acted by his own free will. Then the curse would be undermined. This is why Grover Smith's suggestion of making Harry into a man 'made wicked by the curse and then led by his horror of it to repent of his wilful sins' -- a man 'devoted to the mother and the wife but driven by the curse to injure them against his will, and then reconciled by justification of the curse' -- would not make the play any better.[26] For the devotion to his mother and wife would contradict the curse itself, which started functioning even before Harry's birth.

This understanding will enable us to regard the play as Harry's 'de-possession' rather than Amy's tragedy. For Harry, Eliot says, 'the only way out is purgation and holiness'. This course is recognised to be indisputable. Now that Harry is left 'under the single eye above the desert', he will only need to transform the fear of punishment into an active will to suffer. That is, not to flee the Eumenides, but to seek them. Harry's departure for the desert in one sense is as inexplicable as 'the disciples dropping their nets'.[27] Amy's death, on the other hand, is at least partially due to her own failure to understand Harry's mission and destiny.

Agatha describes the play as 'a story ... of sin and expiation', but the expiation begins only just before the end of the play. Harry's future is only suggested: to leave the life of comfortable unreality at Wishwood and follow the divine messengers to a life in the desert:

> To the worship in the desert, the thirst and deprivation,
> A stony sanctuary and a primitive altar,
> The heat of the sun and the icy vigil,
> A care over lives of humble people...

But to follow Harry's journey to the new life would require another play. That is the content of a sequel. Eliot says that the play needs to be completed by an Orestes or an Oedipus at Colonus.[28] He never attempted such a sequel, but that is not a reason for

blaming this play, which is about the shock of discovering another reality. It starts with a problem, goes through a quest and ends with a discovery and a solution to the problem. This play is complete in itself.

Eliot's early plays were an integral part of his poetry. Firstly, they were written from the same concern as his poetry: the concern with individual's spiritual struggle. 'Sweeney Agonistes' describes the same *acedia* suffered by the narrator of 'Ash-Wednesday', but through a different perspective: the mental Dark Night of St. John of the Cross. The same theme is treated by The Family Reunion, but with greater depth and scope. Its protagonist's suffering further reminds us of the huge void at the heart of 'Coriolan': the meaningless material existence. Murder in the Cathedral dramatises an internal conflict between body and soul, between the law of God and the law of the King. All these plays have one thing in common: that is, they all have the same spiritual dimension as we find in the poetry.

Secondly, these plays are written in verse and contain many passages which can stand on their own, independent of the rest of the play. There are moments when the play requires the actor or actress to speak a language of more than usual power and intensity. Becket's speech on action and suffering, and the love duet between Harry and Mary, are poems on their own, just as the famous 'To be or not to be' of Shakespeare is often read as an independent poem. Yet, this is not to say that these early plays are merely plays for poetry readers. The poetry has been adapted to dramatic need and been tested on stage. Unlike Shelley's Prometheus Unbound, they can be regarded as poetry as well as plays.

Finally, though these early plays have their roots in the Greek drama and that of the Shakespearean age, they also belong to Eliot's own time. Despite his antagonism to realistic drama, Eliot's plays have many connections with it. 'Sweeney Agonistes' is a piece of music-hall melodrama. Its murder is a version of the Sherlock Holmes detective

novel. The Family Reunion is in one sense a comedy of manners, not unlike Dear Octopus. Despite its morality and spiritual struggle, the play is made up of traditional plot material: the party, the reunion, the home-coming and so on. The episode about Arthur's accident -- first driving into a roundman's cart, then reversing into a shop-window -- is purely melodramatic. And as time went on, Eliot came closer and closer to realistic drama. In the next chapter, I shall trace his debt to commercial theatre. And as we shall see, he had gradually come to be a playwright of Shaftesbury Avenue.

Notes to Chapter VIII:

1. Eliot, 'The Music of Poetry', OPP p34. See also 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama', where he complained that 'many poetic plays are written which can only be read, and read, if at all, without pleasure' (SW p60). And then he goes on to say, 'The relation of The Cenci to the great English drama is almost that of a reconstruction to an original ... so far as there was any dramatic tradition in Shelley's day there was nothing worth keeping' (SW p62).

2. Between 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama' (1920) and 'The Need of Poetic Drama' (1936), Eliot wrote half a dozen essays on the same subject. The reasons for verse plays are that the 'human soul, in intense emotion, strives to express itself in verse'; and 'the tendency, at any rate, of prose drama is to emphasise the ephemeral and superficial'. ('A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry', SE p46)

3. E. Martin Browne, The Making of T. S. Eliot's Plays (Cambridge 1969) p19. Eliot reviewed Thorndike's performance in Medea at Holborn Empire in 1920. See 'Euripides and Professor Murray', SE p59

4. The influence of music-hall on 'Sweeney Agonistes' may be seen from Eliot's essay on 'Marie Lloyd' and his character Maisie Montjoy in The Elder Statesman.

5. See Julius Caesar II. i. to which Eliot's 'The Hollow Men' alluded:

> Between the acting of a dreadful thing
>
> And the first motion, all the interim is
>
> Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream.

6. See 'Song' and 'Elegy', The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript, ed. Valerie Eliot (London 1971) p100, p116

7. See Eliot, 'The Pensées of Pascal', EAM p152

8. Eliot, 'Dante', SE p275

9. Eliot, 'John Marston', SE p229

10. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', OPP p81

11. Eliot, 'The Three Voices of Poetry', OPP p91

12. H. Gardner, The Art of T. S. Eliot (London 1949) pp133-36. There was a long debate among historians concerning the motive of Becket. Here Gardner picks up this debate to test Eliot's play.

13. The evolution of the tempters is of some interest. Eliot first considered a scene of visits from historical figures like Herbert of Bosham and John of Salisbury. Browne suggested that the visitors should be those who tried to avert Becket from martyrdom and so ruled out the above two. Then, at the suggestion of Rupert Doone, they became nameless 'figments' of Thomas's imagination, 'embodying the conflicts in his own mind'. See E. Martin Browne (1969) pp42-43

14. Gardner (1949) pp135-36.

15. Eliot says: 'this is a kind of trick ... I may, for aught I know, have been under the influence of St. Joan'. ('Poetry and Drama', OPP p81)

16. In Eliot's early writings, Shaw and Galsworthy represent the comedy of 'ideas' and are always contrasted unfavourably with the poetic drama of the Greek and Elizabethan ages. See 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama' (SW pp60-70); 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poesy' (SE pp43-58) and 'Mr. Robertson and Mr. Shaw' (Criterion iv, April

1926, pp389-90). It was only later, in the 1950s, that Eliot qualified this opinion: 'Our two greatest prose stylists in the drama ... are, I believe, Congreve and Shaw. A speech by a character of Congreve or of Shaw has ... that unmistakable personal rhythm which is the mark of a prose style, and of which only the most accomplished conversationalists ... show any trace in their talk'. ('Poetry and Drama', OPP p73)

17. The Noh plays were at the time promoted by Yeats and his followers. The enthusiasm may have passed through Pound to Eliot.

18. Eliot, 'Introduction' to Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition by S. L. Bethell (London 1944)

19. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', OPP pp82-84

20. Both Grover Smith and F. O. Matthiessen have expressed this opinion. See Smith, T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays (Chicago 1956) p209 and Matthiessen, The Achievement of T. S. Eliot (London 1947) p171

21. See Eliot, Letter to E. Martin Browne (19 March 1938), cited by Browne (1969) pp106-08. This letter is very important for us to understand Eliot's intention and the meaning of the play itself.

22. Eliot confessed a failure, in The Family Reunion, 'of adjustment between the Greek story and the modern situation'. ('Poetry and Drama', OPP p84) I think this is hardly borne out by the text. Aeschylus only acted as an inspiration and the play seems to develop along its own logic, quite independent of its model.

23. See UPUC p153

24. Eliot, 'Baudelaire', SE p389

25. Smith (1956), p209

26. Ibid. p209

27. Vide supra, letter to Browne (19 March 1938)

28. Ibid.

IX. Mundane Solution

There are several reasons for considering Eliot's last three plays as a group, different from his poetry and his early plays. Up till now, Becket and Harry were Eliot's ideal spiritual men: lonely, passionate, intent upon their destiny, and regardless of the impact their action had on other human beings. The grief of the Canterbury women was heavy because of Becket's unalterable decision, and Amy's death was unavoidable, being a direct result of Harry's refusal to compromise. In these works, Eliot is doing what he believes Dickens did: 'the creation of characters of greater intensity than human beings'.[1] But in the later plays, he has come to realize that such extraordinary human beings are after all rare in the actual world. Not everyone can be a saint. 'The best of a bad job is all any of us can make of it'. Now the Lord Monchensey of his early play seems to him only 'an insufferable prig'.[2]

Thus, in the later plays, Eliot created characters who were more like the members of his audience, facing problems not of the saint, but of the ordinary people. His solutions were now mostly not renunciation and asceticism, but mundane solutions. In relation to this, the verse changed. There is an obvious reduction in what he called 'poetry', speeches seldom rising to 'poetic' intensity. There are fewer evocative images like the door, the garden and so on. Formerly, he had also been known as a difficult poet, inaccessible to the majority of the public. Like other modernists, he had written a so-called élitist literature, had only a handful of enthusiasts, and had his ideal audience in a 'hypothetical Intelligent Man'.[3] For the commercial theatre, that kind of verse would not do. He had now to find a medium suitable for modern theatre, for communication to ordinary playgoers.

Eliot himself had documented the progress of his experiments since 1934 in finding such a medium. It was not until The Cocktail Party that he succeeded in inventing a verse form which could both satisfy himself and the theatre on Shaftesbury Avenue: a verse

which consists of lines of 'varying length and varying number of syllables, with a caesura and three stresses', close to the rhythm of modern speech and at the same time accessible to the modern audience.[4] Eliot's later plays were intended for as wide an audience as possible.

That is to say, Eliot in his plays is concerned with what he calls 'the third voice' of poetry. Up till The Cocktail Party, he had been concerned with expressing his own vision, the first voice, and not at all concerned with how the readers would take it. Now writing for the theatre, he had to have an audience in mind.[5] He was eager to communicate and entertain as well. The last three of his plays have a strong desire to give pleasure, to draw a laugh from the audience. To be successful in the commercial theatre, Eliot had to yield to some of its demands.

I

Back in 1933, Eliot had envisaged a poet who should make himself socially useful. The best way to do so, as he saw it, was to write for the theatre.[6] Now, after World War II, he had finally realized, in his last three comedies, that dream of a socially useful poet. He now became a popular playwright, with his activities devoted to commercial theatre. Apart from the verse which even an adverse critic had to admit as 'an admirable medium for the rendering of modern conversation',[7] the last three plays are closer than we may think to the drawing-room comedy of playwrights from Oscar Wilde to Terence Rattigan. Now it seems necessary, in order to understand Eliot's tradition in this period, to embark on what may seem a digression: that is, to give ourselves a better idea of what the comedy of this tradition is like.

A fine specimen is The High Road (1927) by Frederick Lonsdale, an author for whom Eliot had some sympathy.[8] This play is about the difficulties which a class system created for marrying below one's social level. John, the son of an aristocratic family falls in love with Elsie Hilary, an actress. When the news of their secret engagement appears in the newspaper, it causes a storm in the family. The father, Lord Crayle, calls the family together for an emergency meeting, hoping to prevent this from developing into a

scandal. The older generation, including uncles and aunts, are united in disapproval, regarding the union as a disgrace to the family, while the younger generation are more sympathetic, especially Edward, the eldest of the cousins, who is himself in love with another man's wife. To solve the problem, either the older generation have to relinquish their prejudices, or the younger generation have to comply with what is expected of them. The irony is that, after the older generation have made great efforts to change themselves and come to terms with the new freedom, the couple involved discover that they are not in love after all. In fact, they never loved each other. And all those pains and acrimonies are created for nothing.

This is a typical Oscar Wildean melodrama, which almost matches that *fin-de-siècle* author's wit. It also refers back to Shaw in its characterization, and to Ibsen in its exploration of social problems. Although the question it raises is a serious one, the story is light-hearted. Just think of Lord Crayle dancing the 'Black Bottom', wearing flannel trousers and drinking cocktails. Think of Edward falling in love with Elsie, his cousin's fiancée, at first sight. Think of Lord Trench and Lady Trench bickering with each other. They all provide the much-welcomed bits for ordinary playgoers. Several examples will illustrate how funny the play sometimes becomes. At one point the family is expecting John's arrival and discussing how they should receive him.

> Lord Trench. I suggest we all look horrified.
>
> Lady Trench. That won't be difficult with you in the room!

These two are the comic crux of the play. In terms of character, they are at the same time the blackguards of the aristocratic tradition and the butts of laughter. The wife always calls the husband 'that horrid old man', and in return he always refers to her as 'that most disagreeable woman'. And indeed they are what they call each other. One wonders how they are able to live together.

> Lord Trench. She lives with me because she loves me -- don't you, duckie?
>
> Lady Trench. I live with you because I left it too late to do

anything else--and don't call me duckie.

Very frankly they have confessed themselves to be the victims of their own social conventions, joined together in a marriage which they no longer want. They never lose a chance to attack each other.

Lady Trench (to Edward). I should hate to tell you what I think.
All I wish to say is this: you have no right to defend yourself by wishing *another* member of your family to disgrace us.

Lord Trench. I agree -- and God knows I seldom do with anything my wife says.

Although they disagree in everything else, they are united in upholding the tradition they were brought up in, having already fallen victims to it. Lord Trench is simply being cheeky to suggest there is love between them, for he knows there is hardly any.

Sir Reginald. I feel that Miss Hilary is being very loyal to Edward.

Lady Trench. All women protect the men they love.

Lord Trench. All but one.

Indeed it seems bitterly ironic. Such dialogues are really delicious. Eliot's plays never reach such a high level of hilarity, but they are not lacking in light-heartedness, not even during some very serious business. In The Cocktail Party, for example, while Celia's death is being reported, we have a digression like this.

Julia. But, Peter;
If you're taking Boltwell to California
Why can't you take me?

Peter. We're not taking Boltwell.
We reconstruct a Boltwell.

Julia. Very well, then:
Why not reconstruct *me* ? It's very much cheaper.

Such light conversation reminds one of the author of Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats, the comic side of the serious author we have always known. Think also

of Sir Claude and Eggerson in The Confidential Clerk, who worked so hard to prepare Lady Elizabeth for the news of a new confidential clerk only to be told in the end that she chose him in the first place. Lady Elizabeth fulfils certain functions of Julia in the former play, the functions, if I may say so, of the Fool in Elizabethan drama.[9] She has a habit of changing her mind at the last minute. Just think of her coming back from the Continent to report that she did nothing that had been planned and did everything that had not. Think also of her repeatedly getting confused about Colby Simpkins's first and family names. Think again of her advising B. Kaghan, a light hearted fellow, that 'you're the sort of person who needs to eat a great deal of salad'.

A laugh and an evening of entertainment -- these are the very things which the West End comedy provides. And these indeed, I would like to think, are what the last three plays of Eliot were intended to offer, at least partially. In all of them, there is from time to time a very merry moment, when the dialogue becomes funny and witty, a moment when it makes the audience throw their heads back and laugh. The effects Eliot has achieved are common to the works of other commercial comedy-writers of his time. The story of The Cocktail Party indeed is one which a Noël Coward might have written. It is one of the many contemporary comedies which deal with marriage problems. In Coward's Private Lives (1930), for instance, we also have a broken marriage, a third and a fourth person, and a reconciliation of the husband and wife. Here, in a rough sense, is the plot of The Cocktail Party, although Eliot's aim and Coward's are widely different. In fact, to sum up both plays like that is a bit unfair to either. But both are melodramas which put together all kinds of impossible situations.[10] Only Coward went further.

Elyot and Amanda, who divorced and married again -- Elyot to Sybil and Amanda to Victor -- are going on their separate honeymoons, unknowingly, to the same place at the same time. Of course, they bump into each other most unexpectedly and their old love is rekindled. They run away together, leaving their man and woman chasing after them. But soon they begin to quarrel again, and end up in a fight. As they are striking each

other and rolling on the floor, Victor and Sybil arrive in time to see the last part of it. The moral, if there is one, seems to be that one has to choose between loving violently and getting on smoothly. Some people suit each other not because they *love* each other, like Elyot and Sybil or Amanda and Victor (or Edward and Lavinia of The Cocktail Party), while others love each other but cannot get on with each other, like Elyot and Amanda.

The point does not seem to be a terribly important one, but there is plenty of fun. Being caught out fighting, Elyot takes to flippancy to ward off embarrassment. Victor certainly has decided to leave Amanda, after all this, but he feels it necessary, before he does so, to clear up the mess in their relationship.

> Victor. We've got to get things straightened out, you know.
>
> Elyot (looking round the room [which is in a mess]). Yes, it's pretty awful. We'll get the concierge up from downstairs.

Sybil is heart-broken, after all she has been through. Twice she says, 'I wish I were dead', which is perhaps meant to be a joke for the more cultivated members of the audience. She describes her feeling like this.

> Sybil (with spirit). It's all perfectly horrible. I feel smirched and unclean as though slimy things had been crawling all over me. (she crosses L. to the small settee and sits)
>
> Elyot. Maybe they have, that's a very old sofa.

To someone caught up in the situation, like Sybil, this may be disgusting, but to someone watching from the outside, like the audience, this must be delightful. The fact is that such fun is typical and indeed an essential part of this kind of comedy. The fun is important and the meaning is only secondary. Terence Rattigan's Love in Idleness (1944), to take another example, tells of an aging industrialist-statesman (Sir John) and an adolescent boy (Michael) fighting, almost in real terms, for a woman (Mrs. Olivia Brown) who is divided between being a mistress and being a mother. I cannot make very much, to be frank, out of such a story, except that it makes an example of the very fashionable Oedipus Complex and that it is a parody of the Hamlet story, which the play

makes clear in itself. Finally the problem is solved by having the statesman leaving his job as a cabinet minister and making a friend of the son before he wins the mother's hand. I take the play to mean, if it means anything, that one has to give up one's public pretence and be really selfless before one can win another's love, which in a remote way reminds one of The Elder Statesman.

Though the play does not have all that high-falutin meaning, though it does not have all that profundity, it has all the fun and enjoyment. And this is what really matters in commercial theatre. Here is a fine moment in the play in which the humour reaches a very high pitch. Sir John's study is being decorated and he has to work in the drawing-room in the presence of Michael and Olivia. He is dictating a speech to his secretary.

John ... I refer, of course, to the question of the future of British industry in the years immediately following the peace. (The telephone rings.) Now before I begin I would like to make it quite clear -- (The telephone rings again.)

(As Olivia gets up from her desk and crosses down R. to answer it:) that if that telephone rings again I shall go mad.

After Olivia puts down the telephone receiver, Sir John continues.

John ... All my life I have stood for a policy of closer industrial union and co-ordination within the Empire. (Turning.) Our Left Wing friends have dubbed this policy as reactionary and imperialistic... So let our young intellectuals scoff and sneer, let them hurl their odium at my head. I still stand where yet I stand.

Olivia, Miss Dell. (together) Stand still--

John. (crossing R.) I do not stand still. I still stand. Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.

Michael. Harm me.

Miss Dell. Hurt me. I think Sir John was right, it's 'hurt me'.

Michael. (Rising) I'm pretty sure it's 'harm me'.

Miss Dell. Oh no, Mr. Brown, it's 'hurt me'.

Michael. I ought to know it's 'harm me'.

Olivia. I learnt it as 'injure me'.

Michael. Oh, no, Mum. 'Injure me' wouldn't scan. It's 'harm me', I know.

Miss Dell (leaning forward in order to see John round Michael, John has sat down R.) 'Hurt me'. 'Words can never hurt me'.

John. (with controlled fury) It is quite possible that the dictum may hold true of yourself, Miss Dell, but I can assure you that the words that Mrs. Brown and her son are muttering are hurting and harming and injuring me like blue hell.

All this comes very natural and very funny. John's playing on words, 'injure', 'harm' and 'hurt', reminds one of the third act of The Cocktail Party.

Julia. My dear Henry, you are interrupting me.

Lavinia. If you can interrupt Julia, Sir Henry,

You are the perfect guest we've been waiting for.

Reilly. I should not dream of trying to interrupt Julia...

Julia. But you're both interrupting!

Reilly. Who is interrupting now?

Julia. Well, you shouldn't interrupt my interruptions:

That's really worse than interrupting.

This seems one of the many moments when Eliot tried to make himself an entertainer, regarding poetry, not as a serious pursuit, but 'a mug's game'.[11] And so to be an entertainer is certainly not shameful. In fact he succeeded to some extent as an entertainer in his last three plays. Even in The Elder Statesman, the least successful of them, there are some comic moments to the delight of the audience. Just think of Gomez having so easily spotted Lord Claverton's attempt to escape, by arranging for the servant

to call him to a 'trunk call'.

Gomez. Ah, the pre-arranged interruption
To terminate the unwelcome intrusion
Of the visitor in financial distress.
Well, I shan't keep you long, though I dare say your caller
Could hang on for another quarter of an hour.

As we all know, after Gomez, there is a Mrs. Carghill who comes to pester Lord Claverton with the memories of his past. For the old retired statesman, now at a convalescent home, peace is the most important thing and it is what he comes here for. The matron, Mrs. Piggott, is anxious to guarantee that to him. Seeing Mrs. Carghill disturbing him, she comes quickly to his rescue. Indeed she succeeds in making Mrs. Carghill leave, but she, Mrs. Piggott, who is herself so meticulous and talkative, has in fact caused Lord Claverton as much pain as anyone else. The symbolic meaning is clear. The hospital can never cure Lord Claverton. He needs a different kind of cure. This is why his daughter arrives at the right time.

Monica. I saw Mrs. Piggott bothering you again
So I hurried to your rescue. You look tired, Father.

Heaven knows why he should not, after all both women had done to him. Of course I need not point out that the fun lies in Mrs. Piggott's blind spot. Although she means well, she has done exactly what she sets out to prevent others from doing.

Having reached thus far, we see clearly that Eliot's last three plays participate in the tradition of Oscar Wilde, Frederick Lonsdale, Noël Coward and Terence Rattigan. Though Eliot had been steeped in Elizabethan drama, though his early poetry and plays had benefited from it in the most fertile ways, when he came to write his later plays, he seems to have found the theatre of his own time more helpful. His last three plays bear out his remark that he had unconsciously aspired to commercial theatre or Shaftesbury Avenue.[12]

However, Eliot is after all not an Oscar Wilde, nor is he a Noël Coward. And the

plays refuse to be rejected as 'a new way of disguising old trivialities'.[13] The reason he chose verse as his medium is, according to his belief, that verse works simultaneously on several levels and goes deeper into human emotions than prose.

> It seems to me that beyond the nameable, classifiable emotions and motives of our conscious life when directed towards action -- the part of life which prose drama is wholly adequate to express -- there is a fringe of indefinite extent, of feeling which we can only detect, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye and can never completely focus; of feeling of which we are only aware in a kind of temporary detachment from action.[14]

For that fringe of indefinite extent of feeling, verse is the only adequate expression. In other words, in using verse as his medium, Eliot created several levels of meaning in his plays. Beneath the creamy layer of cheerful delight, there is a core of seriousness, a profound meaning.The rest of this chapter will show how Eliot used conventional plot material, and conventional language, to achieve unconventional effects.

II

The title of The Cocktail Party instantly reminds us of a drawing-room comedy. Indeed, the story is a stale one, about marriage and extra-marital relationships. The tangle of affection -- A loves B, B loves C, C loves D, and D is married to A -- seems a little banal. Yet, out of such a story Eliot makes a play of salvation. The party named in the title never takes place. There are actually two cocktail parties. The play begins at the end of the first and ends at the beginning of the second. And it is about what happens in between. The first party is cancelled at the last minute because the hostess Lavinia Chamberlayne has left home, declaring she is not coming back. Despite her husband Edward's effort to notify everyone invited, several guests still show up. They are Celia Coplestone, Peter Quilpe, Julia Shuttlethwaite, Alex Gibbs, and an 'unidentified guest', and the story is to revolve around them.

The wife's departure, as in The Family Reunion, triggers a series of crises. Edward finds himself unable to cope with life, unable to drive away 'the thought of [his] own

insignificance'. He is brought to confront something in himself which he never knew was there --

the obstinate, the tougher self; who does not speak,
Who never talks, who cannot argue;
And who in some men may be the *guardian* --
But in men like me, the dull, the implacable,
The indomitable spirit of mediocrity.

The relationship of Edward and Lavinia is similar to that of Harry and his wife. It is a loveless marriage, which neither has the courage to break up. And without love, life becomes just a 'keeping on' and marriage becomes a kind of prison -- 'each taking his corner of the cage'. Their prototype can be traced back to 'A Game of Chess' (which was originally entitled 'In the Cage'), where the man and woman 'press lidless eyes', being united by a similar death of spirit. Edward says,

I am not afraid of the death of the body,
But this death is terrifying. The death of the spirit --

Yet, different from Harry, Edward is visionless, almost one of those blind folks of The Waste Land. He married Lavinia not because he really loved her, but because he persuaded himself he loved her, never knowing during those years of their marriage what love is about. His relationship with Celia is just a fleeting infatuation, another delusion he has been content to live with. Lavinia's departure has brought him face to face with reality and his character is put to a severe text.

Edward has always thought well of himself and is quite happy as a barrister. He has not been aware of the fact that his refusal to marry Celia is not the result of his scruple over social decency or his fear of public talk. It is a symptom of his lack of passion. Even in practical life, he has shown himself to be indifferent and unconcerned. Now this terrible knowledge seems to be dawning on him: he is incapable of love. This must be a bitter pill to swallow.

Such a recognition must be most disturbing, for Edward realizes for the first time in

life what he really is. No wonder he is shattered and distraught. Lavinia thinks it is a nervous breakdown. But he himself knows well that he does not need a doctor. 'I am simply in hell'. The parallel with the development of Harry well deserves notice, for it is the usual Eliotesque step towards spiritual awareness: a hell before the spiritual illumination.

In other words, hell is not a deplorable thing. It helps to 'clear from the mind the illusion of having been in the light'. Indeed Edward is beginning to think

> Why could I not walk out of my prison?
> What is hell? Hell is oneself,
> Hell is alone, the other figures in it
> Merely projections.

Unlike Harry's hell, Edward's is less deep, less dark and less convincing. And, therefore, the solution for him should not be asceticism or saintliness, but a matter of coming to terms with his destiny and being reconciled to his limited capability: ie. making 'the best of a bad job'. The truth is that, no matter how successful a lawyer he may be, Edward has only a little part to play in spiritual life. This ending is a huge leap forward from Eliot's earlier views on human destiny: he is not so severe an ascetic now.

The story of Edward is similar to that of Harry in that it is also a personal struggle to discover destiny. If The Cocktail Party had concentrated on Edward's problem and his fight to find a solution, it may have become an intensely moving play like The Family Reunion. But the play creates some other characters of equal importance and so we witness various people with various problems. In the end, none of them is portrayed with enough depth. This is perhaps the inevitable result when a comedy is made to deal with a problem of some magnitude.

The point in bringing other troubled characters into the play is for the purpose of contrast: Edward is contrasted to Celia. The latter's problem starts with the breakup of her relationship with Edward, having failed to persuade him to leave his wife and marry herself. That at least appears to be the cause of her disillusion. Perhaps she had so

idealized him that the disappointment was too much for her. In her eyes, Edward changed suddenly into something horrible and sub-human, and with him all other human beings.

> I looked at your face: and I thought that I knew
> And loved every contour; and as I looked
> It withered, as if I had unwrapped a mummy.
> I listened to your voice; that had always thrilled me,
> And it became another voice--no, not a voice:
> What I heard was only the noise of an insect,
> Dry, endless, meaningless, inhuman --
> You might have made it by scraping your legs together --
> Or however grasshoppers do it. I looked,
> And listened for your heart, your blood;
> And saw only a beetle the size of a man
> With nothing more inside it than what comes out
> When you tread on a beetle.

Such disillusion has a profound effect on Celia, to whom now 'the world I live in seems all a delusion'. What happened gives her 'an awareness of solitude' and 'a sense of sin'.

> Not simply the ending of one relationship...
> But a revelation about my relationship
> With *everybody* . Do you know --
> It no longer seems worth while to *speak* to anyone.

As always in Eliot's work, spiritual darkness leads to illumination and salvation. From the failure of a human relationship to 'a sense of sin' -- this is Eliot's routine spiritual development. But, unlike Edward, Celia has the makings of a saint and her salvation accordingly consists, not in coming to terms with this life, but in a life of suffering in the desert. In fact, her death had long been predicted in 'Sweeney

Agonistes': the missionary girl is to be cooked into a 'nice little, white little, soft little... missionary stew'.

Like Eliot's poetry and early plays, this play is about individuals' spiritual struggle, and about their salvation, but here it is treated with a difference: it is seen through psychiatric treatment. This is part of Eliot's own experience. It is described both in this play and in The Confidential Clerk, while The Elder Statesman is set in a convalescent hospital. And the nervous breakdown, for Eliot, is a variation of spiritual crisis. I would not say that Eliot's own nervous breakdown in the early 1920s was a prelude to his conversion in the middle of that decade. But the experience is described time and again in his poetry and plays as an equivalent to the Dark Night of St John of the Cross. The difference is that in his early works religion is usually the solution, while now it is psychiatric treatment.

The three guardians, Sir Henry, Julia and Alex, perform the function of Agatha in The Family Reunion, as guides to salvation. They are actually performing the work of the church, though in their mundane profession, presiding over individuals' spiritual health and putting troubled minds right again by prescribing appropriate remedies according to each one's potential. For those who have the makings of saints, the prescription is a renunciation followed by faith and devotion in the desert, while others have to accept their lot as ordinary human beings. 'Resign yourself to be the fool you are', Sir Henry advised Edward. 'The best of a bad job is all any of us can make of it'. Edward and Lavinia come back together only after they have understood their human condition, and accepted their human limitations. Eliot has at last been reconciled to the life of this world.

Much of the failure of the play arises from Eliot's attempt to hold his audience's attention, to make things constantly happen or always turn out differently from what they expect. This results in some obvious inconsistencies in some characters. Julia and Alex, for example, who were portrayed at the beginning as two of those society gentle people, talkative and shallow, turn out to be guardian angels, concerned with other people's

spiritual health. This seems at best strained and far-fetched.[15]

And the play suffers, too, from a conscious attempt to model itself on the Alcestis of Euripides.[16] After leaving home, Lavinia is said to have 'died' once. 'It is a serious matter', Sir Henry tells Edward, 'to bring someone back from the dead'. But her 'death', except as a correspondence to the death of Alcestis, is not quite meaningful in Eliot's play. The 'death' is by no means the same as someone who 'dies into Jesus Christ' and is born spiritually. Neither Edward nor Lavinia is born again spiritually. Their separation helped them realize the nature of their relationship. In this sense, they are different, when they meet again, from what they used to be. But to call it a rebirth is to exaggerate the matter.

The relationship of Celia and Edward is not wholly convincing. Celia's feelings for him seem so slight that his refusal to leave the wife and marry her does not quite justify her 'disillusion'. On the whole, the play seems much less intense, much less convincing than The Family Reunion, for all the defects that play has. In this play the role of hero is distributed, as it were, among several persons of equal importance. The energy of the play is diffused. So that, in the end, we do not know if we should consider it a play of Edward, or of Celia, or of Sir Henry. The Cocktail Party is about ordinary people and their relationships. But, by dealing with so many types of problem in one play, Eliot has taken on too much at a time. And after the experience of The Family Reunion, one feels that there is here a diminution of depth.

III

The Confidential Clerk is about a changeling. No doubt we are aware of the vast number of similar stories in world literature. Moses was found in a basket and was brought up as a foundling to escape the massacre launched by the Egyptian Pharaoh. Krishna, the incarnate Hindu god, went through an exchange when the king learnt that the boy was growing up to kill him and become King himself. Eliot's inspiration is of course the Ion of Euripides where Ion, the servant in the Temple of Apollo, was claimed by both King Xuthus and his wife Creusa.[17] But one can hardly believe this to be the

only influence that has gone into a play whose conclusion bears some similarity to Great Expectations. And the wish-granting at the end is found to be 'the ancient device of the recognition scene'.[18] The most immediate predecessor is perhaps Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest, where the foundling's identity is revealed by an obscure governess.[19]

Yet this farcical story becomes the vehicle, for Eliot, of some deep meaning, a meaning not apparent in the first place. There is, for example, a re-statement of a theme of Eliot's former works. The poet who had so memorably rendered the indestructible barrier between human beings now says it again through Colby:

> I meant, there's no end to understanding a person.
> All one can do is to understand them better,
> To keep up with them.

Of course, this is only a different version of what Celia said in The Cocktail Party:

> ... everyone's alone--or so it seems to me.
> They make noises, and think they are talking to each other;
> They make faces, and think they understand each other.
> And I'm sure that they don't.

And what Sir Henry said to Edward about his wife's 'death' further states this point:

> Ah, but we die to each other daily.
> What we know of other people
> Is only our memory of the moments
> During which we knew them. And they have changed since then.
> ... We must also remember
> That at every meeting we are meeting a stranger.

Of course, all these carry behind them the Bradleyan theory that we do not understand each other because our finite centres are opaque to each other.[20] This is what The Confidential Clerk makes apparent to us, the division between one's social self and private self. Our everyday understanding of one another is shallow because it is formed

on appearances. 'It's a great mistake', Lady Elizabeth says, 'for married people to take anything for granted'.

Almost everyone in the play lives a double life. Apparently Sir Claude is a financier, but at heart he is a would-be potter. Lady Elizabeth, his wife, has always appeared a perfect lady, a good hostess, but what she really wants to do is to inspire artists, to be a kind of Muse. Lucasta always gives people a 'false impression', poses as a kind of rough girl, but at heart she detests the person she has forced herself to become. She was only too glad when Colby could see 'the real kind of person' she wanted to be. Thus what we see is usually the crust of the real person; and we do not usually bother about what is inside the social skin.

The Confidential Clerk is a more concentrated play. It traces Colby's struggle to liberate himself from the unreal role which life imposed on him. The vision of a higher world has almost disappeared. Happiness is made to depend, not on rebirth into a New Life, but on whether one can follow one's own nature. Though one may be doing some great job, posing as the world's great financier, one's sincerest interest may be in some humble work. This is the dilemma which Sir Claude had been struggling to resolve ever since his youth. To be a potter was always his ambition. And to create with clay was the only thing in life which could offer him happiness. But then life imposed its own terms on him. He inherited the family business and became something which he did not want to be.

If happiness depends on the fulfilment of one's inner nature, then Sir Claude's life, though a great success in terms of his business, is the story of failure and disappointment. The younger generation, his 'son' Colby is now again at the cross-road. He faces a choice, as Sir Claude faced long ago, between following his own nature and yielding to the terms of life. His choice is between becoming a confidential clerk and a musician. He always wanted to be an organist, although he knows he cannot be a great musician. It is only in music that he can find his privacy, his interest, his happiness and, in terms of Eliot's early poetry, his 'beatitude'. Music represents, for him, 'a world

that's more real'.

If I were religious, God would walk in my garden.

In fact the personality of Colby is very similar to those of Harry and Celia. Colby is also potentially a saint. 'He's the sort of fellow', B. Kaghan reports, 'who might chuck it all,/ And go to live on a desert island'. To Colby, music is something of a supernatural order. It is certainly a 'secret garden', Lucasta says to him, 'to which you can retire/ And lock the gate behind you'. Like anything of a supernatural order, it requires devotion and the sacrifice of almost everything else.

Yet Colby is now stuck in the job of a confidential clerk, surrounded by the unreal people of a 'make-believe' world. Living a kind of life which contradicts his own nature, he feels all a delusion 'like building my life', he says, 'upon a deception'. This is not an exaggeration. For everyone in the play seems to want him to be what he is not. Sir Claude wants him to be his confidential clerk; Lady Elizabeth wants him to be her son; B. Kaghan wants him to be his business partner. They all impose their terms on him and for some reason he cannot reject them, although they all deny his own nature.

This is the beginning of Colby's problem. By becoming what he does not want to be, he feels most uneasy. He suffers but has no means to liberate himself. However, if he goes on like this, he will only repeat the failure of Sir Claude. To save himself, he will need to shrug off the burden life has imposed on him and follow his own nature. Ironically, he does not need a spiritual guide as Harry needed; he does not need an Agatha, or a Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly. He only needs the truth about himself. Thus the play is about a different kind of salvation. It is about saving oneself from the role life imposes. This is perhaps why Mrs. Guzzard, who eventually helped Colby, has no mystery to offer. Like Miss Prism in The Importance of Being Earnest, she only happens to know what is held from the others, ie, Colby is not the son of Sir Claude but of an unsuccessful musician. Her revelation is only a parody of Agatha's.

Now Colby no longer has any emotional ties with Sir Claude; nor has he any obligations to the others. So he is liberated and free to make his own choice. Yet his

destination is not to be the desert, but a small parish church in the suburbs of London: he becomes an organist. For Eliot now, to be a good Christian does not necessarily mean the life of a saint. Christianity for most people is after all not a call to high spiritual adventure, but the good obscure life of faith. The destiny of Colby indicates another step Eliot took toward reconciliation with worldly life.

As the hero, Colby fails to fully realize himself. After Celia, he is another of Eliot's inarticulate heroes. As to Harry, we know him by what he says and does. But Colby is often the subject of other people's talk and thought. We know him mostly through the eyes of other characters. After all, there is perhaps an irony which Raymond Williams found in the former play.[21] What is meant as the positive side is unwittingly misplaced in the background. For example, Colby's feelings of failure and deception are communicated only through Sir Claude's story of himself. At the end of Sir Claude's long story, Colby is only too glad to agree.

> Indeed, I have felt, while you've been talking,
> That it's my own feelings you have expressed,
> Although the medium is different.

Again we only know about his 'private garden' through Lucasta who seems to understand him better than he himself. In fact, Colby is given very few good lines to say, and he never gives very strong reasons for retiring into his private garden at the cost of the whole world. We do not know enough about his sufferings and his pains. Thus in the end we get the impression that Colby lacks motive.

IV

The problem which emerged with Edward and Colby predominates in The Elder Statesman. In this play, one gets a stronger impression that everyone has certain things to hide from the world and that everyone is playing a double part or what Wilde calls 'Bunburyism'. The chief cause of anxiety in Eliot's later plays seems to be the loss of touch with the real self. Edward lost touch with himself by pretending to be better than himself. Colby lost touch with himself by taking a job contradicting his inner nature.

Lord Claverton lost touch with himself by escaping from his own past. Thus salvation consists in coming to terms with one's own self.

The Elder Statesman is perhaps the most personal of all of Eliot's works, dedicated to his wife, Valerie Eliot, 'To whom I owe the leaping delight/ That quickens my senses'.[22] It is about an old politician who, having retired from public duties, cannot find peace at home, being pursued by his own past. The plot is a variation of Oedipus at Colonus, a story of nemensis, but it also resembles Wilde's The Ideal Husband, where the hero is also a politician who is pursued and blackmailed by an acquaintance of his youth and who yields to the blackmailer also over concern for his public image.

Yet, Eliot's play has a deeper significance. It assumes special meaning, as one critic has it, 'by virtue of taking place in [a conventional] setting and growing out of this type of dramatic convention'.[23] Like The Family Reunion, this play is also about a spiritual crisis. Yet the way of liberation is now, not the knowledge of one's inheritance, but love. There is a similar pattern in this play. There is a troubled hero, Lord Claverton; there are Furies, incarnated in Gomez and Mrs. Carghill, ghosts of Lord Claverton's past; and there is a spiritual guide, here his daughter Monica who offers him selfless love and affection.

The other main characters can also fit into this pattern. Michael is Lord Claverton's younger self, 'a kind of prolongation of your existence', the son says to the father. He is the image of Lord Claverton as a young man. Charles Hemington, Monica's fiancé, is a mirror of the later Lord Claverton, having made a successful career in politics. On the other hand he also shares the part Monica plays, offering selfless love to Lord Claverton and helping him out of his spiritual darkness.

Lord Claverton, like Oedipus in his last days, is pursued by his own sins. The arrival of Gomez, a fellow Oxford student, serves to bring forward what has long tormented him: the sins of his youthful days when he was responsible for Gomez's corruption. The latter was jailed for forgery and later emigrated to a Central American state. They used to know each other as Dick Ferry and Fred Culverwell. Those names

represent what Lord Claverton now wanted to forget. Gomez's sudden appearance cruelly recalls to mind the Dick Ferry of Oxford: an intemperate and easy-going young fellow who once ran over an old man. Gomez was the only witness and now is a thorn in his conscience.

After Gomez, there arrives Mrs. Carghill. The woman used to be the young Dick Ferry's lover Maisie Montjoy, an actress who took him too seriously while he was only playing around. In the end, the young man was only too glad when his father bought him out of the trouble and saved him from a breach of promise suit. It is a shame which Lord Claverton happily consigned to oblivion. Mrs. Carghill's appearance forces him to re-live and suffer his old life of promiscuity. It reminds him of another aspect of himself as a young man: his immoral attitude towards love.

But since then the three of them have changed. The intemperate and easy-going Dick Ferry has married the daughter of a respectable family and become Lord Claverton, an eminent politician and successful financier. The unscrupulous Fred Culverwell has made his fortune in Central America and has become Frederico Gomez, an honorary citizen. And Maisie Montjoy married a successful businessman and is now a rich widow, Mrs. Carghill. By changing their names they all aim to bury their youth and their shame. Lord Claverton expresses the feeling of them all when he says: 'what I want to escape from is myself, is the past'.

But the past cannot be forgotten. As Lord Claverton learns from his experience, 'those who flee from the past will always lose the race'. To face his past, this is Lord Claverton's affliction in his retirement. Apart from Gomez and Mrs. Carghill, his son Michael, with his careless driving, his problems of debts and women, recalls himself as a young man. Knowing himself to be of such a nature, but unwilling to give up his pretence as a respectable gentleman, this is Lord Claverton's problem. It is a bitter thing to have to come to terms with his real self, especially when that self is not so commendable: a self which consists of

> Temporary failures, irreflective aberrations,

Reckless surrenders, unexplainable impulses,

Moments we regret in the very next moment,

Episodes we try to conceal from the world.

If he is to identify himself with such a past, Lord Claverton has to bring himself down from a position to which he had climbed painfully all these past years. But Dick Ferry of Oxford insists on his acceptance. Confronted with his real self, Lord Claverton experiences real confusion. He, who had always been a great statesman in the eye of the public, now feels that

Some dissatisfaction

With myself, I suspect, very deep within myself

Has impelled me all my life to find justification

Not so much to the world -- first of all to myself.

What is this self inside us, this silent observer,

Severe and speechless critic, who can terrorise us

And urge us on to futile activity,

And in the end, judge us still more severely

For the errors into which his own reproaches drove us?

Lord Claverton begins to realize that to assume a different name could not change his nature. A different costume does not mean a different part to play. This recognition plunges him into a hell. His pain and suffering will not end unless he can come to terms with his real self and accept it as his own. His liberation starts with his confession.

-- I've made my confession to you, Monica:

That is the first step taken towards my freedom,

And perhaps the most important.

Eliot tells us that his verse will become more 'poetic' when the emotion rises in intensity,[24] but the verse here remains flat. In fact we cannot talk of an intensity anywhere in the play. Anyway, when Lord Claverton has already come to terms with his past, it will no longer be so frightening. As Harry in the end welcomed the Furies, Lord

Claverton insists on facing his suffering.

Charles: ... How long, Lord Claverton,
Will you stay here and endure this persecution?
Lord Claverton: To the end. The place and time of liberation
Are, I think, determined.

Then, to add to the suffering caused by Gomez and Mrs. Carghill, his son Michael rebels against his wishes and insists on having his own way: to seek a position under Gomez, the forger. Now Lord Claverton is finally brought down to earth. It is only through suffering that he begins to understand what love is, at the age of sixty. He says to Michael:

... I shall never repudiate you
Though you repudiate me. I see now clearly
The many many mistakes I have made
My whole life through, mistake upon mistake,
The mistaken attempts to correct mistakes
By methods which proved to be equally mistaken.

Repentance and love, the two things absolutely necessary for his salvation, have come to him. And through repentance and love, he has won the love and devotion of his daughter Monica who gives him such comfort at the end of his life. He says to her:

This may surprise you: I feel at peace now
It is the peace that ensues upon contrition
When contrition ensues upon knowledge of the truth...
I've only just now had the illumination
Of knowing what love is.

This play, modelled on Oedipus at Colonus, revives the theme of crime and punishment in Eliot's early work.[25] But it lacks the rigour with which the early plays treated the question of salvation. I mean, the solution to Lord Claverton's problem is now not uncompromising renunciation and holiness, but a mundane solution. And for

the first time in Eliot's work, spiritual peace is found in personal relationship. Did Eliot's marriage to Valerie Fletcher have anything to do with this? Anyway, Eliot has come a long way back to recognize that life in this world is worth living after all and that it offers a beauty and happiness which he had for a long time denied. Having found his peace through suffering and repentance, Lord Claverton is reported to die peacefully, like Oedipus, under a tree at the convalescent hospital.

Notes to Chapter IX:

1. Eliot, 'Wilkie Collins and Dickens', SE p424. But this phrase applies better to Eliot than to Dickens.

2. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', OPP p84

3. Eliot, 'Kipling Redivivus', Athenaeum (9 May 1919) p298

4. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', OPP p82

5. See Eliot, 'The Three Voices of Poetry', OPP p89

6. See UPUC p154

7. J. G. Weightman, 'Edinburgh, Elsinore and Chelsea', Twentieth Century cliv (Oct. 1953) pp306-8

8. Critics have found in the later plays 'an unconscious reversion to the style of theatre Eliot knew as a young man'. And Eliot had jokingly talked about his similarity to Frederick Lonsdale. See Katherine J. Worth, 'Precursor and Model Maker', T. S. Eliot: Plays, A Casebook, ed. Arnold P. Hinchliffe (Basingstoke 1985) p60

9. See Eliot, 'The Beating of a Drum', a review of Studies in the Development of the Fool in the Elizabethan Drama by Olive Mary Busby, Nation & Athenaeum xxxiv (6 Oct. 1923) pp11-12. One function of the Fool, according to Eliot, is to 'provide a contrast of mood which contributes to the seriousness of the situation'.

10. This is not to reduce the importance of Eliot's play, for Eliot has used similar

terms to describe Dickens and Wilkie Collins. For him, 'the frontier between drama and melodrama is vague; the difference is largely a matter of emphasis; perhaps no drama has ever been greatly and permanently successful without a large melodramatic element'. ('Wilkie Collins and Dickens', SE p429)

11. UPUC p154

12. Eliot, 'The Three Voices of Poetry', OPP p90

13. M. Darlow & G. Hudson, Terence Rattigan: The Man and His Work (London 1979) p234

14. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', OPP p86

15. I am surprised to find that my view on this matter converges with that of John Peter, 'Sin and Soda', in Hinchliffe (1985) pp150-55. But I do not think that the inconsistency in the characters can warrant the inference he makes of an unbridgeable gap between the two worlds, spiritual and material.

16. Eliot talked about the influence of Alcestis in 'Poetry and Drama', OPP p85

17. Translations of Ion and Alcestis were reviewed in the Criterion xvi (July 1937) p727. At a later time, Eliot talked about the Greek plays as his 'points of departure'. See Writers at Work Second Series (London 1963).

18. Northrop Frye, T. S. Eliot (Edinburgh & London 1963) p95. Actually Frye has found in the play 'an atmosphere of a demure farce'.

19. It is not certain that Wilde is behind this play, but critics have perceived a similarity. Frye has actually pinpointed it (ibid. p95). E. Martin Browne, referring to The Confidential Clerk, also says that 'with such a plot, it must be seen, not as realism, but as high comedy analogous to that of Oscar Wilde'. See Two in One (Cambridge 1981) p203.

20. In Appearance and Reality, F. H. Bradley put forward the thesis that every finite centre is private and opaque to others. See Eliot's quotation from this book in Monist xxvi (Oct. 1916) p572 and in his note to l.411 of The Waste Land.

21. Raymond Williams says, 'In moving so far into the conventional theatre, giving

its modes and tones an effective priority, Eliot succeeded in displacing the lonely intense experience, which had always been his essential concern, to a reported event: a story to point at'. See Drama from Ibsen to Brecht (London 1968, repr. 1971) p194

22. CPP p524

23. Michael Goldman, 'Acceptance of Loss and Limitation', in Hinchliffe (1985) pp178-79

24. Eliot, 'Poetry and Drama', OPP p74

25. Eliot talked about the influence of Oedipus at Colonus in Writers at Work Second Series (London 1963). If we still remember his remark that The Family Reunion needed to be completed by Orestes or Oedipus at Colonus, then this final play fulfils that promise.

X. A Question of Originality

Later in his life, Eliot says that 'as for Classicism and Romanticism, I find that the terms have no longer the importance to me that they once had'.[1] The question obviously no longer concerns him. However, it does concern his critics and the question is closely connected with a proper understanding of his meaning and achievement. The attempt to describe him as a Romantic seems always to go hand in hand with an intention to discount his revolutionary force and reduce his achievement. The reason that this position does not hold true is that Eliot can be subsumed into this tradition only on account of the broadest concepts like 'post-Enlightenment mind' or 'post-Enlightenment situation'.[2] This synthesis, which regards everything after Enlightenment as a lump, seems to deny all differences between ages and periods: a synthesis which seems to deny the basic concept of history.

Critics who hold this view have tried to describe Eliot not as a prophet of a new poetic movement, but simply as a successor. This seems to come finally to a question of originality. The rehabilitation of Romanticism as the central tradition seems always to reject modernism as peripheral and exclude Eliot from the canon of 'strong poets'.[3] The critics of this camp seem always to regard Eliot as un-original or derivative. And I think the problem is not with Eliot but with the critics' concept of originality. In this chapter, I shall demonstrate what originality really meant for Eliot and how he participated in tradition and at the same time retained his individuality.

I

The reader of Eliot's poetry and plays is often impressed by the power of his language. Part of his distinction, Clive Bell says, lies in his 'phrasing'.[4] Yet, some have also been annoyed by the fact that many of Eliot's phrases come from other writers. A 'dying fall' in 'Prufrock' comes from Shakespeare; the 'buried life' in 'Portrait' comes

from Arnold; 'a wilderness of mirrors' in 'Gerontion' may be adapted from Pound's 'a broken bundle of mirrors' ('Near Perigord'). 'A heap of broken images' in The Waste Land may also have originated there. 'A handful of dust' may come from Genesis or from Donne (Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions). 'When lovely woman stoops to folly' comes from Goldsmith's The Vicar of Wakefield and also perhaps from the same author's She Stoops to Conquer.

Conrad Aiken was amazed to find a passage, with which 'I have long been familiar' and which 'I had seen as poems, or part-poems in themselves', inserted into The Waste Land as into a mosaic.[5]

A woman drew her long black hair out tight

And fiddled whisper music on those strings.

Yeats was exasperated by Eliot's allusions and wrote him off as a 'clipper' from past poets and as 'an interesting symptom of a sick and melancholy age'.[6] Richard Aldington went further when he said of Eliot: 'We might almost say that what is original in his poetry is not good, and what is good is not original'.[7] This criticism is very harsh indeed, but it at least has got one thing correct: Eliot quotes a great deal. This is especially clear in his relation to Dante.

In 1950, Eliot told an audience at the Italian Institute, London, that he could read Dante 'only with a prose translation beside the text'. Nevertheless, this did not prevent Dante's poetry from becoming 'the most persistent and deepest influence on [his] own verse'. Why? Because his study of Dante aims not to form a profound critical opinion -- he is 'in no way a Dante scholar' -- but to give himself up to a hearty appreciation of the beauty of the poetry: Dante can be appreciated before he is understood.[8]

The reading habit of a writer is quite different from that of a scholar or that of an ordinary man. The ordinary man reads for story and knowledge; the scholar reads for historical or biographical background. When a writer reads, he is looking for images, for

special uses of language, for skills which make the expression artistic. At his earliest stage, Eliot was in the habit of memorizing those passages which especially appealed to his imagination. Dante, of course, has many such passages.

'Forty years ago', Eliot continued, 'I began to puzzle out the Divine Comedy in this way; and when I thought that I had grasped the meaning of a passage which especially delighted me, I committed it to memory; so that, for some years, I was able to recite a large part of one canto or another to myself, lying in bed or on a railway journey'.[9] These passages or cantos, which 'especially delighted' him, are documented in the 1929 essay on 'Dante' and started to re-appear in his poetry right from the beginning: 'Count Guido da Montefeltro' became the epigraph of 'Prufrock'; 'La Pia' was adapted into the first Thames-daughter's confession; as to 'Arnaut Daniel', the first part became the title of the American edition of Poems (1920) and the second part became a line at the end of The Waste Land; 'Marco Lombardo' inspired 'Animula'; 'Piccarda de Donati' ('In His will is our peace') was used in 'Ash-Wednesday'; and 'Brunetto Latini' inspired 'Little Gidding' II.

In these examples, it is clear that, when Eliot read Dante, his purpose was not so much to form a critical opinion, as to choose and memorize those passages in which the use of language is special and the sensibility is rich and strange: the passages which he might later use in his own poetry. Dante's poetry modified his sensibility and sharpened his idiom, and it had an enduring power over his imagination. It was around 1910 that Eliot began to read Dante, and in the next few years he became steeped in the Divine Comedy. Twenty years later, in 1929, his memory was still strong and accurate, and forty years later, in 1950, that memory was still fresh. It is unimaginable what a spell Dante's poetry had cast upon Eliot's mind at the time of the first reading.

The reason for Eliot's intensive use of sources may be his feeling of belatedness. In a language in which great poetry has been written for centuries, the opportunity for a new poet in the twentieth century lies in the creative use of tradition: in Eliot's own

words, 'to recover what has been lost and found and lost again'. Eliot told Bonamy Dobrée, 'There are really three roses in the [Four Quartets]; the sensuous rose, the socio-political Rose (always appearing with a capital letter) and the spiritual rose: and the three have got to be in some way identified as one'.[10] In other words, one must draw on the entire resources which the tradition has given to the words in the language.

II

Yet Eliot's tendency to quote and allude has been grossly exaggerated. Every time he touches an image or a phrase which was used before, he is suspected of alluding to a past poet or describing a comparable experience. Quite a few alleged sources are probably not Eliot's sources at all, but are simply the works of other authors which Eliot's poetry reminds its critics of. The garden in 'Burnt Norton' I, for example, has caused critics to bring in a wide range of works for comparison: Rudyard Kipling's 'They', Lewis Caroll's Alice in Wonderland, D. H. Lawrence's 'The Shadow in the Rose Garden', Oscar Wilde's 'The Selfish Giant', H. G. Wells's 'The Door in the Wall' and even Francis Hodgson Burnett's 'The Secret Garden'.[11] In all these stories, there are images like garden, pool, trees, birds, children and hidden laughter, but could it be possible that Eliot had introduced so many sources into his poem? Some of these, like Kipling and Lawrence, had Eliot's authority, but others were never confirmed. Even Kipling's garden is not altogether like Eliot's which represents a timeless reality, entered through an 'unknown and remembered gate'. A comparison of the sources only shows us some verbal or imagistic coincidences. The garden Eliot described could further remind us of the gardens of Dante, Milton and Genesis.

Similarly, 'East Coker' IV provoked memories of many other authors' works. Eliot told his secretary Anne Ridler that 'the wounded surgeon', 'the dying nurse', and 'the hospital' are intended to form an elaborate conceit in the fashion of Cleveland and Benlowes.[12] John Hayward recognized it as an allusion to Sir Thomas Browne who

wrote, 'For the world, I count it not an Inn, but an Hospital, and a place, not to live, but to die in' (Religio Medici II12).[13] Helen Gardner points out that the allegory of the millionaire may be suggested by André Gide's Le Prométhée mal enchaîné, from which Eliot had earlier quoted in his 1932 Harvard lectures. Gide's story is a modern version of the Greek myth of Prometheus. The modern Zeus, as a banker and millionaire, tortures others for his own pleasure. He first punches the person who picks up his handkerchief and then punches another who receives the payment for the first person. Prometheus, a witness of this, summons the eagle to feed on his liver and eventually he becomes more gaunt as the eagle becomes more beautiful. Gardner thinks that Eliot had this story in mind when he wrote 'East Coker' IV. The manuscript shows that he had initially jotted down 'banker' and then, crossing it out, replaced it with 'millionaire'. In other words, Eliot had transformed Prometheus into Christ who also suffered for mankind and the 'cynically selfish Zeus into a banker or millionaire who gives away his infinite wealth to endow the hospital in which a wounded surgeon and a dying nurse minister to man'.[14]

Gardner's argument for the Gide-source seems far-fetched, since Eliot neither mentioned this source to Hayward at the time of composition, nor to Anne Ridler in answer to her query one year later. The only source he gave is Cleveland and Benlowes. There is no reason why Eliot, who had worked in a large bank for eight years, should not have thought of the 'banker or the millionaire'. Nor is it likely that Eliot was taking a hint from Sir Thomas Browne, for the hospital allegory is also found in St. John of the Cross. 'And since the soul is now, as it were, undergoing a cure, so that it may regain its health (that is, God, Who is the health of the soul), His Majesty restricts it to a diet and abstinence from all things... The soul is like a sick man who is carefully nursed in his house'.[15]

'East Coker' IV is most probably an allegory of Eliot's own, but in the mode of

symbolist writers like Gide and James Joyce. In these authors, the reader will find many ingenious passages in which ordinary little incidents in modern life are made into allegories of a certain mythical story, with techniques similar to that of Eliot. In Joyce's Ulysses, for instance, the Dublin prostitute Georgiana Johnson was married away to a travelling salesman from London, Mr. Lambe. And Joyce has it, or rather Stephen Dedalus has it, that the Lamb took away the sins of the world. What Eliot, as a great admirer of Gide and Joyce, had in common with them is the same interest in making modern experience yield mythical meaning. What Eliot learned from them, in this instance, is perhaps not any particular symbol, but the technique of making such an allegory.

That is to say, coincidence should not be taken as an influence. It is not possible, for example, that every time one writes about a rose, one is alluding to Robert Burns. One must not confuse sources with reminiscences.Several phrases in Eliot's poetry remind me of some Chinese poets, whom Eliot probably knew nothing of. In 'East Coker' I, for example, Eliot writes 'Out at sea the dawn wind/ Wrinkles and slides'. This calls to my mind two famous lines of Chinese poetry: 'Lü shui bù chou, ying feng zhòu miàn; qing shan bù lao, weì xüe bai tóu', meaning 'Blue water is not worried, its face wrinkles because of wind; Green mountain is not old, its head whitens because of snow'. This is even closer to Eliot's early version where he wrote: 'And the dawn wind/ Wrinkles the sea'. Since Eliot never mentioned anywhere his knowledge of this Chinese poem, (he could not have found it in Pound or Arthur Waley since neither translated this poem), this is at most a coincidence showing the similar sensibility of the best poets of the world. And this is true of many so-called sources of Eliot. Although a certain line of his may resemble a certain line of a past author, it need not have been at the back of his mind when he wrote his own.

Perhaps the prevalence of the 'lemon-squeezer school of criticism' had something to

do with Eliot himself. He seldom denied to his critics what they discovered as his sources, perhaps over the concern that in so doing he might have fixed the meaning of his poems. When F. O. Matthiessen pointed out to him that the line in 'Gerontion' -- 'In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering judas' -- may be a concentrated allusion to a passage in The Education of Henry Adams, where Adams described the strange, pagan richness of the New-England spring, mentioning dogwood, judas and the 'depravity that marked the Maryland May', Eliot showed amazement, but did not deny it.[16] Similarly, when the line from 'Little Gidding' -- 'To summon the spectre of a Rose' -- reminded Hayward of Sir Thomas Browne's 'to raise up the ghost of a Rose', Eliot again showed amazement, yet accepted it as an unconscious reminiscence, although actually he learnt the phrase from the title of a Russian Ballet, which he had liked sometime before, namely, Nijinsky's Le Spectre de la Rose.[17]

However, when the situation was carried to the extreme, Eliot had to intervene: 'I regret having sent so many enquirers off on a wild goose chase after Tarot cards and the Holy Grail'. And one book like Road to Xanadu is enough.[18] A proper understanding depends on our distinguishing sources from comparable works. The Bhagavad-Gita, for example, has long been recognized as a source of 'The Dry Salvages' II. The details of the similarity between the 'Fare forward' passage and Krishna's words in the Hindu epic have been admirably documented recently by Cleo Kearns and P. S. Sri.[19] Especially impressive is the former's reading of Krishna's ideas into Eliot's plays and his essay on Virgil. The rhetoric with which Krishna, the incarnated god Vishnu, urges Arjuna to battle focuses on man's duty to act, to fare forward. So long as man is not concerned with the fruits of action, so long as he acts selflessly, his action is an inaction, is God's will. In Eliot's works, there are many instances in which he advocates this sense of destiny. The choice faced by Thomas Becket in Murder in the Cathedral and by Colby in The Confidential Clerk is between worldly success and destiny. And their final decision

has much to do with Krishna's words to Arjuna in the Gita.

Such comparisons are reasonable and illuminating, but others need to be thought over carefully. Is it possible that the opening of The Waste Land was drawn from Patanjali's Yoga-sutras? Is it possible that Patanjali's theory on meditation shaped Eliot's theory of artistic creation? The reader has to decide for himself whether in this last instance Eliot was appropriating Hindu mystical books or generalizing from his own experience. Anyway, in the study of sources, it is very easy to step over the boundary and overstate a case. And also, is it necessary to know that the ocean of 'The Dry Salvages' is the 'ocean of life' of the Upanishads? or that the house of 'Gerontion' is an allusion to 'a house' in the same book? When source-hunting goes too far, it simply becomes trivial.

III

Eliot's use of sources is very often not just a borrowing, but an exploitation and enrichment. This is most clearly demonstrated by his allusions to Andrew Marvell who, though a much lesser poet than Dante, impressed Eliot just as much. Certain lines from Marvell stuck in Eliot's memory more firmly than those of any other metaphysical poets.

> Let us roll all our strength and all
> Our sweetness up into one ball
> And tear our pleasures with rough strife,
> Thorough the iron gates of life.

Eliot found in Marvell not just wit and intelligence, but also a tough reasonableness beneath the light lyrical grace.[20] Parts of 'Prufrock' were modelled on them.

> Would it have been worth while...
> To have squeezed the universe into a ball
> And roll it towards some overwhelming question.

In Eliot's poem, Marvell's image is broken up and re-shaped into an image of equal, if not greater, beauty and strength. In both poems, the image of ball has sexual

overtones. But while Marvell's image implies strength in expansion, like a snow ball which gathers size, 'strength' and 'sweetness' as it rolls, Eliot's ball, on the other hand, is more like Donne's 'globe' of which the workman 'hath copies by', reversing Marvell's idea by showing strength in compression and concentration ('squeezed the universe into a ball'). This is Prufrock's special way of gathering strength and courage. What is more, Eliot associates the ball, still maintaining its sexual connotation, with a bowling ball rolling toward its target: the 'overwhelming question'.

While the reshaped image creates no tension with the original text, the changed syntax reverses the idea therein expressed. Marvell appeals to his mistress to act at once, because time does not wait. In Eliot, this urgency is questioned and doubted. He challenges the worth of action: 'Would it have been worth while'? This alteration fully brings to light the psychology of Prufrock who is torn between decision and indecision, between vision and revision. Thus, the emotion becomes much more complex, much more subtle.

Marvell's poetic power caused Eliot to return to him many times. In the following lines, from the same poem I have already quoted, Eliot found 'that surprise which has been one of the most important means of poetic effect since Homer'.[21]

> But at my back I always hear
> Time's winged chariot hurrying near;
> And yonder all before us lie
> Deserts of vast eternity.

Little wonder that they have inspired several passages of The Waste Land.

> But at my back in a cold blast I hear
> The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.
>
> ---
>
> But at my back from time to time I hear
> The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring

Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.

The source of the second passage is acknowledged by Eliot's notes, but it should be clear that the first was also composed with Marvell 'at the back of [his] mind'. This unconscious debt only testifies to the strength with which Marvell took hold of his mind: he is referring to Marvell without knowing it.

Marvell's image -- hearing something at the back -- expresses for Eliot a sense of unexpectedness or unthought-of-ness. It represents a blow, a shock. It awakens one to the reality and the horror. This is exactly what Eliot wanted. The reality is what most of us live through and accept with complacency: the broken river tent, the wind blowing across a brown land, and the meeting of nymphs and the heirs of City Directors. Then, what we do not see at our back are 'the rattle of bones' and the chuckle of ghosts: in one word, death. With a simple 'but at my back', Eliot achieved the effect of 'that surprise' which he found in Marvell.

Here Eliot retains the idiom and the structure of Marvell's line, but substitutes what he saw around him for Marvell's corresponding items. 'In a cold blast' and 'from time to time' replace Marvell's 'always', showing the different modern experience. The rattle, the chuckle, and the hooting of motors create an ironic contrast with Marvell's 'Time's winged chariot'. Eliot defines his debts to other poets in the following three categories:

> There are poets who have been at the back of one's mind, or perhaps consciously there, when one has had some particular problem to settle, for which something they have written suggests the method. There are those from whom one has consciously borrowed, adapting a line of verse to a different language or period or context. There are those who remain in one's mind as having set the standard for a particular poetic virtue, as Villon for honesty, and Sappho for having fixed a particular emotion in the right and the minimum number of words, once and for all.[22]

It is apparent that Marvell should be in the second and, to an extent, the third

category. If his 'But at my back I always hear' did not fix 'a particular emotion in the right and the minimum number of words, once and for all', it certainly has achieved a very high degree of excellence in expressing that particular emotion, an excellence of expression which Eliot tries to repeat here.

Eliot's passage is also an adaptation of the following lines from John Day's Parliament of Bees:

> When of a sudden, listening, you shall hear,
> A noise of horns and hunting, which shall bring
> Actaeon to Diana in the spring,
> Where all shall see her naked skin.

It may seem strange that a poet like Day could teach Eliot to write. Yet his borrowing seems to have a significance, and efficacy independent of the original text. It is saturated with Eliot's own meaning. In his adaptation, Eliot substituted the sound of motors, a modern phenomenon, for Day's pastoral hunting noise; substituted his own Sweeney and Mrs. Porter, the modern pimp and prostitute, for Day's Actaeon and Diana, the mythical hunter and the goddess of chastity. It is clear that Day only falls into the second category of Eliot's influence.

It is true that many of Eliot's images come from other poets. It is true that his reading is a process of collecting images. But the images from his reading and observation have since been re-filled in his mind with his own meaning and assumed symbolic values for him.[23] They are likely to recur to his mind charged with special emotion. Thus Sappho's Fragment 149, about the Evening Star that 'brings back all that the shining Dawn has sent far and wide', becomes the much more memorable lines of The Waste Land

> At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
> Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,

The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast...

John Webster's 'thin curtain' made by the spider for your epitaph reappeared in Eliot as an image of much more potency.

By this, and this only, we have existed

Which is not to be found in our obituaries

Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider.

'The poet's mind', Eliot says, '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'.[24] The lines quoted above could well be written by Eliot without the sources, but with them his meaning is enriched and his experience is thickened. Indeed Sappho's images have been adapted by Shelley, for example, much to the same effect (Cf. The Triumph of Life). What distinguishes Eliot from merely borrowing is the fact that the borrowed images are re-worked into a shape which is peculiarly his own. It has his finger-prints in it.

The fact that Eliot borrows from other poets, the fact that he sometimes seems to be describing his own experiences with the expressions of other poets, by no means diminishes his originality. His eagerness to acknowledge his sources reflects his own theory about poetic composition; it refers back to his ideas about tradition and the individual talent. In pointing out his sources, Eliot is able to claim for his poetry a solid basis in the authority of past poets. Even if a comparison between him and his sources does not illuminate his meaning, the ingenuity with which he transmutes the borrowed texts is interesting. But very often out of such a comparison comes that ironic comprehension which cannot be achieved otherwise.

IV

'The whole study and practice of Dante', Eliot says, 'seems to me to teach that the poet should be the servant of his language, rather than the master of it'.[25] By 'the servant of his language', Eliot means that the poet should achieve a balance between the

forces of tradition and his own genius. One cannot take the language wholly into one's hands and use it to express anything really freely. 'Of some great poets, and of some great English poets especially, one can say that they were privileged by their genius to *abuse* the English language, to develop an idiom so peculiar and even eccentric, that it could be of no use to later poets'.[26] Excessive originality leads only to eccentricity. This is an error in some past English poets, which Eliot wishes to avoid.

One of the ways of maintaining this balance is suggested by those poems of Eliot which I have tried to analyse. That is the creative use of tradition. We have seen that many of Eliot's images come from the literature he read. In many places, he was careful to keep his idiom within that of his models. But we have also seen that he did not simply copy his sources. He took over an image, broke it apart and re-assembled the components into a new pattern. Even in cases of imitation, Eliot's attempt represented an emulation, with improvement upon the original text. And very often a common line from a past poet was adapted into a context, which is rich and meaningful.[27]

The most typical example of this is Eliot's use of The Tempest. This play tells only an ordinary story: the crown is usurped, the king banished; then a tragedy happens that affects the usurper very gravely, so that he reforms; and finally the king is restored. Similar stories are told in other plays of Shakespeare, such as As You Like It. But Eliot did not simply take the story, which was not of much use to him. Instead he cut out one episode and changed it to mean much more than it did in the original text.

> While I was fishing in the dull canal
> On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
> Musing upon the king my brother's wreck
> And on the king my father's death before him.

Here the fisher king of the Grail legend melts into Prince Ferdinand who just wakes upon the shore of an island, wondering where he is and remembering the tempest, from which he has narrowly escaped and which he believes has killed the king his father. The

'death by water' is only an ordinary detail in Shakespeare's play, but Eliot infuses it with a symbolic value and makes it an incident like the death of a fertility god. In other words, Eliot has read something of his own into the play, bending Shakespeare's meaning in order to fit it into a richer symbolic context. Like the death of a fertility god which brings new life to the world, 'the king my father's death' brings about a 'sea-change', a regeneration in Shakespeare's play. It is because of the wreck that the usurper reforms and the duke is restored to his throne.

Eliot's cultivation of this source offers a new interpretation of The Tempest itself. He has, in Harold Bloom's words, deliberately misunderstood the meaning of Shakespeare and, through such a misunderstanding, made Shakespeare's play into his own poetry.[28] The 'death' in The Tempest is not just interpreted into the framework of the fertility myth, but it is also regarded on the physical level:

> Those are pearls that were his eyes.

Death even transforms the dead body into something beautiful. This is the song, twice quoted in The Waste Land, which Ariel uses to allure Prince Ferdinand to Miranda. Their love, which is the beginning of the regeneration, leads to the final reconciliation of the duke and his reformed brother, and also to the freedom of Ariel and a new role for Caliban. So what is implied in this line -- death leading to something beautiful -- is also acted out on a higher, thematic level.

What impresses us a great deal in Eliot's poetry is not his sources, but his improvement on his sources. In 'Sweeney Erect', he ingeniously used a past author to frame his own experience. He first set a scene (in the epigraph) with a passage from The Maid's Tragedy by Beaumont and Fletcher, in which the heart-broken heroine Aspatia advises her attendants, who were working on a tapestry, to use herself as their model.

> And the trees about me,
> Let them be dry and leafless; let the rocks

Groan with continual surges; and behind me

Make all a desolation.

Then as the poem opens, Aspatia's voice, appealing for a picture of 'a cavernous waste shore' and a 'snarled and yelping sea', melts into the author's own. So the picture which emerges in the following paragraphs is not of a literal sea with gales and surges, but a metaphorical sea of perverse passion. The contrast reinforces our impression of the present desolation. What Eliot painted in the rest of the poem is the 'ape-neck' Sweeney rising up from the prostitute's bed attempting violence with his razor. 'The lengthened shadow' of this man is certainly not what Emerson calls the 'history', but the prolonged chaos and madness created by lust and evil.

Such brilliant use of the sources is also found in 'Little Gidding' II, where Eliot verbally parodies his source and uses it thematically to control his own meaning. This section, Eliot says, is intended to 'reproduce, or rather to arouse in the reader's mind the memory, of some Dantesque scene'.[29] It indeed has done its job, not so much through quotation, as through imitation of the rhythm, the verse form (*terza rima*), and the atmosphere of the original text. In fact, Eliot had quoted a line from Inferno XV in the first draft: 'Are you here, Ser Brunetto?': a direct translation of 'Siete voi qui, ser Brunetto?' He did not omit 'ser Brunetto' and change the line into 'What, are you here?' until he realized that this dead master is best conceived as a compound ghost.[30]

The composition or the growth of this passage is a process like this: Dante suggested a scene but, when Eliot got started with his own writing, he gradually grew out of the model and the thing which emerged was his own. Dante's meeting with Brunetto Latini inspired Eliot's own meeting with his dead master. The allusion should have made the London street burn with the cold fire of Inferno, but what Eliot wanted is the fire of Purgatorio, for the simple reason that his compound ghost, who is now recognizably a mixture of Yeats, Mallarmé, etc., should not be placed in hell. Thus the original text is changed to adapt to the new situation.

That is to say, Eliot is by no means a mechanical imitator. He changes what he takes and makes it into something better or at least something different. And this is exactly what he has done in 'Little Gidding' II. An additional allusion to Hamlet at the end makes it clear that Dante is not his sole model. The ghost scene of Shakespeare transforms Eliot's Purgatorio into a scene which both approximates and differs from Dante.

> The day was breaking. In the disfigured street
> He left me, with a kind of valediction,
> And faded on the blowing of the horn.

A single passage acts out Eliot's theory of tradition and the individual talent, maintaining a good balance between the poet's creativity and his responsibility to the tradition which he allies himself to. What he has done here is summarized by himself when he says in 'East Coker' V that, because what there is left to conquer in poetry has already been discovered once or twice or several times by men one cannot hope to emulate, one has now only to fight, by both 'strength and submission', to recover what has been lost, found and lost again.

This constitutes an effective answer to those who accuse Eliot of being derivative. For an artist to succeed, he has to maintain that balance between tradition and his own originality. This is exactly the impression we get from Eliot's own poetry. 'The difference between influence and imitation is that influence can fecundate, whereas imitation -- especially unconscious imitation -- can only sterilize',[31] a distinction which is drawn obviously from Eliot's own experience and which throws much light on his own poetry. What makes the passage in question typical is that Eliot was not, in the sense defined above, imitating. He received an inspiration, but he was not overwhelmed by it. All the time he kept on top of it. The consequent impression we get is a good balance between the poet's 'strength' and his 'submission'.

Notes to Chapter X:

1. Eliot, 'To Criticize the Critic', TCC p15. Also in 'What is a Classic?', Eliot said: 'The account of classic which I propose to give here should remove it from the area of antithesis between "classic" and "romantic" -- a pair of terms belonging to literary politics, and therefore arousing winds of passion' (OPP p53).

2. See Robert Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition (London 1957) p27, p104

3. See Harold Bloom, Poetry and Repression: Revisionism from Blake to Stevens (New Haven & London 1976) p2

4. Quoted by E. Wilson, Axel's Castle (1931, repr. Glasgow 1974) p85

5. C. Aiken, 'An Anatomy of Melancholy' (1923), T. S. Eliot: The Man and His Work, ed. Allen Tate (London 1967) p196

6.Yeats, Letters on Poetry from W. B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley, ed. D. Wellesley (London 1940) p75

7. Richard Aldington, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot (Hurst. Berks. 1954) p17

8. Eliot, 'What Dante Means to Me', TCC p125

9. Ibid. p125

10. B. Dobrée, 'T. S. Eliot: A Personal Reminiscence', in Tate (1967) p86

11. See Helen Gardner, The Art of T. S. Eliot (London 1949) pp150-60; Louis L. Martz, 'The Wheel and the Point' T. S. Eliot: A Selected Critique, ed. L. Unger (New York 1948) pp448-49; Elizabeth Schneider, The Pattern in the Carpet (Berkeley & Los Angeles 1975) pp161-62; Grover Smith, T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays (Chicago 1956, repr. 1968) p325; Leonard Unger, Eliot's Compound Ghost (London 1981) pp85-91

12. Eliot, Letter to Anne Ridler (10 March 1941)

13. John Hayward's note to l. 157 in his French edition of Quatre Quatuors (Paris

1950)

14. H. Gardner, The Composition of Four Quartets (London 1978) pp43-46

15. St. John of the Cross, The Dark Night of the Soul, extracted in Walter T. Stace, The Teachings of the Mystics (New York 1960) p40

16. F. O. Matthiessen, The Achievement of T. S. Eliot (New York 1947) p73. The incident is reported by B. C. Southam, A Student's Guide to the Selected Poetry of T. S. Eliot (London 1968, repr. 1977) pp44-45

17. Hayward, Letter to Eliot (1 August 1941). See Gardner (1978) p202

18. Eliot, 'The Frontiers of Criticism', OPP p110

19. P. S. Sri, T. S. Eliot: Vedanta and Buddhism (Vancouver 1985) pp106-10; Cleo Kearns, T. S. Eliot and Indic Traditions (Cambridge 1987) pp49-66

20. See Eliot, 'Andrew Marvell', SE p296

21. Ibid. p295

22. Eliot, 'What Dante Means to Me', TCC p127

23. UPUC p148

24. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', SE p19

25. Eliot, 'What Dante Means to Me', TCC p133

26. Ibid. p133

27. Cf. Craig Raine, 'Eliot and the Dialect of the Tribe', Times Literary Supplement (2 Feb. 1990)

28. See H. Bloom, Anxiety of Influence (New York 1973)

29. Eliot, 'What Dante Means to Me', TCC p128

30. See Eliot, Letter to Hayward, quoted in Gardner (1978) p176

31. Eliot, 'To Criticize the Critic', TCC p18

XI. Epilogue: Literary History and the Concept of Tradition

Commenting on R. P. Blackmur's remark that Lawrence's work lacks rational order, Harold Bloom wrote that 'Lawrence's poetry, like Blake's, is animated with mental energy: it does not lack *mind*. For it is precisely in a quality of mind, in imaginative invention, that Lawrence's poetry excels. Compared to it, the religious poetry of Eliot suggests everywhere an absence of mind, a poverty of invention, a reliance upon the vital frenzy of others'.[1] Then, in an introduction to Shelley, he wrote again that 'Eliot thought that the poet of Adonais and The Triumph of Life had never "progressed" beyond the ideas and ideals of adolescence, or at least of what Eliot had believed in his *own* adolescence. Every reader can be left to his own judgment of the relative maturity of Ash-Wednesday and The Witch of Atlas, or The Cocktail Party and The Cenci, and is free to formulate his own dialectics of progression'.[2]

The argument and the tone are typical of the 1960s critical reaction, known as 'the rehabilitation of Romanticism'. The same attempt at reassessing Eliot, though with less aggression, is apparent in other Yale critics J. Hillis Miller and Geoffrey Hartman, and in Donald Davie and Graham Hough. They have all sought to restore the Romantic poets, not just to their original place, but to a new height. In their view, Romanticism marks the beginning of modern poetry. Everything which comes after it should be seen in its shadow. Despite the fact that there is little in common between Eliot's concerns and those of the Romantic period, they regard him as a belated Romantic. 'We need', to quote Bloom again, 'to thrust aside utterly, once and for all, the critical absurdities of the Age of Eliot, before we can see again how complex the Romantics were in their passionate ironies'.[3]

In its search for Eliot's connection with the last century, criticism has gone into the mysterious, taking guesses for facts and shadows for reality. This is from Gregory Jay:

> The continuity of Prufrock's crisis with that of his Romantic precursors may be seen by comparison to an unlikely father poem, Shelley's 'Mont Blanc'. I do not mean, of course, to suggest this as source or influence in the literal sense. An interpretative or argumentative relation between texts does not depend upon conscious intention or even verbal resemblance, but emerges from the larger context of how writing disseminates a culture's legacies.[4]

If influence 'does not depend on conscious intention or even verbal resemblance', how could it travel from Shelley through 'Mont Blanc' to Eliot? How could 'Mont Blanc' be the father poem of 'Prufrock'? The deconstructive strategy could make anything happen.

Bloom and Jay have both considered Eliot's anti-Romanticism as the result of his anxiety of influence. They both agreed that, after being influenced by Romantic poets in his early years, Eliot went through an askesis in his adolescence and achieved a counter-sublime or counter-demonization. He successfully effected the disappearance of the Romantic genius loci. In the place of Wordsworth and Shelley, he revived the tutelary spirits of Laforgue, Baudelaire and Henry James as the geniuses of the haunted city. One can agree with this as far as it goes. Yet, after all consensus on the askesis, they still regard Eliot as an heir of the Romantic tradition, which seems rather inexplicable. To me, it is right for them to emphasize Eliot's self-purgation, his successful effort to empty the earlier Romantic influence. If the Romantics had played a part in Eliot's mature development, it served as a counter-stimulus. It spurred him to do something different or something better.

The last sixty or seventy years have proved Eliot as controversial as ever: he is still a poet you either love or you hate. He has been accused of many things: literary dictatorship, conspiracy, anti-semitism, prejudice, misogyny, homosexuality,

plagiarism, intellectual deficiency, poor craftsmanship, etc, etc. But, as times goes on, his poetry remains as potent as ever. He is not regarded, as Yeats predicted, 'as an interesting symptom of a sick and melancholy age',[5] but he is regarded as one of the most important poets of this century. Eliot's aggressiveness, his special taste, should be understood in its own context: the circumstances under which he wrote were largely responsible for his mistakes. A greater part of his life had been a struggle. His poetry was established by attacking other kinds of poetry, attacking the Establishment, and attacking heresy. It was exactly this struggle that gave him motivation, energy and a sense of direction. Much of his interest comes from a comparison between the things he accepted and the things he rejected. Similarly, much of his interest comes from a comparison between his own poetry and the poetry he criticized. In his rejection and in his promotion, we see his impeccable taste.

Let me finish this thesis by drawing attention to an aspect of Eliot's thought, which has been neglected by all critics: that is, the impact of his theory of tradition on the art of history. Eliot's concept of tradition seems crucial for us to understand the ways literary history is written nowadays. It is crucial, too, for us to understand why criticism today is so involved with history and why history now is so mediated by criticism. To explore this, we must acquaint ourselves, first of all, with the literary history of and before Eliot's time.

I

Literary history in English arose in the eighteenth century, in answer to the need of literature to become an independent academic study. General social history had existed long before this time, but for literature it tended to be too selective, leaving out a great many facts which a literary historian would regard as relevant. Most general historical works are concerned, for instance, with external events of greater social consequences rather than with intellectual or literary development -- more concerned with wars,

famines, natural disasters, etc. If the general social historian seldom cared about literature, and if literature wanted to be instituted as an independent academic discipline, it must have its own history.

The early literary history, therefore, was concerned chiefly with establishing a canon of works for literary education. A work of literary history at that time was often a work of literary archaeology. On the whole, the historian's interest fell into two areas of investigation: lost works and lost authors. His work was usually characterized by a very restricted perspective: an interest in authors as individuals. In Giles Jacob's Historical Account of the Lives and Writings of Our Most Considerable English Poets (1720), for example, the narrative is totally atomistic in the sense that it is arranged around the individual poets, the account of each seldom continuing into another. Samuel Johnson's Lives of the English Poets, which has a detailed account of the metaphysical poets as a school, is yet not unified by a single purpose. The book is at most a collection of separate critical biographies. The centre of literary historical study at this stage seems to be the individual poets.

On the other hand, the eighteenth century is a great age of discovery as regards classical English literature. Most literary historians of the time were preoccupied with collecting, editing and publishing classical works which survived in manuscripts or prints. Their findings contribute to the general knowledge of literature and to the creation of the canon of English literature as we now know it. In this work of archaeology and collection, the historian's attention is almost completely turned away from any critical understanding of the history of literature, away from any investigation into the cause and effect of the historical process, away from any description of the course of historical development.

Thomas Warton's History of English Poetry (1774-81), for example, chose to follow a chronological method which seems to be adequate for his purpose -- that is, to show, through 'a series of regular annals' of poetry, the progress of Western civilization

from barbarism to civility and from rudeness to grace.[6] This method seems also to suffice as a method of history in Warton's time. The kind of history which his book represents works mainly by accumulating knowledge rather than bringing in a degree of critical selection. Warton's book was acclaimed as exemplifying admirable taste and useful scholarship. His collection of early English poetry, which had previously remained scattered and unknown, constituted the major accomplishment of a scholar, but not a literary critic.

In the three later editions of Warton which were published by Richard Price in 1824, by John Madden in 1840 and by William Hazlitt in 1871, not one of these editors questioned Warton's method, which apparently did not arouse any doubts. Though George Ellis in 1811 referred to Warton's history as a 'very learned and entertaining, though desultory work,' it did not touch the fundamental problem.[7] It is not until the late nineteenth century that W. J. Courthope brought Warton's unity into question. Courthope, in the preface to A History of English Poetry (1895-1910), criticized Warton for falling 'into the way of simply hunting up old metrical remains, without attempting to classify them by their poetic spirit and character'.[8]

In Courthope's effort to improve Warton, he only did what he could in his historical circumstances. He only pointed out, to a limited degree, the continuity of literature. His own book shows similar interests of a literary antiquarian. Like Warton's history, Courthope's actual performance exhibits the same scholarly temper, the same immense interest in the documentation of facts, as we find in his predecessors. His narrative is still fragmentary and did not go beyond the mere recording of literary events and biographical information. Like all histories of this kind, Courthope's history is still a collection of unconnected biographies and a catalogue of literary works.

This kind of history was still produced in Eliot's time and it accounted for his critical protest. Reviewing J. W. Cunliffe's English Literature during the Last Half Century for

the Athenaeum in 1919, Eliot complained that Mr. Cunliffe 'proceeds informatively from one writer to another almost as if each were the sole occupant of an island of his own'.[9] And then reviewing Gregory Smith's Scottish Literature: Character and Influence for the same magazine, he found the author quite ignorant of 'the difference between a history and a chronicle, and the difference between an interpretation and a fact'.[10] In neither men did he find a 'historical structure with some coherence'. In the end, what they offered was just a 'curious procession' of knowledge: a collection of essays which were informative but not helpful for our understanding of the historical process.

These two features, the interest in authors as individuals and the antiquarian collection of literary works, are what we must bear in mind when we consider classical literary history. Despite the risks which accompany generalizations (risks worth taking in order to put things in order), I would like to subsume the literary histories written from the earliest time up to the beginning of the twentieth century under one category. As I have demonstrated, they share the same characteristics. This kind of history may be called scholarly or biographical history.

The reader must be wondering why literary historians of the previous two centuries bear such resemblance in their method. This has to do with their concept of tradition. Let me proceed with a very brief investigation into this concept. In its earliest use, the word 'tradition' means what is handed down, in oral or written form, from the past. One part of the Bible, for example, contrasts the 'traditions of menne' with the tradition of Christ.[11] In fact the word is used usually in connection with religion. It often signifies a system of well-established beliefs or doctrines which are in the process of being passed on from generation to generation.

What requires notice is that the word 'tradition' does not signify any historical continuity or process of development; it implies no more than a passive acceptance by

later generations. It simply means a survival from previous times. It is worth pointing out that the word did not appear in literary criticism at all. When we find it used by literary critics, it is always related to religion, legendary history, or custom. Dryden, who virtually ignores the word tradition in his literary criticism, finds a use for it in his religious satire, The Hind and the Panther:

> The good old Bishops took a simpler way,
> Each ask'd but what he heard his Father say,
> Or how he was instructed in his youth,
> And by tradition's force upheld the truth.

The absence of the word tradition from Dryden's literary criticism while it appeared in his religious satire indicates that in Dryden's time the word had not been used in connection with literature. To search through Samuel Johnson for examples of his use of the word is a fruitless job, as is also a search through Wordsworth and Coleridge. The only place Coleridge used 'tradition' in his Seven Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton is where he wrote about the tradition or the social convention which opposes 'the marriage of brother and sister'.[12] One reason that we seldom find the word tradition in these critics is, I guess, that in their more famous books they are chiefly concerned with literature not with religion or legendary history or social convention.

Up to the mid nineteenth century, the meaning of tradition had had a very slow evolution. On the one hand, the early literary historian did not have a proper concept of tradition to direct his view of history. And, on the other hand, the lack of a notion of tradition caused the prevalence of what I shall call 'literary individualism' in this long historical period. Under this philosophy, tradition began to acquire a negative sense. When the writer of that part of the Bible refers to 'the traditions of menne', the meaning of tradition is neutral. It is approximately in the time of Shakespeare that this essentially neutral meaning of tradition began to take on a very different connotation. Shakespeare

writes in Richard III :

> You are too senseless, obstinate, my Lord,
>
> Too ceremonious and traditional.

The pejorative sense which is attached to the adjectival form of the word indicates a general impatience with tradition as a repressive force for individual development. Tradition is regarded as a bondage for originality and creativity. This can be seen not just through the epithets with which the word 'traditional' is combined here, but through a value system which this combination implies, a system which tips the balance from tradition towards the individual. In similar temper, Milton writes about

> A pervers age, eager in the reformation of names and ceremonies, but in realities as traditional and as ignorant as their forefathers.[13]

We can now say that, starting from the Renaissance, the importance of tradition is replaced by that of the individual. While adhering to tradition became negative, individual development became a matter of paramount importance. The history of English poetry from the Renaissance to the twentieth century is characterized by a neglect of the function of tradition and by a glorification of individual development: 'originality', 'individuality', 'genius', 'creativity' and 'spontaneity' have become terms of the highest commendation. Johnson writes in his Preface to Shakespeare: 'The greater part of his excellence was the product of his own genius'. He vindicates Shakespeare in 'his violation of these laws which have been instituted and established by the joint authority of poets and critics'.[14] Johnson's remark elevated Shakespeare's individuality to the highest point. For him, 'the joint authority of poets and critics' (shall we call it tradition?) had better be violated in favour of individual originality. Coleridge's writing on Shakespeare for the most part concentrates on the qualities by which Shakespeare is different from other dramatists. Shakespeare's work, being the product of a combination not of words but of images, 'satisfies the mind as well as tickles the

hearing.' Coleridge was especially impressed by Shakespeare's depth of thought, 'by which he stands alone, with no equal or second in his own class'.[15]

If emphasis is laid on individuality and originality, the critic must also appreciate spontaneity and sincerity. Coleridge compares the poet's mind at work to an Eolian harp, on which the winds of inspiration produce verbal music and harmony. The purpose of this metaphor is to emphasize the naturalness and the spontaneity of poetic creation. Wordsworth's definition of poetry as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' recollected in tranquillity offers a classic document of nineteenth-century individualistic criticism.[16] The actual effect of this doctrine is an elevation of personality, for Wordsworth's spontaneity is achieved by sincerely following the wanderings of his own mind.

Matthew Arnold still retained the frame of mind which he inherited from the early Romantics. While 'genius' and 'originality' are still very frequent within his vocabulary of laudatory terms, he seems to believe very much in inspiration. In an essay on Wordsworth, he highly commended the poet's manner of writing: plain and spontaneous as if Nature herself took the pen out of his hand and wrote for him. Nature, or inspiration, or Muse, or 'not ourselves,' or whatever Arnold may term it, points to one thing -- the poet's own self.[17]

The emphasis on the uniqueness of personality in the Victorian age on the one hand obstructs our view of the common tendency shared by different poets and on the other hand predisposes us, when we contemplate history, to see unique individuals. This is why classical literary history had its focus of study on the lives and works of individual poets. And this is also why this kind of history can be described as separate and unconnected biographies. However, a proper history will not only present facts but also critical understanding of the facts. The development of our intellect will inevitably lead us to see things and facts as connected. Classical literary history can no longer satisfy

our needs. A new literary history becomes a necessity.

II

Before the change in historiography becomes possible, a change must necessarily be introduced into our concept of tradition, whose work is to regulate the way we look at history. A new literary history is possible only after we have a new concept of tradition. This new concept appears to have been provided by Eliot in his various essays on this subject, most importantly 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. Criticism has not been sufficiently aware of the ways Eliot revolutionized our idea of tradition.

First of all, Eliot liberated 'tradition' from its derogatory sense of being a conservative force. In his essays, tradition no longer has the stifling pressure that weighs on the individual; it is a source of inspiration, quickening the mind into growth and development. Anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year, Eliot says, must learn to write with the whole of the literature of Europe in his bones. Before he sets his pen to paper, he needs to bear a tradition in mind. A historical sense of this kind, Eliot goes on, 'which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional'.[18]

For him, writing a poem is not finding completely new things to write about, or finding a completely new style of expression. For a new poem to become really significant, it must have a tradition behind it. That is, when a poet writes he unconsciously joins a community of poets. The poem he writes assumes a certain relation with the works of other poets.[19] And a literary history is constituted by many such inter-related individuals. When we assume that a literature exists, Eliot wrote in 1919, 'we suppose not merely a corpus of writings in one language, but writings and writers between whom there is a tradition; and writers who are not merely connected by tradition in time, but who are related so as to be in the light of eternity contemporaneous, from a certain point of view cells in one body'.[20]

When Eliot calls himself a 'traditional' poet, he is not deprecating himself, but he is pointing out what a poet can achieve by joining a tradition. He has some very telling and very candid remarks about himself being influenced by a dead poet and made by that influence to grow from 'a bundle of second-hand sentiments into a person'. The origin of his growth makes him the 'bearer of a tradition'.[21] This is perhaps why the most individual parts of an author are 'those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously'.

Thus liberated from the conventional derogatory sense, 'tradition' becomes a positive force, ready to be distinguished from 'history'. The next step Eliot took to change our idea of tradition was indeed to separate 'tradition' from 'history'. In past usage, 'tradition' is just the past, the dead, or history. It is the whole lump, dead and stagnant, which drags on the feet of the present. In Eliot's usage, history is the general term. Tradition, on the other hand, is a part of the history. It is the continuation of a single event, thought, or state through a length of time. 'The [new] poet must be very conscious of the main current [of poetry], which does not at all flow invariably through the most distinguished reputations'.[22]

A tradition is a 'current' and a history has many such 'currents'. Eliot's own literary history is a drama in which traditions clash. It is an attempt to trace the beginning, the continuity and the end of traditions and their interplay in history. Thus we see terms like the 'Romantic tradition' and the 'metaphysical tradition' come into general usage. This meaning of tradition does not just characterize Eliot's theory of metaphysical poetry, but his historical thinking at all levels. 'What we want is', Eliot wrote in an essay in 1918, 'to point out that every generation, every turn of time when the work of four or five men who count has reached middle age, is a crisis'.[23]

In such a casual remark, there is the general assumption that a tradition is a continuity and that when a tradition is exhausted, it will be replaced by another tradition.

The crisis is both the end of the old tradition and the beginning of the new. In this remark, too, there is a sense of epoch, a sense that the continuation of poetic powers is like a current which flows for a distance, then runs against other currents, and finally disappears into the sand. Here is Eliot's paradigmatic demonstration of this historical movement:

> ...the tide of influence, which a writer may set in motion for a generation or two, has come to its full, and another force has drawn the waters in a different direction...[24]

In this description of the historical movement, the tradition is not the whole of the past, but a section of it, a line among many lines of events which constitute history. This distinction between tradition and history is Eliot's most important contribution towards a new literary history. In 1948, Eliot described the process of social change and said, 'It is certain -- and especially obvious when we turn our attention to the arts -- that as new values appear, and as thought, sensibility and expression become more elaborate, some earlier values vanish'. He believed that, culturally, 'our own period is one of decline'; and that the decline will continue for a time until we reach a point where conditions were ripe for a revival.[25]

We owe to Eliot the view that history is not an atomistic collection of unconnected events, and we also owe to him the view that history consists of lines of developments and new developments. In these instances, Eliot has drawn attention to some of the important laws which govern the movement of history. For him, a history must show 'how a language lives and dies and is renewed'.

> A mature literature ... has a history behind it: a history, that is not merely a chronicle, an accumulation of manuscripts and writings of this kind and that, but a ordered though unconscious progress of a language to realize its own potentialities within its own limitations.[26]

Eliot's definition of tradition, different from all previous definitions, emphasizes its continuity as well as its function within history. In this new concept, the word has shaken off its derogatory sense; it is no longer the bondage or restriction to the individual but a necessary shaping spirit. This transformation of the meaning of 'tradition' represents a rethinking of the relation between tradition and innovation, conformity and originality. What Eliot wanted to achieve is a balance in the antithesis. This brings us to the third thing Eliot did to change our idea of tradition.

The mind of Europe, according to him, and the mind of one's own country are much more important than the individual mind of the artist. The individual mind changes, but the mind of Europe, the tradition, does not. It refines and complicates, the refinement and complication being a development which abandons nothing *en route* .[27] In other words, tradition is something constant and orderly, something outside the individual, which can give shape and significance back to the chaotic mind of the individual. Eliot discerned in James Joyce a constant parallel between antiquity and contemporaneity. The past literature of Europe provided Joyce with a vision of the chaotic modern world, a way to look at 'the immense panorama of anarchy and futility which is the contemporary history'.[28]

Eliot always regards the individual mind as chaotic and formless, and therefore excessive dependence on the private mind is inappropriate. Eliot gives rather scanty credit to William Blake for his sincerity, a sincerity with which he produced his own private philosophy, private vision, and private insight. What Blake sadly lacked, Eliot writes, 'was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own, and concentrated his attention upon the problems of the poet'.[29]

My juxtaposition of Eliot's views on Joyce and Blake is intended to show that they are typical of the two historical periods to which they belong. After Irving Babbitt, Eliot

regards Romanticism as the cult of the individual. For Babbitt, as well as for Eliot, it is the worship of novelty in the previous century -- which I called the literary individualism -- that caused the typical Blakean eccentricity and formlessness. Eliot's view had found constant confirmation from works of other philosophers and from his own experience of the Romantic poetry.

'The persistence of literary creativeness in any people', Eliot points out, 'consists in the maintenance of an unconsciousness balance between tradition in the larger sense -- the collective personality, so to speak, realized in the literature of the past -- and the originality of the living generation'.[30]

As a necessary corrective to this Romantic individualism, Eliot thought that his age needed to re-emphasize tradition. To Eliot, the formless, enigmatic individual mind needs control. He found Joyce appealing because Joyce's practice as a novelist bore out his own idea of the relation between tradition and the individual talent. By entitling his most important novel Ulysses and by calling a character in another of his novels 'Dedalus', Joyce found a parallel for his vision of the modern world in the well-known and well-accepted visions of antiquity. To organize his material on the model of classics provided order for the individual's chaotic experience in the modern world.

The individual's enigmatic nature and his need of control are directly responsible for Eliot's elevation of tradition over the individual personality. It is for this reason that Eliot criticized Middleton Murry's belief that the artist should listen to his Inner Voice. It is also for this reason that in 1928 Eliot declared himself 'a classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion'.[31] For, it is worth pointing out, the 'classicist, royalist and Anglo-Catholic' are the inevitable and ultimate positions which Eliot's earlier thoughts had been leading up to. Eliot's choice between tradition and personality, monarchy and anarchy, orthodox and heresy has always been the same. This also explains Eliot's defence of Charles Maurras and *L'Action Française* , a defence

not just of a well-appreciated contributor to his Criterion, but also a defence of his own sympathy for the movement to restore the French monarchy. This also explains why Eliot criticized Arnold and Babbitt for their programme to establish art and humanism in the place of religion.

III

Eliot's re-definition of tradition has a profound effect for historical thinking. To someone who values tradition more than individual originality, his attention is naturally concentrated on the common feature of poets rather than their differences. Eliot's historical thinking represents a new type of literary history. The method in which he re-writes English literary history is revolutionary and closely connected with his concept of tradition.

Eliot's literary history traces the development of metaphysical poetry from the sixteenth century to the present, with special attention to the vicissitudes it went through in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Though his specific views of the history are questionable, his method is still alive in many later critics. His history is the first in a series which presents a continuous vision of the past, fusing history with criticism and tracing the development of a single poetic tradition through its evolution. The thrilling effect, arising from the concept of a crisis, is essential to this kind of history. A crisis and a revival have been typical features of the literary history written since Eliot's time. As we shall see, no matter in what ways later writers may deviate from Eliot's vision of history, his general method is always adopted.

First of all, the new literary history is short and selective. It is not concerned with providing facts. The writer of this kind of history does not worry about the completeness of his information. Neither F. R. Leavis's Revaluation (1936) nor Cleanth Brooks's Modern Poetry and the Tradition (1939), for example, are history in the ordinary sense. They *are* works of history because they deal with historical development. The purpose

of these works, like that of Eliot, is to describe the way English poetry developed from the seventeenth century. Like Eliot, too, both Leavis and Brooks argued that modern poetry breaks with the nineteenth-century tradition and picks up the earlier metaphysical tradition. Both left out many authors and works that do not immediately serve their purpose, having taken it for granted that the reader already knew these facts and that he can bring them into the argument if he wants. Both works are not history in the sense that Warton's history or Courthope's history are, because they are not concerned with the documentation of facts.

A more important feature of the new literary history is that it deals exclusively with traditions. It distinguishes between them and explains how, as time and ideology change, they succeed one another. That is, the new literary history usually contains an argument or a system which separates different traditions. One can disagree with Eliot or Leavis or Brooks over their systems. Herbert Read in The True Voice of Feeling (1953), for example, comes to the conclusion that modern poetry begins with Romanticism. The point where he differs from Eliot is that he regards the modernist movement in the twentieth century, not as a reaction against Romanticism, but as its continuation. While including modern poetry in the Romantic movement, Read divides the whole of history into two halves: the Classical and the Romantic on grounds that classical poetry is, as it were, a game of complicated rules and Romantic poetry is the 'true voice of feeling', the expression of the poet's inner self. Although Read's chart of history almost includes the whole span of the English literary history, he only started with Wordsworth and concluded with Eliot. This incompleteness of information derives from the historian's exclusive concern with historical development.

The contrast between Eliot and Read brings forward the important fact that a new literary history always carries a proposition or a conclusion. This fact indicates that literary history after Eliot is more often a treatise on history, rather than a fact-book. Frank Kermode's Romantic Image (1957) draws a chart of English poetic history similar

to that of Read. Kermode is mainly concerned with the Symbolist poetics in the Romantic period, a period which for him extends to the present day. Romanticism, according to Kermode, created the first poetics in English which regards poetry as an 'organism' and as the unity of thought and feeling. And, in the twentieth century, this poetics still remains with us in such New-Critical doctrines as 'anti-intentionalism' and the mistrust of the 'heresy of paraphrase'. For Kermode, as for Read, classical poetry ended with the rise of Romanticism; and Romanticism began a movement of which Modernism is only the second phase. In his whole book, Kermode's attention is focused on the Romantic period, though his argument covers the whole history of English literature. He, too, has omitted a great deal which the authors of the Oxford History of English Literature would regard as important.

But, like that of Read, Kermode's concern is obviously with the evolution of English poetry. If we are not prepared to call this kind of work 'history', it is because we still retain the old idea of history as a documentation of facts. For the works of new literary history are not fact-books. The new historian's task is not research nor the discovery of neglected authors: these he leaves to the scholars and the textbook writers. His task is explanation. He explains why the history develops as it does. In other words he is not concerned with the what, but the why.

This is why the new literary history becomes so critical and evaluative, so much so that you can also call it literary criticism based on a distinct historical view or, simply, historical criticism. This is also why many works of new literary history were treated as criticism. Eliot's reading of literary history was obviously understood, or misunderstood, as an opportunist use of history for the purpose of criticism. In his history, the changed historical view disrupts the established hierarchy of literature. The authors of one period rise while others sink. This is natural because when our view of a certain historical period changes it affects all poets living in that age. This happens not just with Eliot, Leavis and Brooks, but also with later new literary historians.

Graham Hough, for example, argues in Image and Experience (1969) that there is an English tradition characterized by the English spirit, by the whole drift of poetry written in the English language. Modernism, with its radical innovations in imagery and structure, is a movement against this tradition which, even in the heyday of Modernism, never disappeared from the scene. It was carried on by Thomas Hardy, John Crowe Ransom and John Betjeman. Therefore, Hough argues, the English tradition is the 'main highway', and Modernism a 'side-road', a deviation. Now it is high time for the Modernist movement to wind back and rejoin the main road. In this chart of history, Modernism is only a sub-tradition. And naturally, in such a perspective, Pound, Eliot and Auden will rate lower than Hardy, Ransom and Betjeman.

This change of the hierarchy takes place because of the historian's different view of historical development. What concerns the new literary historian is not the difference between one author and another, but the difference between one age and another. Eliot's argument focuses on the difference between the metaphysical period and the Romantic period, while Hough's focuses on the difference between the whole of English literature and what he regards as a parallel but transient tradition Modernism. For this reason, the historian is forced by his system to choose between different periods. Eliot chose the 'metaphysical tradition' and Hough chose the 'English tradition'. The preferred tradition receives sympathetic treatment while the other suffers in comparison.

Now, generally speaking, every historian faces two choices: he either chooses to compile facts or he chooses to describe historical development. The classical historians made the first choice and as a result their works were chiefly scholarly and biographical. They neglected the lines of historical development. The new literary historian, on the other hand, makes the latter choice. He studies the relationship between one period and another; he traces the development of traditions inside the history. His works are exclusively concerned with historical development, with 'the pattern in history', 'the

map of history', 'the course of historical development'. The new literary historian does not need to recount the date of an author's birth, the kind of woman he married or even the opinion of his contemporaries. Rather he discerns, among the writers of his age, the common tendency or the line of development, and he explains the change of this line into the next. This brings us back to our initial argument: Eliot's new concept of tradition effected, in literary history, an ascendency of tradition over the individual originality.

Looking back on the whole of the thesis, the reader may wonder how a person like T. S. Eliot, who was conservative in many aspects, could be so revolutionary in others. It is true that the two tendencies tend to co-exist in Eliot and one will have to wait for future developments in psychology to provide a sound explanation to this. Somehow, his conservativism is double-edged. On the one hand, his traditionalism, his 'piety towards the dead',[32] seems to have brought him to a position where class system is favoured and cultural preservation is the inevitable choice; on the other hand, his very traditionalism embodies a radically new attitude towards the past. After Eliot, we have not been able to see the past as dead or as having vanished. We have seen the truth about what he calls the 'presence' of the past. His panoramic view of history as organized and constantly ordering itself is indeed unprecedented and has radical significance for criticism. To deny this is to deny ourselves a better and more effective way of looking at the relation between ourselves and the tradition we inherit.

Notes to Chapter XI:

1. Harold Bloom, The Ringers in the Tower (Chicago & London 1971) pp198-99
2. Ibid. p32
3. Ibid. p229
4. Gregory Jay, T. S. Eliot and Poetics of Literary History (Baton Rouge 1983) p94

5. Yeats, Letters on Poetry from W. B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley, ed. D. Wellesley (London 1940) p75

6. Thomas Warton, 'Preface', The History of English Poetry vol. I, ed. Richard Price (London 1824, repr. 1840) p3. See also Warton, Letter to Thomas Gray (20 April 1770), quoted in Courthope (1895) p.x.

7. George Ellis, 'Preface', Specimens of Early English Poets vol. I (London 1811) p.vi.

8. W. J. Courthope, 'Preface', A History of English Poetry vol. I (London 1895) p.xii.

9. Eliot, 'The Education of Taste', Athenaeum (27 June 1919) p520

10. Eliot, 'Was There a Scottish Literature', Athenaeum (1 Aug. 1919) p680

11. Bible Annotation (1551), quoted in Encyclopaedia Metropolitana vol.XXV, p708. See also Colossians 2: 8, Holy Bible (King James Version).

12. S. T. Coleridge, Seven Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton, ed. J. P. Collier (London 1856) p88

13. John Milton, 'The Judgment of Martin Bucer Concerning Divorce', Complete Prose Works of John Milton vol. II, ed. Douglas Bush et al. (New Haven 1959) p436

14. Samuel Johnson, 'Preface to Shakespeare', Johnson on Shakespeare, Yale Edition of Works of Samuel Johnson, vol. VII (New Haven & London 1968) p75

15. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, ed. George Watson (London & Melbourne 1975, repr. 1984) p180

16. William Wordsworth, 'Preface' to Lyrical Ballads (1800), The Prose Works of William Wordsworth vol. I, ed. W. J. B. Owen & J. W. Smyser (Oxford 1974) p148

17. Matthew Arnold, Essays in Criticism Second Series (London 1888, repr. 1921) p155

18. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', SE p14

19. Eliot, 'The Function of Criticism', SE p24

20. Eliot, 'Was There a Scottish Literature', Athenaeum (1 Aug. 1919) p680

21. Eliot, 'Reflections on Contemporary Poetry', Egoist vi (July 1919) p39

22. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', SE p16

23. Eliot, 'Observations', Egoist v (May 1918) p69

24. Eliot, 'Johnson as Critic and Poet', OPP p163

25. NDC p25; p19.

26. Eliot, 'What is a Classic?', OPP p56

27. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', SE p16

28. Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth', Selected Prose of T.S.Eliot, ed. F. Kermode (London 1975) p177

29. Eliot, 'William Blake', SE p322

30: Eliot, 'What is a Classic?', OPP p58

31. Eliot, 'Preface', FLA p.ix

32. NDC p44

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